





Chapter 5

Village Groping for
Tomorrow

Toshima

Kei Kawai

Kagoshima University Research Center for
the Pacific Islands



The sea at Kodakara seen from Ferry Toshima

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The village of Toshima spreads over the islands called Tokara. The Tokara Islands consist of seven inhabited and five uninhabited islands. All of the Tokara Islands were created by volcanic activities. The names of the inhabited islands are Kuchinoshima, Nakanoshima, Taira, Suwanose, Akuseki, Kodakara and Takara. A distance of 160 kilometers between the northernmost and southernmost tips of the village of Toshima makes it Japan's longest village.

As the region where the cultural spheres of Yamato and Ryukyu overlapped, the Tokara Islands witnessed a flourishing interchange of people and culture since the days of antiquity. In fact, the remains of a dugout called Tachibana from the end of the Jomon Period were discovered on Nakanoshima.



Masked gods called *Boze* s exhibited at Toshima History & Culture Pavilion

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A man there told me, "Toshima is Japan in miniature." I thought he was simply implying that the north is different from the south, or that the people on Kuchinoshima and Nakanoshima are serious and diligent while the people on Kodakara and Takara in the south are magnanimous and easy-going. But there was more to it than that. The islands in the north are towering with precipices that jut out towards the ocean while Kodakara and Takara are gently sloped and are covered with uplifted coral reefs. The man said that those topographical characteristics affected the characteristics of the island inhabitants.

The village of Toshima is filled with mystery. On Akuseki, masked gods called *Bozes* appear in the seventh month of the lunar calendar used in old Japan and drive the evil spirits away from the people. Moreover, it is said that many defeated soldiers of the Heike Clan escaped to this region and settled there around 1200. It is also said that, although historically untenable, Captain Kidd buried his treasure on Takara and that the island in Robert Louis Stevenson's book called *Treasure Island* is actually Takara (meaning "treasure" in Japanese).

This region is extremely interesting biologically. A zoological borderline called Watase's Line runs between Akuseki and Kodakara. Temperate Zone life forms dwell on one side of the borderline while Subtropical Zone life forms dwell on the other. For example, in these islands, *habus* (*Trimeresurus*), which are venomous snakes

indigenous to this region, do not dwell to the north of Watase's Line, whereas *Tokara habus* (*T. tokarensis*) dwell only on Kodakara and Takara.

A myriad of other native plant and animal species inhabits this region. Tamoto lilies (*Lilium nobilissimum*), which give blossom to white petals between late June and early July, are endemic to Kuchinoshima. They are called "tamoto lilies," meaning "sleeve lilies," because defeated soldiers of the Heike Clan brought bulbs, hidden in their sleeves to the island. The

tamoto lilies are now on the verge of extinction because they have been excessively picked since the late 1920s.

There are Tokara horses, which are a native species of small horses that have never had contact with horses of the Occident. They have been designated as protected animals of Kagoshima Prefecture. And there are Ryukyu robins (*Erithacus komadori*), which are designated as protected animals of the nation. They inhabit the Tokara Islands and the other islands of the Nansei Island archipelago.

"Steamship is our roads."

Having no airport facilities, the village of Toshima is completely dependent on sea vessels. The village, which consists of

twelve islands, has almost no roads. So Mr. Fumizono, who made great exertions to put a village steamship into operation, proclaimed "Steamship is our roads." The *Toshima Maru*, which is the village-operated liner that the villagers had wished for, finally went into service in 1933.

Nowadays, a doctor comes to the islands by ship once a month. Food and mail are transported by ship. There are almost no stores in Toshima, so for shopping, the villagers go to the city by ship. All of the villagers unload the cargo from the ship that comes three times a week so the islands become very active during the unloading time.

A new large-size ferry, also called *Toshima*, was put into service in 2000. The old ship could not be used during unfavorable weather conditions, which occurred often. But the large-size ferry can handle almost any weather condition. The



Monument on Nakanoshima commemorating the opening of a new sea route © Kei Kawai

new *Ferry Toshima* sways very little and affords a pleasant ride, even in slight turbulence. I could feel the great reliance and pride in the new ferry when a man there told me, "Now we can still get around, even when the other ship is out of action."

In the past, ships had to moor in the offing because the harbors of the islands weren't equipped to accommodate them. A barge from the harbor had to go out to meet

the ship and come alongside it. The cargo and passengers were then transferred into the barge and hauled to the harbor. It wasn't until ten years ago that the harbor on Kodakara was able to accommodate ships. Gaja Island, which used to be inhabited, was abandoned because it ran out of young people to transfer cargo from the ship to the barge. Equipped harbors and stable service by the ships are necessary to support the villagers' livelihoods.

Industries

Farming and ranching are the main industries of Toshima but only twenty percent of the villagers are engaged in them. Many villagers work in the marine products industry or at the construction sites of public works projects but most of them have more than one job. For example, a person who runs an inn might also work in the fishing industry, or a farmer might also work at a power company. A fisherman explained, "It's safer to hold different kinds of jobs."

The apparent reasons are that the income from only one job is not enough and that there are few year-round jobs. The villagers used to be self-sufficient. In cattle breeding, beef cows, which are black-hair cattle, are put out to pasture. At auction time, calves are dispatched by ship. The lady who runs the inn where I stayed said, "Buyers mercilessly haggle down the

prices of the calves."

She explained that it is too expensive to return the calves to Toshima so the sellers apparently end up selling the calves at unreasonably low prices. But a long time ago, commission merchants used to come to the islands and purchase the calves at ridiculously low prices to make enormous profits for themselves. In those days, having no understanding of market pricing, the villagers had no choice but to agree to the unfair terms set by the commission merchants. Another villager added, "So the situation now is better than before."

The villagers have been engaged in putting Tokara goats out to pasture recently. As you walk in the village, a Tokara goat often suddenly appears in front of you from behind a bush or something and gives you a start. In farming, the villagers are also putting energy into the cultivation of loquats, *toranoos* and other such crops. However, a lack of space for ranching and an aging population have become problems.

Living on the Ocean

The islands of the village are situated in line with the flow of the Japan (Kuroshio) Current, where the ocean contains a wealth of natural resources. Single-hook fishing for Japanese snapper, flame snapper, splendid alfonsino, and other fancy fish that live near the seabed occurs all year round in Toshima. People also troll the waters for bonito, Spanish mackerel and dorado. These fish are mainly consumed in the village.

Flying fish migrate to the village from May through June so fishermen fish for them by gill net and preserve most of them by drying. Skin diving for spiny lobsters, cuttlefish and green snails is also conducted in the coastal areas. The end of the year is the time when the village is swamped with orders for spiny lobsters. Even without advertising the spiny lobsters, orders for them come in from all over the place as a result of the high acclaim they receive by word of mouth. But these fishing industries have many problems.

One problem is that less than 10% of the population is engaged in the marine products industry. Still worse, the number of younger participants in the fishing industry is steadily diminishing as the population drains so the fishing industries are conducted on a very small scale. Although scores of flying fish migrate to the village in spring, it is not profitable to fish for them on a small scale, so the flying

fish cannot be fished for when not enough people are available.

Another problem is that the villagers of Toshima have almost nothing to put up for collateral, so they don't qualify for financing from any bank. It is difficult for them to get bigger fishing vessels and increase the scale of their fishing industries. Another problem is that they cannot place really fresh fish on the market of the mainland islands because of the long transportation time. And to market the fish, freight charges must also be paid.

Other major negative factors are the rampant typhoons that blow through the Tokara Islands in summer and the monsoons that disrupt weather conditions in winter. Another problem is, according to some villagers, the alarming decrease in the fish population brought on by deteriorating water quality caused by construction on the coastal areas of the islands. Still worse, it is believed that other environmental problems are also severely affecting the volume of natural resources.

On the other hand, according to some villagers, fish are so bountiful in this region that numerous fishing vessels from other regions continually come here and raise havoc. The village fishing industries are conducted on a very small scale. So even though the area is good for fishing, the village fishing boats are too small to handle unfavorable weather conditions that the large-size vessels from other prefectures can handle.

To further develop the marine products

industry of the village, a fisherman who conducts local single-hook fishing points out that emphasis must be placed in three areas. The first is acquiring large-size fishing vessels through investment. The second is knowledge about the fishing industries. And the third is knowledge about the fish that utilize the features of the area.

With assistance from the village office, the fisherman is now setting up a large-scale refueling facility on the harbor. He also operates a 5-ton fishing vessel, which he acquired through his own investment. This 5-ton vessel is operable even in unfavorable weather so now he can go out on twice the number of days as he could when he used a 1-ton vessel.

Now that the large-size *Ferry Toshima* has been put into service last year, he can dispatch fish to the market on a regular schedule. The ferry has eliminated the problem of many canceled plies (runs). With the new ferry, fish are dispatched immediately after they are caught and are marketed in good fresh condition. He says that he can immediately dispatch even a small catch. This steady supply of fresh fish to the market is a merit that offsets the freightage.

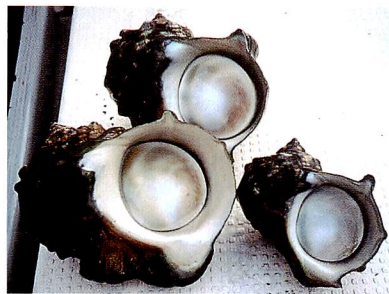
Immediately after a typhoon has passed is the best time for him to hustle. This is because the fishing vessels from other regions evacuate the area when a typhoon is about to strike and it takes them a while to get back after the typhoon passes. But having the new large-size vessel and a geographical advantage, he

can resume operations as soon as the weather starts improving.

This strategy also gives him a head start at dispatching his catch to the market. He can also charge a high price for the catch because the supply of fish is low at times of unfavorable weather. He says that the large-size fishing vessel allows him to market fresh fish even under slightly unfavorable weather conditions and that his catches have been winning higher appraisal than before. Needless to say, the large-size *Ferry Toshima*, which stoutly stands up to foul weather, also contributes to his achievements.

With such things in consideration, the following must be established to further develop the marine products industry:

- 1) Measures for natural resources
 - 2) Maintained anchoring sites and refueling facilities
 - 3) Increasing the number of younger participants
 - 4) Measures for funding
 - 5) Stable means of transportation
- Numerous fishermen point out that



Green snails caught by skin diving © Kei Kawai

the volume of natural resources has considerably decreased. Fishing restrictions on a few species are conducted during closed seasons for fishing. But what is really necessary is for a study to be conducted into the volume of natural resources and for more efforts to be made in reforming the present attitude of "catching fish" to "fostering fish."

It is necessary to teach things such as proper fishing methods to the fishermen. And although most of the islands are equipped with harbors, it is also necessary to add adequate refueling facilities. It is important to consider that if those items are not implemented systematically, the environment will be destroyed and the volume of natural resources in the coastal area will diminish.

In the face of a population drain, finding younger participants is a major problem but I think that the villagers might solve that problem by conveying the image they hold of the future to returnees and newcomers to the islands. Toshima is conducting financing for the development of its fishing industries and the financing is expected to

become much more substantial. Another positive turn is that the large-size *Ferry Toshima*, which is of vital importance, is expected to provide even more stable service.

Many problems are pointed out for the marine products industry on the remote islands but on the other hand, the islanders are wasting no time in becoming modernized. They are taking increasing advantage of information technology. In fact, lately, fishing vessels have also been communicating with each other not only by radio, but also by mobile phones.

Before, messages had been conveyed to fishing vessels entirely by radio. But now, mobile phones are used for verbal dialog and email with vessels within a twenty-mile range from the island. Their informational exchange includes topics such as the location of good and bad fishing areas. And with mobile phones, fishing vessels can also easily and instantly obtain large quantities of information such as the latest weather charts, so fishing plans have become easier to map out. Information technology has indeed permeated every nook and cranny of Japan.

Salt

The natural salt industry is one of Toshima's important industries. Salt from Toshima is marketed under the brand name of *Takara no Shio*. Shipped to Osaka and other places, it is one of Toshima's few

nationally famous products. In Toshima, salt is produced on Takara and Kodakara. On Takara, natural salt production is now a small-scale industry that engages three people.

In the past also, production of natural salt had been conducted on Takara but the industry declined and was temporarily sus-

pended. It went back into operation four years ago after a monopoly on salt had been lifted.

The drying of the salt is now done either by natural sunlight and wind or by heating in pots, but they say that the naturally dried salt has a mellower taste. Toshima's natural salt industry made rapid growth because it went back into operation at a time when a boom for natural foods had occurred and Toshima jumped on that bandwagon.

Natural salt production is perfectly suited to the region because the islands are surrounded with an abundance of saltwater and the raw material is there for the taking. And unlike produce that loses freshness with time, salt does not deteriorate in quality no matter how long it takes to transport to its place of consumption.

But Toshima's salt industry has been hit with a double punch. Competition from other areas has rapidly increased and the natural salt boom in Japan is on the wane. A peculiar phenomenon in Japanese society is that fads occur with enormous momentum but suddenly come to an end when the next fad begins. So now, with the increased supply and decreased demand, it has become difficult to expand business operations.

Two tons were produced on Takara in



Takara no Shio salt

© Kei Kawai

the first year after coming back into operation but that was not enough to break even. Toshima's salt industry then expanded to allow a twelve-ton yearly production, but yearly production is now held down to five tons because of the present oversupply. To accomplish further development, the people in this industry must open a new market of consumers.

But being on a remote island far from the place of consumption, and being a small-scale industry, they are not in a position to sell their product by dispatching sales personnel to directly meet with the dealers and consumers. So the people in the industry are now trying to expand their market by advertising on the Internet and sending samples to various places. They are steadily continuing production and anticipating a recurrence of the boom.

Future Prospects

The Tokara Islands have an exquisite natural environment. And being created by volcanic activity, all of the islands have

numerous hot springs. Japanese tend to visit places where there is mystique, lush nature, natural spas and delicious local cuisine. The Toshima administration is thinking of making those attributes into resources for tourism but the villagers don't seem to pay much heed to the idea. A gap in thinking is in the making.

A great change in the thinking of the villagers will probably be necessary for them to appreciate the numerous latent possibilities in tourism as a future industry. But without giving the views of the villagers due respect, a major problem will occur. Generally, plans to develop tourism in the countryside mainly reflect urban attitudes and values. The sense of values held by villagers greatly differs from that of urbanites and "island practice" accordingly greatly differs from "city practice."

There will be no hope of making Toshima a site for tourism unless the villagers clarify the ideal future they want for the islands and discuss it with the administration so that a common understanding can be reached.

The many problems in Toshima include aging, depopulation, declining birthrate, garbage and confusion about what the main industry should be. As a depopulation countermeasure to enliven the islands, the village is inviting city children to sojourn on the islands to study the mountains and seas. The children enjoy the life on the islands, but this also involves many problems.

The decreasing number of villagers



Open-air bath on Akuseki

who can act as substitute parents for the city children is a big problem. The villagers are now examining the possibilities of calling in such substitute parents from the outside. In any case, I think that the key to solving the depopulation, aging and other population problems will be the way the returnees, newcomers and other outsiders are handled. Also, the upkeep of steady service by the ships will play a vital role in raising the standard of living on the islands.



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Roads make up an important transportation network in any region of land on the globe. People come and go, up and down an assortment of roads from alleys and avenues to streets and superhighways. Likewise, valuing the "steamship is our roads" concept, Toshima must not depend only on the *Ferry Toshima*, but must have more sea vessels of every description. For successful future development, Toshima must have a sense of solidarity as a community in

which all members share the same fate.

I think that the future possibilities will increase if exchange between the islands is deepened in many ways such as plies (runs) by small vessels. Daily life on the islands unfolds at a slower pace than in urban areas so a very apt organizer who can skillfully harmonize "island practice" with "city practice" is absolutely necessary. The organizer will need a comprehensive viewpoint that is fixed on the future.