

# Environmental History of Waterfront Life

— Folk Cultures in Brackish Water Environments —

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This joint research focuses on brackish water environments. Many of the coastal environments of the Japanese archipelago, such as estuaries, lagoons — parts of back swamps — and semi-enclosed bays, are in brackish water areas, where freshwater and sea water mix. Being low-lying, marshy and mixed with salt water, these areas are barren land where people usually do not live, and have been regarded as poor soil that must be transformed by, for example, developing new rice fields.

However, this is how brackish water areas have been looked at mainly by those in governments. It goes without saying that historians depending on records and statistics kept for governments have looked at these areas in the same way. How will brackish water environments look if examined from the viewpoints of people who have lived there instead of the viewpoints of researchers and those in governments? This question gave our joint research a purpose: presenting a new image of brackish water environments.

This paper has been compiled as an interim report, and consists of articles by the following five joint researchers:

Yasumuro Satoru has drawn up an outline of the history of research on brackish water conducted to date, and presented a definition of brackish water at this point for us to carry out our joint research. He has also reported on fisheries characteristic of downstream brackish water areas and brackish lakes, and examined contemporary issues concerning brackish water, relating these issues to environmental issues.

Matsuda Mutsuhiko has reviewed folklore research conducted to date on the impacts of brackish lakes on fisheries, taking into account the achievements of ecology. He has also conducted a preliminary study to clarify a relationship between various fishery methods employed in brackish lakes and the lives of people involved in fisheries there.

Yamamoto Shino looks at commercial activities linked to brackish lakes. On Daikon Island in Nakaumi, a brackish lake on the border between Shimane and Tottori prefectures, many women peddled peony seedlings from the 1960s to the 70s. She has used various reports compiled in the 1950s as texts to review the livelihood on Daikon Island from the prewar to postwar years and examine why the peddling started.

Kawashima Shuichi studies ria coast bays, which are brackish water environments. As ria coasts, where rivers flow directly into the sea from mountains, create nutrient-rich brackish water environments, many kinds of fish are attracted to ria coast bays. He has reported on the history of fisheries from the early modern period, including competing interests such as salt farming in bay areas that tried to eliminate brackish water environments and mullet net fishing that took advantage of brackish water environments, in villages facing Kesenuma Bay in Miyagi Prefecture, a typical ria coast brackish bay.

Lastly, Tsunemitsu Toru looks at fisheries techniques used in brackish water areas at estuaries. Although sweetfish bait fishing is a fisheries technique noticeable in brackish water areas, little attention has been paid to it in the field of folklore. He has reported on bait fishing in the Kure River in Nakatosa Town, Kochi Prefecture, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s based on his own experiences.