

## REGIONAL NEWS

# Dr. Takuya Nagaoka and the true essence of culture

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TO understand Micronesian culture one must learn a variety of fundamental cultural cues.

Time, for example. For many islanders, sea turtles are the true representation of slow-paced island life. They are now symbols of marine environment and environmentalism, but they also project an ideal sense of time in much folklore and legends in the various Micronesian islands.

The peaceful creature can be misconceived as a sedentary animal, but many types of turtles, especially sea turtles, frequently migrate over large distances in oceans and have played an important role in meeting all kinds of cultural needs in many islands.

As for the Micronesians' sense of time — long ago, many didn't have any deadline to meet and they performed their tasks slowly but still accomplished a lot by the end of the day.

Many foreigners have misunderstood and taken island culture for granted.

Many arrived here and tried to change the lifestyle or aggressively speed up huge developments for their benefit even though these were against the spiritual beauty and traditions of local society.

Others think that the islands are too slow and boring compared to city life. But the unique beauty of Micronesia is in its many cultures and the "slowness" of time that have strengthened the islanders' cultural identity which many people from all over the world find attractive.



TAKUYA NAGAOKA

In Micronesia, each island is unique and has its own cultural traditions and beliefs which should be valued and respected for creating a harmonious society which Micronesians call home.

Many have expressed the need for development but culture and tradition based on the environment should remain a priority to maintain a balanced society.

Takuya Nagaoka, who has a Ph.D. in anthropology, heads a non-profit organization Pasifika Renaissance, in Nara, Japan.

The group endeavors to preserve and promote the cultural and historical heritage of the Pacific Islands in order to revitalize and empower islands communities.

Dr. Nagaoka has worked continuously with other organizations including the Department of Anthropology of the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

He has conducted field research and interviews for documentaries and numerous publications for over 30 years.

"We're now in an age when new technologies are a most useful tool for cultural education to reach people more widely and effectively," he said.

"Documenting disappearing traditional cultures and passing their knowledge down to younger generations is one of our group's priorities. We have been recording oral traditions on the islands of Pohnpei State in the Federated States of Micronesia by video camera to share them on our YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/channel/UCnmyAfrAD0u4MpUF9jLgjjag/](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnmyAfrAD0u4MpUF9jLgjjag/)).

"This method of documenting and publishing by modern technology and media has great potential for future applications due to its easiness and transmitting ability.

"We are further planning to work on such projects for sharing historical and academic materials (e.g., sound recordings) kept in foreign institutions with local Pacific island communities on the internet and creating online courses about various topics including Pacific prehistory and traditional seafaring."

Cultural education should be merged with western learning for current and future generations, and it should guide policy-makers when making decisions that affect the islands' cultural heritage.

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