

Small-scale Fisheries in Japan

Environmental and Socio-cultural Perspectives

edited by Giovanni Bulian and Yasushi Nakano

Introduction

The aim of this collection of articles is to cover a wide range of interdisciplinary issues related to small-scale fisheries in Japan. These fishing activities still tend today to be firmly rooted in local communities representing a form of economic activity that reflects the richness of an extremely varied fishing culture, ethical values, management strategies and local knowledge.

Despite there is no universal definition of ‘small scale-fisheries’ (Berkes et al. 2001, 8), in this book, the term must be contextualised as a series of particular fishing activities that “usually require only small capital investment, use low technology gear and vessels (often non-motorised) and catch fish for subsistence or local markets” and that is “characterized as a dynamic and evolving sub-sector of fisheries employing labour-intensive harvesting, processing and distribution technologies to exploit marine and inland water fishery resources. The activities of this sub-sector, conducted full-time or part-time, or just seasonally, are often targeted on supplying fish and fishery products to local and domestic markets, and for subsistence consumption” (Staples, Satia, Gardiner 2004). This kind of activities are also often based in small coastal and island communities that depend on local resources that can be affected by local activities (Berkes et al. 2001, 11).

In Japan, however, although small-scale fisheries are a dynamic community-based sub-sector, when looking for a clear definition on what they exactly are, there are some difficulties because there are various definitions in Japanese legislation. As Kaneda summarises: “Japanese fisheries fall under several classes quite different in technological development, from a large number of coastal small-scale fisheries run primarily by family labors to the latest, large-scale, fully equipped few” (2005, 6). Delaney and Yagi have observed that “there is no legal definition of small-scale fishing [...], but for the purpose of fisheries production statistics, fishing boats smaller than 10 gross tons are recognized as coastal fishing vessels and also as small-scale fishers in Japan” (2017, 315; see also Makino 2011, 6-8). In the attempt to provide a commonly accepted definition, in this book ‘small-scale fisheries’ in the context of Japanese fisheries are referred to fishing activities carried out with small boats, which have a very small crew (usually one or two people) and which operates mainly in coastal areas and almost always in territorial waters. Moreover, small-scale fisheries are also specialised with some division of labour (fishing unit) with medium to low investment whose disposal of catch is generally

organised on local sale with significant consumption of the operator or the local fishing community.

Using different methodological approaches, the book covers a diverse range of topics related to community-based fisheries: environmental management of coastal areas, local practices of allocating fishing spots by lottery, fishing livelihoods, environmental threats or historical destructive fishing techniques, gender and entrepreneurship and, more generally, socio-cultural issues focused on the critical strategies adopted to strengthen or improve local economies of fishing communities. Topics covered in this volume therefore highlight some of the major socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the small-scale fisheries that could be ideally defined as 'internal' to the Japanese fishing communities.

The book also contributes to the currently debates concerning the need to reconsider the cultural and economic role of this fishing sector. Studies on small-scale fisheries, if compared to the various fisheries research areas, has been a marginal theme for a long time becoming only in recent times an object of theoretical interest (Akimichi 1996; Jentoft et al. 2017). A further factor to consider is also that small-scale fisheries could continue nowadays to make an important contribution to the development of a research agenda to address identified information gap for fisheries policy (Staples, Satia, Gardiner 2004, 12), offering also theoretical challenges that can be of interest to anthropology and to disciplines that make use of bio-economic and cultural approaches to the study of fisheries (Pauly 2006a 2006b; Colburn, Abbott-Jamieson, Clay 2006). In this context, the extremely varied cultural heritage of Japanese small-scale fisheries has become then part of the current debates focused on the necessity of re-contextualizing the role of small-scale fisheries in a global perspective (Stoffle 2001; Béné 2006; Ingles et al. 2007; Delaney, Yagi 2017).

The book attempts various thematic paths, which open a very wide range of approaches and different perspectives, depending on the methodological choices, temporal context and the selection of the topics. In the first chapter, Taku Iida focuses on the use of explosive material during the post-war period in the Southwestern Archipelago immediately after World War 2, bringing about stimulating perspectives on both modern history and fisheries management in Japan. The author reconstructs the general conditions of this fishing technique, now prohibited, in coastal villages in the Southwestern Archipelago as a step to clarify the farther details of fishing innovation on individual base. The chapter is structured in three parts: a review of published records of this type as well as oral testimonies collected by the author's research, a detailed analysis of the Iriomote Island's case, where non-fishers used explosives to set off against their lack of skill and gears and, finally, a detailed analysis of the Kohama Island's case, where full-time fishers used explosives in many strategical ways according to target species. According to the author, people with experience of "dynamite

fishing” generally hesitate to tell their story probably because of a sense of guilt. However, their story uncovers many characteristics of fishery that cannot be observed anymore in Japan: famine relief, boom industry, and nevertheless requirement of practical knowledge through experience.

In the following article, Mitsutaku Makino and Kumi Soejima examine the development of fisheries women entrepreneurship groups in the Japanese marine products distribution sector. In particular, they discuss strategies adopted by women’s groups in fishery cooperative associations (FCAs), who live in fishing communities and conduct economic activities using local resources centred on fishery products. According to the authors, central to the analysis of the role of women in entrepreneurial activities is the case of the Sanmi Sea Mothers, who are active in the Sanmi community located in the town of Hagi (Yamaguchi Prefecture). Examining their historical evolution, the authors subdivided their economic activities into three main periods (1996-2005; 2006-2007 and 2008-2010) in order to show how fishery women’s entrepreneurship could play a significant role to communicate the cultural value of fishing communities to local people as well as the general consuming public.

Tetsuo Yanagi’s contribution consists in a critical review of the activities of fishermen who are members of the Hinase Fishermen’s Union in the Seto Inland Sea. In particular, the author focuses on the environmental *engagement* of the local fishermen in restoring of the areas of eelgrass beds, which were decreased in the coastal area from the early ‘60s, mainly because of water pollution and other meteorological factors. The author then highlights how the initiative of the Hinase fishermen in the voluntary activities for the cleaning and the collection of seabed debris, with the aid of national government funding, has brought great improvements on the environmental and economic level.

Shūichi Kawashima’s article focuses instead on fishing grounds to be determined by lottery. Given that existing studies of early-modern and modern fishing maps from across Japan have not examined how they were used by fishermen, the author focuses on the practices of ‘fishing with *kuji*’ 籤 (lottery) to determine the use of a fishing area. The chapter focuses primarily on coastal areas of the eastern Kii Peninsula, where diverse fishing methods are used by local communities (gill nets and four-armed scoop nets). In these areas, fishing lotteries, whose origin is religious, have been developed to be used during fishing seasons. The contribution of the author, therefore, demonstrates how *kuji* is a culturally sophisticated method to ensure the equal distribution of fishing opportunities, a strategy born from a view of a world in which fishers are constantly subject to the harsh whims of nature.

In the next chapter, Yasushi Nakano focuses on the issue of the endurance and the transformative dynamics of the folk festivals that take place in a fishing community. To this day, Japanese fishery and fishing communities are asked by government for multilateral functions rather than

only fishery production, the author focuses on the question of how fishing villagers perform the folk festival. Tracing diachronically the critical processes of change of a long-established folk festival, the author takes the endurance and the transformation of the traditional boats of Tamaeura as a case study (Hagi city, Yamaguchi Prefecture). Secondly, considering the causes and conditions that effect the endurance and the transformation, the author also sheds light on the powers between the fishing community and government, discussing also the framework of Japanese fishery, which is mediated at local (fishing community) and national level (government).

Johannes Wilhelm, instead, examines some of the main critical consequences of the nuclear disaster following the Tōhoku earthquake and *tsunami* on 11 March 2011. Even before disaster struck, the Tōhoku region has been regarded an epitome of a structurally weak region where the process of depopulation and aging combined with a traditional economy based on agriculture, forestry and fisheries, a fact that can be underlined by looking at the locations of nuclear power stations such as Fukushima I & II, Onagawa, Higashidōri or Ōma. Depopulation and dropping numbers of fisheries population came apparent long before disaster struck and the disaster accelerated this trend distinctly. After disaster, a large part of the coastal population moved from shelters to temporary housings (*kasetsu*) to wait for completion of residential areas on higher ground. However, findings from recent population data (13th Fisheries Census of 2013 and local statistics) show that micro-level migration increased significantly due to temporary resettlement, but also a structural change in local economy (from fisheries to construction work) occurred in the aftermath of disaster. It is highly questionable if the resettled population will move back to their former places (i.e. remote settlements) in near future. Another aspect of this problem is how to cope and overcome this kind of socially induced vulnerable state for the continued existence of coastal communities, where social bonds gradually fall apart. Based on observations conducted during the past 15 years, the author discusses then the vulnerability of communities in Pacific Tōhoku induced by social factors such as depopulation and shrinking. At the same time, the author analyses the strategies chosen by affected residents to cope with such a situation and how conflicts evolve and become settled in contemporary small-scale fisheries communities.

Returning to the topic previously examined by Yasushi Nakano, the last contribution of the book examines some issues of festival management that are related to the transformation of the local institutions and to the power relations among the various local leaders of Kamishima (Mie Prefecture). Specifically, Giovanni Bulian provides an anthropological overview of the critical processes of empowerment and disempowerment of ritual leaders in the context of a winter festival that takes place during the New Year's Eve, whose management and celebration represent an important catalyst for local leadership. Therefore, the article will explore the balance of pow-

er between the director of the local fishing association who is connected to the 'new' institutional system introduced in Kamishima (neighborhood associations and fishing cooperative association) and the head of the religious ceremonies, traditionally elected by the three historical local districts of the fishing community. According to the author, these two ritual leaders can act as mirror reflecting the particular characteristics of the radical transformations of the local organisational systems.

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