

MASAMARU, A VANISHING BREED OF ANGLERS*

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Introduction

In the spring of 1988 I undertook my second field research in Izu Oshima, Habuminato*. From March 17-23 I collected written documents regarding the past and present social conditions of the people. While in the process of searching pertinent materials, I also observed the daily life around the port area. Habuminato is a fishing port which also presently serves as an important shelter for boats that fish around the Izu islands, the waters facing Tokyo and the Prefectures of Chiba and Kanagawa (See Map 1). It is strategically located near rich fishing grounds.

This paper is about a knowledgeable man known as Masamaru whom I met on the 4th day of my stay. He is a 57 year-old hook and line fisherman from Yugawara, Kanagawa Prefecture who had been fishing for the past 43 years. He first came to moor in Habuminato in 1950.

I will try to relate the various natural and technological changes that occurred which had affected him to reveal his deep knowledge of the sea which he shared with me. It is of importance to me, as an anthropologist, to hear him talk freely of this hard gained knowledge because fishermen, even if they share information about their fishing activities, never talk about their secrets to other people.

Chance Meeting

It was almost past nine in the morning when the bidding at the nearby fish market ended. Since the weather was quite chilly, I decided to look for a cozy place to drink coffee and write my observations for the morning. I walked a few meters and found a sunaku (drinking pub).

* Paper read during the monthly meeting of Sikolohiyang Pilipino, Japan Chapter at Komaba Foreign Students' Dormitory, 28 October, 1988. This research is part of the Izu Shoto Anthropological Project of the Division of Anthropology, Institute of History and Anthropology, University of Tsukuba under the grant from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Japan.

There were three men and a woman in a corner sipping hot sake beside a kerosene stove. I found out later that the woman was the mama-san of the sunaku. One man was an operator of a leisure fishing boat who lived with her. The other was his client from Yokohama and the third man was a fisherman from Chiba. I introduced myself as a Filipino foreign student who was doing a study on the lives of the people there.

A few minutes after exchanging pleasantries and explaining to them what particular information I wanted to know, a short balding man of about five feet tall came and joined us around the kerosene stove. The leisure boat operator introduced him as the sensei of the fishermen. He was called Masamaru after the name of his boat.

The Rendezvous

Sunaku is actually a place for transients, a watering hole for fishermen who come to Habuminato to sell their catch, buy their supplies and moor their boats while waiting for the weather to clear up before proceeding to fish. These men may be some sort of mooring nakama, a group of non-local fishermen whose fishing schedule coincide, thus, making them some sort of an intimate group in the harbour where they moor temporarily. Almost all of them are hook and line specialists. I learned that hook and line fishing can be performed in any part of Japan. Unlike net fishing which needed licensing and strict control and has designated areas for fishing, hook and line fishermen are free to exploit the waters of their choice.

Masamaru's favorite fishing spots are very close to Habuminato. He comes to fish 200 days a year. He moors here from 3 to 4 days a week on the average. When asked why he liked the place, he replied:

Jibun ni tekishita sakana ga iru kara.

'Because there are fish that are suitable for me(there).'

Besides, he added, the fish market is right beside the wharf, fishing supplies are available. When I interviewed him, he intended to stay a week more around the area before he returns home. He sleeps and cooks in his kobune, a less than 3 ton-class boat.

The price of fish in Habuminato is relatively lower than in the Yugawara area, an onsen (hot spa) belt, due to the presence of tourists. But due to the

distance between his home port and fishing grounds, it is not economical to return home after every fishing trip. His type of fishing, that is, hook and line with less than a three-ton boat and a low-powered engine is only suitable for a day's fishing trip. If he decides to return home, he has to gather enough fish to cover his long trip and a reasonable quantity to sell to his fishing cooperative association's fish market. Members are expected to sell their catch to their home market. It is through their catch that the cooperative market earns some profit.

The Fisherman as a Teacher

Masamaru considers himself an uwaki (unfaithful) compared to Suzumaru from Misaki, Kanagawa Prefecture, who only fishes for kinme (alfonsin) all year round. He, on the other hand, only fishes for species in season. His annual schedule is therefore affected by the changes of the seasons or the ocean currents. He drew this map (See Map 2) showing the fishing spots, the ocean currents, the periods of fishing and the corresponding species caught together with the type of fishing gear he uses. From his drawings, I learned that the kuroshio (warm current from around April to around October) and its branch which enters the Izu island chain (beginning June), and the oyashio (cold current from around November to February) greatly affect the sea environment as well as his fishing activities. These currents make the archipelago a rich fishing ground. Many varieties of fishes, such as polar fishes from the north and tropical fishes from the south can be found. Consequently, Masamaru's sea routes are likewise influenced by the movements of these currents. In general, he follows three routes within a fishing cycle, i.e. (a) from Shimoda (Kanagawa Prefecture) to Chikura (Boso Peninsula, Chiba Prefecture), (b) from Shimoda to Habuminato to Omorodashi, and (c) from Misaki (Kanagawa Prefecture) to Omorodashi, Okinoyama and Chikura. He summarizes his fishing schedule as: (1) from January to June around Omorodashi for kinme, ako and hiramasa, (2) July until the end of summer around Okinoyama for medai, katsuo, shimeji, and kiwada, and (3) from October to November around these two fishing spots for mameji. Since species differ in their seasonal appearance and locations, he also uses different types of line fishing. He alternates using tatenawa (hand line fishing) and tororingu (trolling line). Hand line (See fig. 1) is composed of one long strong line, several hooks, a weight or a balance and some accessories. Trolling line (See fig. 2) is a method of fishing whereby the line is towed on the surface or near the surface with hooks at the end of the line. The bait is principally artificial, but sometimes raw bait, such as cuttle fish is used. For setting hooks, a wooden or plastic trolling board is used, and by adjusting the towing speed, the hooks are sunk to a suitable depth. From his own handwritten map the

following table (See Table 1) will show the various fishing spots, fishes caught, and the kind of lines he uses.

Table 1
Fishing spots, fish names, and gears.

Fishing Spots	Fish name	Gears	
		Tatenawa	Tororingu
(1) Hatsushima oki	kuromutsu kinme	*	—
(2) Chigasaki (3) no ba	kinme ako	*	—
(4) Omorodashi no jinoba	medai onakada	* *	— —
(5) Omorodashi no asai (23 m) tokoro	hiramasa kampachi	— —	* *
(6) Omorodashi (7) no minami no ba	ago onaga medai	*	—
(8) Omorodashi no higashi	ako	*	—
(9) Oki no ba (10) (Oki no yama) kiwada	meji katsuo	— — —	* * *
(11) Chikura oki	kiwada	—	*
(12) Takase	kinmedai	*	—
(13) Nijijima mae	mutsu	*	—
(14) Sashikiji semba oki aka ika	maika yari ika	* * *	— — —
(15) Okata ko oki	maika yari ika	* *	— —

Legend: * used not used

Note: The number inside the () corresponds to those in Map 2.

Masamaru, the Fisherman

The map which Masamaru drew is a product of 43 years of fishing experience. He began to fish professionally right after graduating from middle school when he was 15 years old. His fisherman father died before his graduation. Life was difficult during those days; he had to continue his father's trade. During school vacation he went to fish with his father. Like all other trades in Japan, skill is learned through apprenticeship.

Masamaru is a disciplined fisherman, who kept records of his daily observations, noted the changes of his environment not only through his 20 year accumulated diary, but also drew nature as he saw it and how it affected him. He is a meticulous craftsman who prefers to weave his own scoop net for two days than buy the easily available nylon mass-produced product.

Masamaru relies basically with his seaspun knowledge more than the electronic gadgets. In the open sea, he can navigate without the help of navigational instruments. He resorts to yamate, a concept of triangulation where mountain peaks, and other 'recognizable' markers on an island are used as guide posts (See fig. 3). For him knowing yamate, he does not need to use the roran (LORAN, an acronym for Long Range Navigational Aid) to find directions or remember fishing spots. For instance, in 500 meter deep waters where fishes are stationary, yamate is sufficient. He may not be blamed for his dislike of mechanical gadgets because he experienced negative consequences from using them. He illustrates the gyogun tanchiki (fish finder), a sound scooping device used to detect the pulse of fish in order to find their location. This device, according to him, affects egg-bearing fish like sea bream whose eggs are stored close in its soft nape. Since many fishermen are now using very powerful gyogun the eggs may either die or grow to have soft bones. He has showed evidence to his claim and reported it to the Misaki Marine Experimental Station. The reply was that they will study the matter further.

With many experiences such as this, he is pessimistic about the future. He thinks that some day remokon roboto, a remote controlled robot, can take his place. He believes that his predictions will come. In fact remote controlled planes are now being used, he said. Yet in spite of his grim images he continues to rely on his knowledge that does not need sophisticated tools. He finds the fishing spots by observing the sea foam, checking the sea water temperature, observing the currents and others. He keeps watch of the wind by looking at the smoke of Miihara Volcano.

From a distance, the most prominent landmark in the island of Oshima is Mt. Miihara, an active volcano. Through the smoke of this volcano he can judge how much work can be possible. When a gentle smoke comes out, he feels secure in the open sea. He does not need to worry about the strong wind. But smoke veering to the west means a strong wind is coming and it is time for him to return to the port. In his words ...

Nishikaze suyoi, nan toyu, toki niwa,
Kaze no suyoi toki, suyoi bai wa,
yahari, aa, Miihara no kemu ga,
ne, aa, nishi no nobite.
Totte, kaze ni tobasarete,
nakunatta kara.

When west wind is strong
when wind is strong,
well, smoke of Miihara
is veering to the west
for the wind is blowing
since (smoke) vanished.

Kaze ga tsuyokunaru kara,
ja, kairo ka naa, toka, ne.

Because wind is becoming
stronger, better return.

Kyo Miihara no kemu ga
otonashi kara,
kyo wa, odayakana dakara
yukkuri shigotoshiyo kara.
(fishing).

Today Miihara's smoke
is quiet, so ...
today (it) is calm, so ...
(I) will take (my) time

How can this notion be understood by a layman like me? He thought of illustrating this phenomenon to me by the smoke from a cigarette. The following is a transcript of our conversation:

(Miihari funka suru toki ni...)

(When Mt. Miihara erupts...)

Shigoto no shii yasui.
Shigoto yari yasui.
Subai shiteta, aa,
Miihara no kemuri ga
nakunatta to iu koto wa,
kaze ga tsuyokunaru toiu koto.

Work is easy.
Work is easily performed.
When conducting your
business and the smoke
of Miihara disappears,
it means that the wind
will be strong

Kaze takusan aru to, kurudatte,
usukunachau desu yo?

If there is strong wind
it becomes less, right?

Odayakana baai wa, tabako datta so
nan desu kedo, suu fuutekeba,
tabako no kemuri, datta,
fuata kemurinan desu yo?

when calm, like cigarette
when blowing smoking
that cigarette smoke
is blown smoke, right?

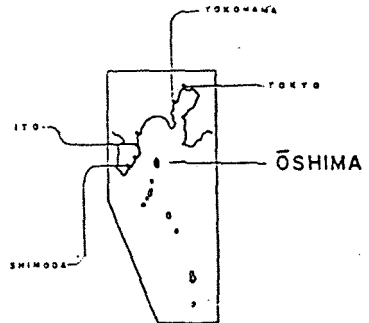
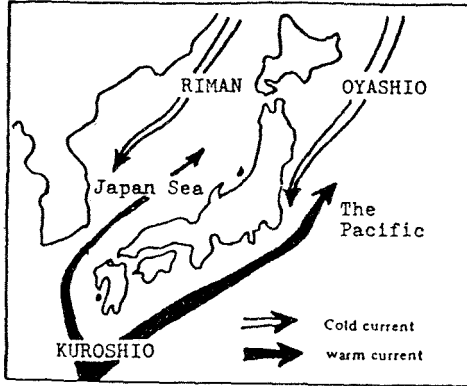
Kaze ga tsuyoi toki, tabako kemuri
tonjau desu yo?

During strong wind, smoke
disappears, right?

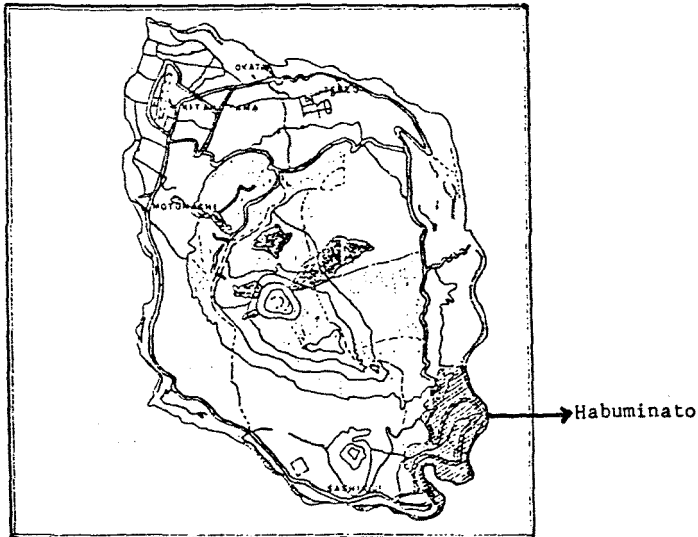
We may not be able to understand now how Masamaru stores, retrieves and processes his knowledge. But we know for sure that there is a man who continues to harmonize with his environment with his simple tools in the midst of his technologically sophisticated milieu.

Map 1. Izu Oshima, Habuminato and its environs

Japan and Its Currents



OSHIMA



Map 2. The Sea according to Masamaru

(Note: Romanization of place names were the only modifications done in this map.)

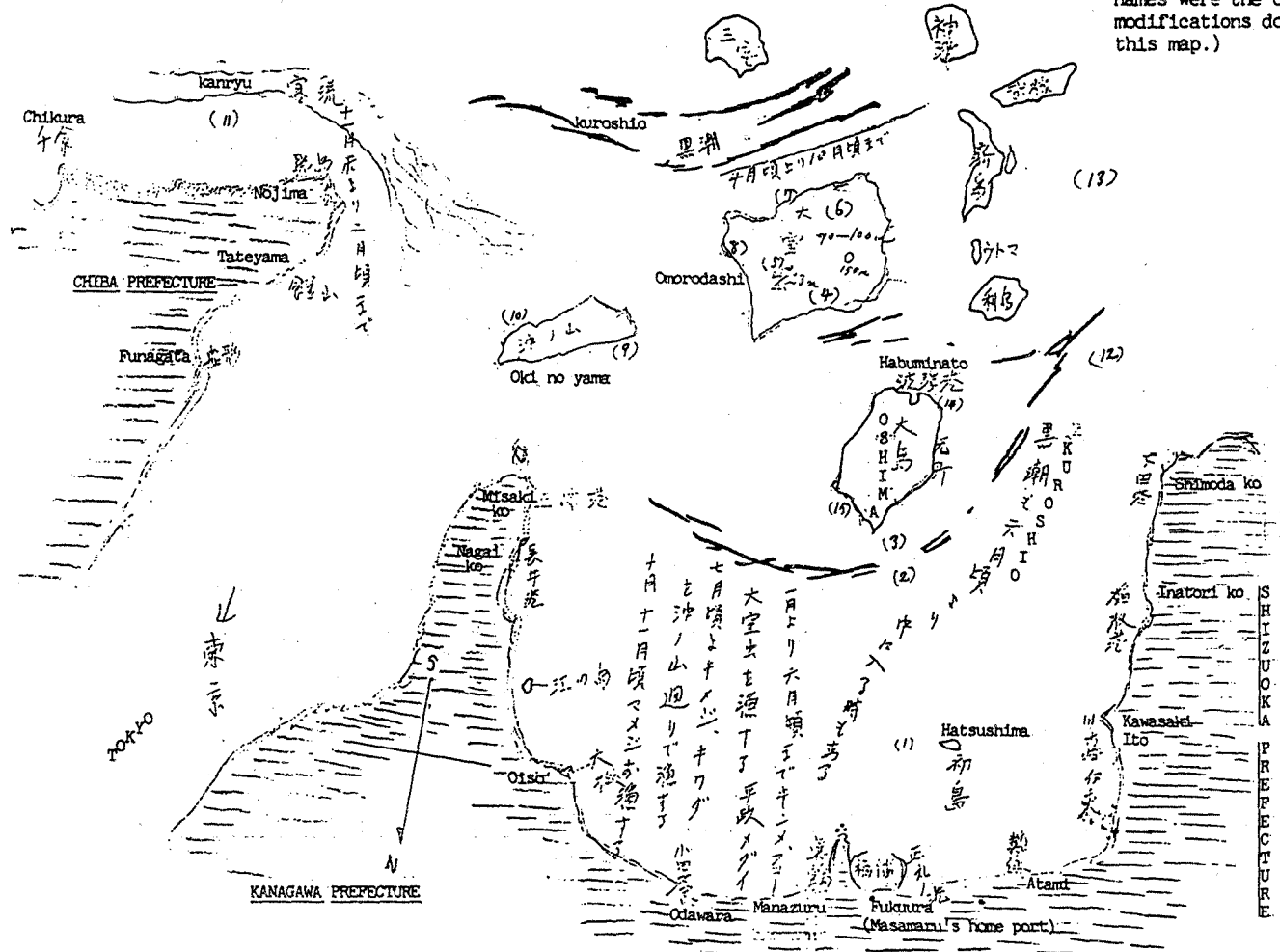


Fig. 1 Tatenawa

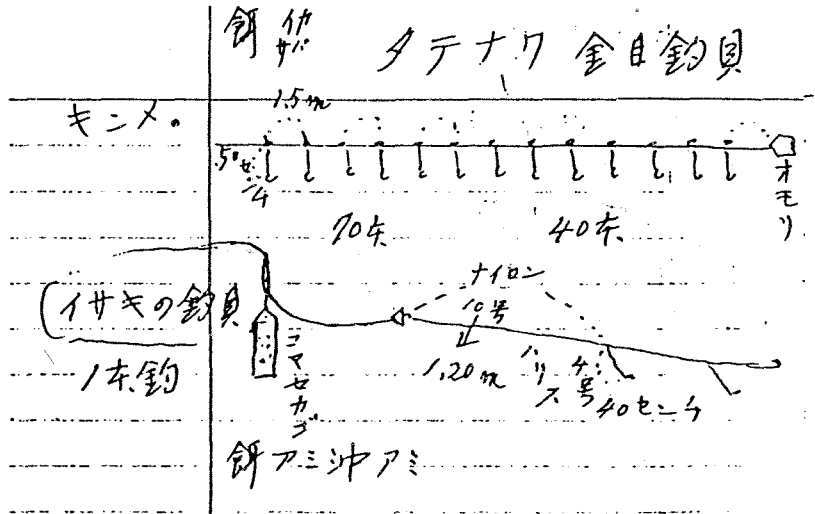


Fig. 2 Tororingu

