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What kinds of lifestyle and rurality do migrants from cities have in Ehime Prefecture?

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Since the late 1980s, support for I-turn migrants have been actively promoted in order to revitalize hilly and mountainous areas and remote islands and as a measure against depopulation. As soon as the green tourism projects started to spread nationwide, and as more city dwellers aspired to live in the nature and longed for traditional culture and life in rural areas, a trend called the country life boom emerged in the 1990s. I-turn migrants who seek country life have their own image of farming villages and countryside. They choose a place to reside and their house with clear goals to attain the life that they think is ideal. Therefore, they have a unique lifestyle. This is partly affected by the ideal image of rural areas and the life there that media have created including TV programs featuring successful migrants to farming villages and special country life magazines. At the same time, there is a strategic aspect on the part of local communities that accept migrants. They advertise their own local communities in a way to suit the ideal image of country life in order to win the hearts of potential I-turn migrants who are willing to migrate to farming villages. How could rural areas offer country life to city dwellers as products? And what kinds of lifestyle and rurality do migrants from cities have? In this presentation, the actual situations of migration to rural areas are clarified through analyses of entities surrounding country life, which will provide a viewpoint in considering rural space in Japan that is increasingly commodified.

Ehime Prefecture, which has carried out a tourism-based migration promotion project since 2006, will be studied for this presentation. Through a tie-up with an airline company, Ehime Prefecture put featured articles about country life in the prefecture on in-flight magazines and conducted promotional activities in various media. In this project, the prefecture has also offered information in cooperation with electric utilities project to restore old houses as well as real estate firms information bank of vacant houses. Travel agencies have developed travel products along with the project for visitors from outside the prefecture. In cities, towns, and villages that cooperate with Ehime Prefecture, extended-stay farm facilities such as farm garden have been established, for which unique support systems including working holiday programs have been developed. As a result, 177 people migrated through the project from 2007 to 2009. Many migrants to coastal municipalities are retired baby-boomers whose hobbies are fishing and diving. In contrast, many migrants to remote islands along Shimanami Area and those who migrate to Uniko Town are young people: the former have newly been engaged in agriculture as producers of fruits such as tangerines and lemons, and the latter as pesticide-free organic vegetable producers.

In this presentation, the accepting side will be analyzed through descriptions in booklets created by the prefecture and municipalities to be distributed to those who are interested in migrating to the prefecture, featured articles by airline companies and travel agencies that tie up with the project, and the contents of the travel package trial migration. The guest side will be analyzed through and narratives, experiences, and blog articles of migrants.

Keywords: I-turn migrants, country life, rurality, narrative, Ehime Prefecture