

## Studies on Overlapping Local Fishing Skills

— Three Octopus Catching Methods for One Fishing Ground During a Season —

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In some areas, various fishing techniques are used to catch just one type of fish or shellfish in a fishing ground. Fishermen on Tobishima, an island in Sakata City of Yamagata Prefecture, for example, use three methods with similar techniques and equipment to catch octopus during a season. What does this mean, and what can be learned from their activities? In the case of plant cultivation, similar methods are used to grow certain crops on the same field through early and late season plantings. This is practical in that the same method can be applied for the same crop while shifting planting seasons. But this is not the case with fishing because employing three similar techniques in one place during a period is completely different from time-shifting crop cultivation. Various fishing techniques used in one fishing area have been featured in fishing surveys and folklore studies, but few explanations have been provided for the connections between the techniques. The question lies in not only what characteristics of each fishing technique but also how various techniques are related.

This research theme is based on my experience of failure in my work. When I studied fishing techniques used in local communities, I had a chance to talk with a fisherman called a master, who was said to know more about fishing than anybody else in the area. After compiling a community report based on his stories, I visited the place again and interviewed other fishermen. Surprisingly, they pointed out some of the techniques described in the report, saying they did not know anything about them and criticizing them as the wrong techniques, or even doubting if such techniques had existed at all. Then I realized the techniques totally unknown to those fishermen were in fact invented by the master through his own experience. Local fishing techniques obviously include those shared by fishermen as well as those devised by individuals. But without such experience, I could have remained unaware of this fact. Since then, I have been able to recognize that some fishing techniques in a local community could have been developed and used by individual fishermen with their extraordinary skills and professional experience. All these findings suggest the importance of exploring how local techniques relate to one another.

This research can also lead to the possibility of identifying the characteristics of each of the fishing techniques that coexist in a community in terms of its relationships and status. The key is to investigate how different techniques and overlapping similar techniques affect fishing activities. As a series of studies on overlapping techniques have been conducted in the occupational field of folklore studies, this study focuses on the importance and roles of what appear to be the same fishing technique while analyzing three methods for catching octopus in Tobishima as case studies.