

# The characteristics of the indigo-dyeing culture in Awaji Island in terms of the fishermen's coat *Donza* and the implementation of the inheritance support project

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## 【Abstract】

*Donza* was the garment worn primarily by fishermen in western Japan. We confirm that some *Donza* were stitched with rags, and others were durable garment by stitching together several layers of indigo-dyed cotton cloth. Until the 1950s, the coat was worn by some people in Awaji Island. 23 *Donzas* remain in 2 museums now. Also, *Donza* inspires some people to create various articles. We consider popularizing *Donza* as Awaji Island's unique craft could lead to the regional development of the island. However, there are only a few literatures about *Donza*. Therefore, we planned to clarify the characteristics of Awaji Island's *Donza* and indigo-dyeing culture. Through questionnaire and interview to primarily Awaji Island's residents, we found there are 11 privately-owned *Donzas* apart from two museums; *Donza* was used in winter; *Donza* used unevenly in the northwestern part of Awaji Island, which appears to be closely related to winter migrants. Moreover, we found that 10 houses used to be *Konya* on the island. Some houses remain some items, which were used for indigo dyeing.

Based on these findings, we held a *Donza* exhibition to get more people know *Donza* and indigo dyeing culture, and to inherit these cultures to future.

**Key words:** *Donza*, *Konya* (indigo dyeing house), indigo, *sashiko* (old needle technology), inheritance

## 1. Background and Purpose

*Donza* is a fisherman's garment stitched three layers of indigo-dyed cotton cloth, used primarily for protection from cold and reinforcement (Fig. 1). As the saying goes, "the sailor has only an inch of plank between him and death", fishermen had a tough job. Therefore, the women prayed for their sons and husbands, and stitched various patterns on the indigo-dyed cloth: hemp denoting a talisman, persimmon denoting a good harvest, and so on (Fig. 2). In Awaji Island located in Western Japan (Fig. 3), some fishermen wore *Donza* until the 1950s (Sharon & Luke, 2001). Today, 22 *Donzas* remain in the Awaji City Hokudan History Folklore Museum and 1 *Donza* remains in the Sumoto City Cultural Museum.

Thesesdays, *Donza* are attracted attention to some residents on the island. For example, the tile company, Danto Tile Corporation, manufactures "*Donza* Tile" using the *Donza* patterns, and two fashion designers Hougetsu and Orikoubou Ituiro produce "*Shima no Huku*" that are clothes stitched using *Donza* patterns on indigo-dyed cloth (Fig. 4). Therefore, *Donza* inspires people to create various articles. We consider popularizing *Donza* as Awaji Island's unique craft could lead to the regional development of the



Fig. 1 *Donza*

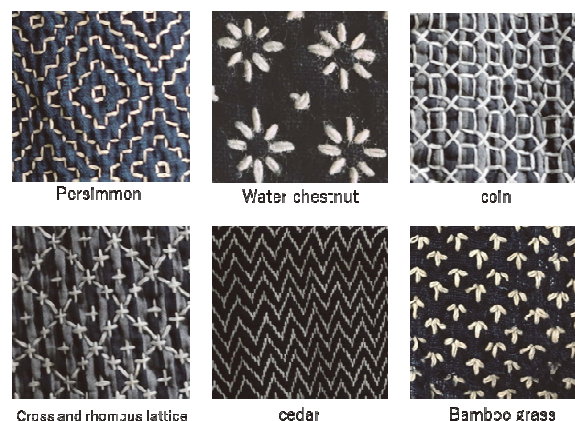


Fig. 2 some examples of *Donza* patterns

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Fig. 3 Location of Awaji Island



Fig. 4 “Donza Tile” (left), “Shima no Huku” (Right)  
(figure credit: Danto Tile [left], Hougetsu and Orikoubou Ituiro [right])

island. However, there are a few literature about *Donza* and no literature about indigo-dyeing in Awaji Island. For the regional development of the island by making most of *Donza*, we need to clarify about the characteristics of *Donza* and indigo-dyeing in Awaji Island.

## 2. Research Flow

### 2.1 Investigation

We conducted questionnaire and interview to obtain information about *Donza* and indigo-dyeing.

#### 2.1.1 Questionary

From May to June in 2021, we handed out questionnaires to 17 fisheries cooperative associations and collected the responses from 2 associations. The rate of response is 11%. Also, From September to October in 2021, we handed out questionnaires to 341 leaders of older people club in Awaji Island, who they are from 60 to 80 year olds, and collected the responses from 192 leaders. The rate of response is 56%.

#### 2.1.2 Interview

From April to October in 2021, we interviewed some people: 8 fishermen, 2 staffs of Awaji City Hokudan History Folklore Museum, 2 curators of Tokushima Prefectural Museum and approximately 30 Awaji Island’s residents.

### 2.2 Holding a *Donza* exhibition that summarizes the above step

Based on investigation, we held a *Donza* exhibition to get more people know about *Donza* and indigo-dyeing culture with some Awaji Island’s residents from 29th to 31st October 2021. 210 people visited this exhibition. We handed out questionnaires to visitors to know which point people get interested in *Donza*.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Awareness of *Donza*

We analyzed the responses received from older people club leaders to understand the awareness regarding *Donza*. The rate of leaders who responded with “yes” to the question, “Do you know or have you ever heard of the word *Donza*?” was: 32 leaders out of 71 in Awaji city (45.0%), 10 leaders out of 45 in Sumoto city (22.2%), 27 leaders out of 77 in Minamiawaji city (35.0%). It is clear that Awaji city has the highest level of awareness regarding *Donza* among the three cities.

### 3.2 Current remains of *Donza*

Fig. 5 shows privately owned *Donzas*. Through interview and *Donza* exhibition, we found 11 privately owned *Donzas* apart from the 2 museums. 6 *Donzas* were from Iwaya region, 3 from Nushima region, 1 from Toshima region, and 1 was worn in Tokushima prefecture.

### 3.3 Uses of *Donza*

Table 1 presents the uses of *Donza*. To questions regarding the use of *Donza*, we received responses such as, “my grandfather went offshore to catch sea breams,” “some older people chatted around fire in winter,” and so on. These responses indicate that *Donza* was worn at many places, such as, offshore, workplace, place to gather, and for a chat. In addition, 9 responses stating that *Donza* was worn in winter shows that it was used for protection from cold.

### 3.4 The relationship between fishermen’s migratory routes and the presence of *Donza*

Table 2 presents the fishermen’s winter migration, and Fig. 7 illustrates the relationship between fishermen’s migratory routes and the regions where



Fig. 5 11 privately owned Donzas

Table 1 Narratives obtained through the questionnaire and interview about the use of Donza (excerpt)

Place or scenario	Uses of Donza	Number of responses
Offshore	My grandfather went offshore to catch sea breams. (85-year-old woman)	2
Workplace	I have memories that fishermen wore Donza when they sewed fishing nets. (77-year-old man)	3
Gathering around fire	During 1945 to 1949, I have memories that older people such as retired fishermen wore Donza and chatted around the fire in winter. (83-year-old man)	7
Other	I have worked as a fisherman since I was in elementary school. In those days, whenever I was very sleepy, I slept with Donza as a blanket because I had to go fishing before going to school. (90-year-old man)	5
	During my childhood, fishermen sang a song having the lyrics “sashiko no Donza ni nawa no obi (Stitched Donza and belt of rope)” at the harvest festival. (90-year-old man)	
	I tied Donza with a rope of straw. (90-year-old man) (Two fishermen in Fig. 6 tied Donza with an apron.)	
	When I went to Kobe as a vendor wearing Donza, someone often said to me “that garment is rare!” (90-year-old man)	
	I wore Donza on a boat, however, I took it off when I caught marine products even though the weather was cold. (90-year-old man)	



Fig. 6 Two fishermen wearing Donza (in 1910s)  
(figure credit: Mr. Yamatani)

Table 2: Narratives obtained through the questionnaire and interview about fishermen’s winter migration (excerpts)

	Narratives
Narratives of the people living in west regions.	Some fishermen worked at Tokushima prefecture because they could not go fishing in winter. (living in Ichinomiya, 72-year-old men)
	The western winter winds were so strong in winter that fishermen could not go fishing for many days. (living in Osaki, 67-year-old men)
	Before WWII, my parents went to the Korean Peninsula to buy raw fish. Most of the fishermen living in Toshima went to Kyusyu regions in winter, and they brought wives along with fish on their return. (living in Murozu, 77-year-old men)
Narratives of the people living in east regions.	In winter, some fishermen did not work far from their home and they went to Sumoto to catch sardine or engage in earthwork in winter. (living in Kamaguchi, 87-year-old men)
	I suppose that people living around Yura had some work in winter, because there were military institutions before WWII. (living in Yura, unknown age, men)

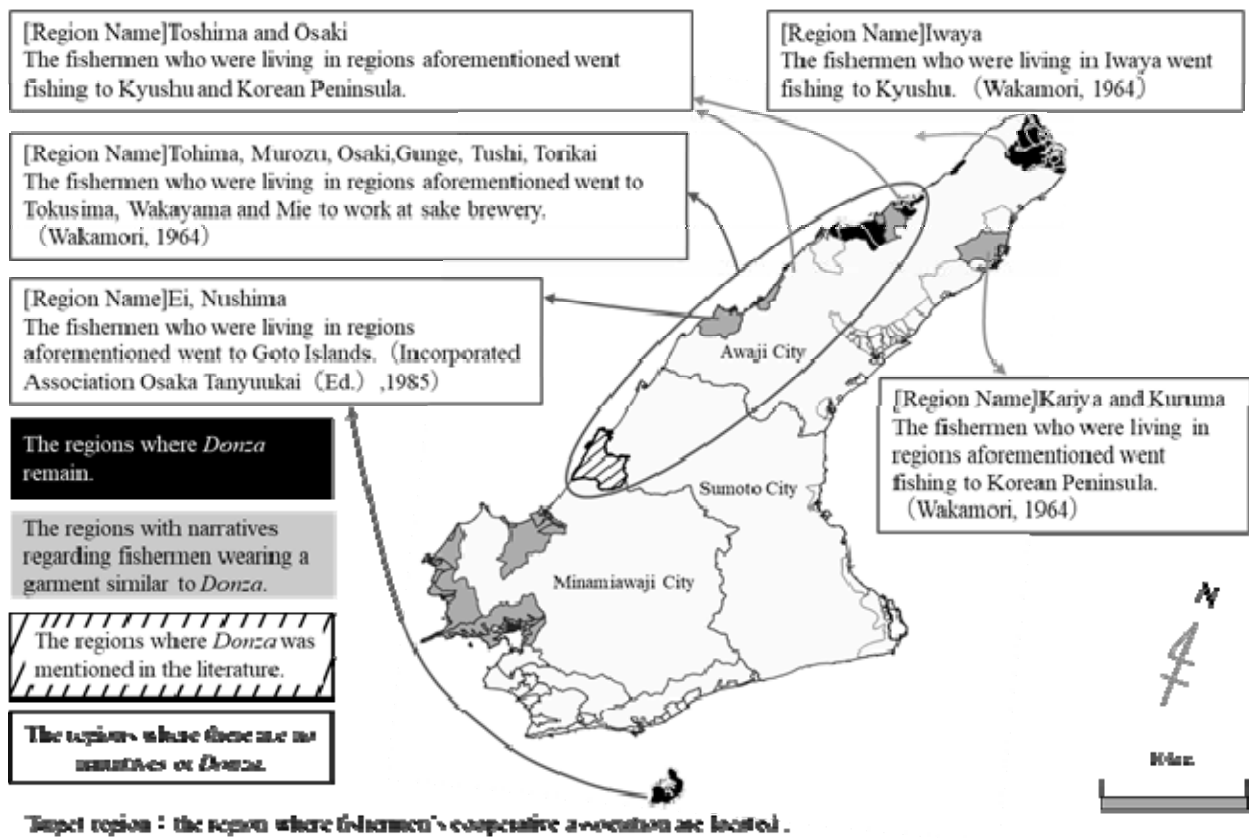


Fig. 7 The relationship between fishermen’s migratory routes and the regions where *Donza* is presently found

*Donza* is presently found. The areas, where 11 *Donzas* are found, are primarily in the northwestern part of Awaji Island, such as Toshima region. The narratives of fishermen shows that the winter winds were so strong that most of the fishermen working in western region of the island were often unable to go fishing. Therefore, some fishermen worked at sake brewery in Hanshin regions, and Tokushima, Mie, and Wakayama prefecture (Wakamori, 1964). Others went to their hometowns and Osaka to sell fish, which they bought in the Korean Peninsula. Because there are some *Donzas* in Shikoku and Kyusyu

regions similar to the elaborate *Donza* of Awaji Island (Matsumura, 2005), we speculate that Awaji Island fishermen, lived in northwestern fishing villages, saw and spread *Donzas* at the areas they visited for migrating and fishing.

### 3.4 The location and the characteristics of the *Konya* structure

Fig. 8 presents the location of *Konya*, and Fig. 9 illustrates the floor plan of *Konya* drawn by Mr. Hagiwara Shigeyuki.

A curator at the Tokushima Prefectural Museum

narrated that, during the Edo period, Mr. Miki, who was a merchant of indigo dyeing ingredient in Tokushima prefecture, traded with 110 people in Awaji Island (Matsunaga, 2020). In addition, we found that 10 houses used to be *Konya* through questionnaire and interview. Fig. 8 indicates that 5 out of 10 houses were approximately 100m from a river. It is assumed that indigo dyeing work developed along the river because dyeing requires much water.

Moreover, we discovered that there are or were wells at 4 houses. The temperature of well water is

stable, which is suitable for dyeing. Some regions used well and spring water because there was lack of water on the island. This indicates that people used well water for indigo dyeing.

Next, we considered the characteristics of *Konya* structure (Fig. 9). Some characteristics of the Hagiwara House in Kasyuufukui of Minamiawaji city indicate that the building was used as *Konya*. Therefore, we visited and researched the facilities to understand its composition. Fig. 9 shows that people used 2 wells with a Haneturube (tool for pumping up

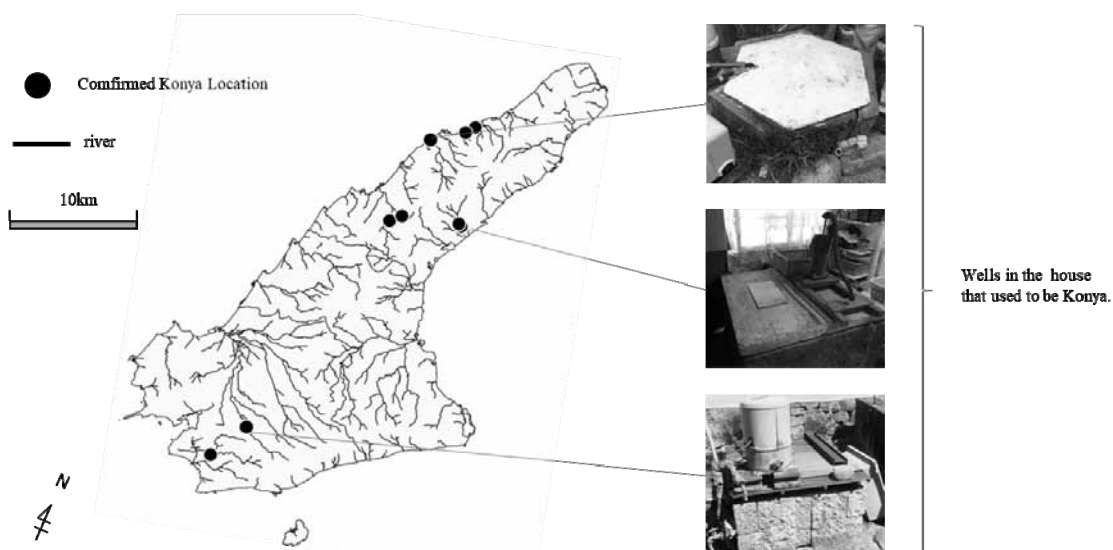


Fig. 8 The location of *Konya* in Awaji Island

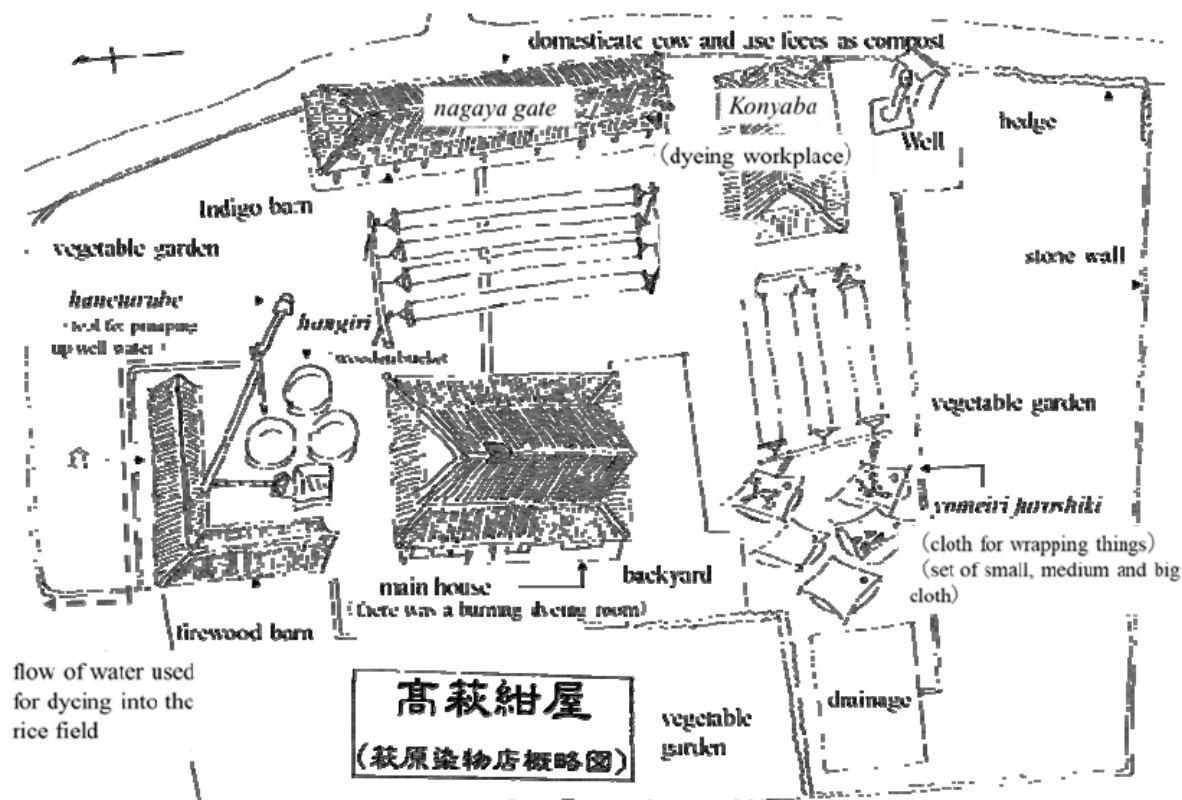


Fig. 9 Floor plan of *Konya* drawn by Mr. Hagiwara Shigeyuki (figure credit: Mr. Hagiwara Shigeyuki)



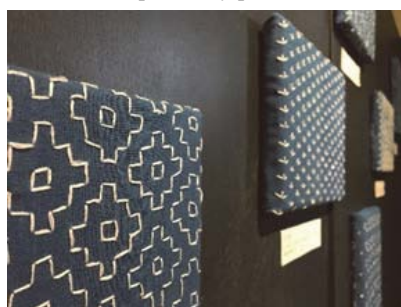
1. Donza

2. Explanatory panels

3. Cotton spinning and indigo dyeing tools



4. Papers with Donza pattern



5. Donza patterns and meanings



6. Sashiko works



7. Donza Tile



8. Donza cookies



9. Indigo dyeing experience



10. Sashiko experience



11. Indigo products for selling



12. State of exhibition

Fig. 10 Donza exhibition

well water). This indicates that dyeing required much water. Mr. Hagiwara said that Nagaya Gate, a traditional gate at Awaji Island, has some rooms. People domesticated cows and used the feces as compost and stored indigo dyeing ingredient at Nagaya Gate. Moreover, workers dried dyed cloths in the garden in front of Nagaya Gate. We understand that dyers used the Nagaya Gate well. Also, because dyers dyed by the way of burning-dyeing in the main house, the ceiling of the house is still black. These

remains provide us an idea of what it may have looked like in those days.

#### 4. the inheritance support project

Through our research, we found the characteristics of Donza and indigo dyeing culture, and the awareness of Donza is not high. So that, it is necessary to inherit these history and culture information more people. Therefore, we held a

Table 3 Feedback from the *Donza* exhibition (excerpt)

Category	Additional comments	Number of responses
Event	This event has both beauty and intelligent. /It is enjoyable to attend an event regarding <i>Donza</i> . /Making progress to investigate and conserve is appreciable.	26
Characteristics of <i>Donza</i>	[stylish] <i>Donza</i> is so stylish and modern in its textile design. / [functionality] I tried on the <i>Donza</i> and found the clothing is tough and warm. / [story-line] I felt the experience of men of historical days that left a strong impression on me.	32
History and culture about indigo dyeing and <i>Donza</i>	I participated in the stitching program and felt the magnificence of our predecessors. /Indigo dyeing was special for me before, and, I learned about the uses of indigo dyeing in our daily lives that amazed me. / It was an informative and enriching experience to learn about Awaji's culture and history that I had no knowledge of. / I could know more about the clothes on Awaji Island, because earlier I never thought regarding the clothing culture of the island. / This event provided me a chance to know about the richness of local traditions and culture. / It was informative to know regarding <i>Donza</i> , which is my husband's tradition as a fisherman.	70
Inheritance about indigo dyeing and <i>Donza</i>	I want more people to know. / Explanatory panels are useful. If this information is presented as a booklet, I would want to buy it. / It would be wonderful if <i>Donza</i> can be revived in some form in the modern age. / I expect you would devise a plan to pass them on from energetic older people to children. / I have always been amazed at the wonderful embroidery of <i>Donza</i> , and it is the treasure that I want to pass on to our children, therefore, I would attempt to research and create a picture-story about it.	22
Other	I am deeply moved that you investigated the indigo dyeing culture of the island, on foot. In the absence of a comprehensive literature, I believe it is commendable. / I visited this event as I am interested in stitching and indigo dyeing.	8

*Donza* exhibition to get more people know about Awaji's *Donza* and indigo-dyeing culture with some Awaji Island's residents for 3 days.

#### 4.1 *Donza* exhibition (refer to Fig. 10)

##### 4.1.1 Exhibits on display

We exhibited 8 privately owned *Donzas* and explained the meaning of the patterns stitched on them. To enhance visitor's familiarity with *Donza*, we let them try on a *Donza*. Further, we displayed something; cloth works stitched *Donza* pattern to explain the meaning of patterns stitched on *Donza*.; explanatory panels on the findings of our study.; tools used in the process of making *Donza* such as, a spinning wheel for cotton spinning, *Sukumo* (an indigo dyeing ingredient), and paper with *Donza* patterns.

##### 4.1.2 Experience Program

To enable visitors to understand *Donza* more deeply, we conducted 2 experiences programs: indigo dyeing and *Sashiko* stitching on masks. Moreover, we sold indigo tea and doughnuts prepared using

indigo leaf at *Donza* café. Particularly, we prepared cookies with the *Donza* pattern to encourage visitors to notice *Donza*'s various uses. Further, we displayed and sold some products used with the *Donza* motif such as "*Donza* Tiles", and "*Shima no huku*" (Fig. 4). The others products are indigo soap and tea produced by dyers, Awaji Ai LAND Project.

#### 4.2 Evaluation of visitors

We handed out questionnaire to visitors and analyzed the feedback from 203 responses (Table 3). One comment on questionnaire said, "It was an informative and enriching experience to learn about Awaji's culture and history that I had no knowledge of" which indicates the exhibition provided an opportunity to know about local culture and history. Apart from that, there are some comments that "*Donza* is the treasure that I want to pass on to children, and I would try to study and make a picture-story." In fact, the woman writing above comment studied about *Donza* and fishing characteristics on the island, and made a picture-story (Fig. 11), which is a family story on fishermen and *Donza*. She went to a school on the island to narrate

this picture-story. This activity leads to passing on the culture of Awaji Island to children. These shows that the purpose of the exhibition was achieved to a certain extent.

It is noteworthy that we could conserve one *Donza* owing to this exhibition. A man living in Iwaya, Awaji city noticed the poster of the exhibition and contacted us “if you need *Donza*, I would be able to give you one *Donza* that I am going to throw away.” He mentioned that the *Donza* was probably used by his father, who is now around 100 years old.



Fig. 11 Picture-story (figure credit: Mrs. Uoi Keiko)

## 5. Conclusion

Though there are not many people who know *Donza*, we found some things about *Donza*: there are still 11 privately owned *Donzas* apart from two museums in island; *Donza* was used in winter at workplace, offshore and so on; the relationship between fishermen’s migratory routes and the regions where *Donza* is presently found. Moreover, we found that 10 houses used to be *Konya*, 5 out of 10 houses were approximately 100m from a river and 4 houses

used well, because indigo-dyeing requires much water.

Also, through *Donza* exhibition, we found one *Donza*, and many people became interested in *Donza*. After the exhibition, we have held some events about *Donza*. Through events, we found new 2 *Donza*. From that, we speculate that *Donza* still remain in some fishermen’s house. We want to expect to find *Donza* by increasing the awareness of *Donza*.

Recently, the number of people interesting in *Donza* is increasing, and more residents cooperate for popularizing *Donza* and revitalizing the regional communities. From now on, we will try to find the way to revitalize the region by spreading *Donza* that is the resources of Awaji Island.

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