Life and Folklore of a Fishing Village in Tsugaru Peninsular
—Imatsu, Tairadate Village, Higashi-tsugaru County, Aomori Prefecture—

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Tairadate Village, fronting on Mutsu Bay, extends north and south on the east coast of the Tsugaru Peninsular. As the western part of the village is mountainous land mostly covered with beech and Tsugaru-hiba forests, both residential and agricultural zones are small in this village. Since about 80% of the large forests are nationally owned, forestry cannot be a principal industry. Furthermore, the cold climate of this region, represented by the Yamase (a cold, salt wind blowing from over the sea) in summer, and snowfall in winter, has impaired the development of agricultural foundations. Therefore, fishery in the bay has remained the principal industry of the village.

The large share of life occupied by “fishery”, and the harsh climate, have greatly restricted living conditions in this area. Until the middle of the Shōwa Period (1955–1965), fishermen (mainly young men) went out as “employees” to Hokkaido for the herring fishing, later returning to the village. After the middle of the Shōwa Period, in the period of rapid economic growth, the number of “dekasagi” (people working away from home) increased, and some left the village with their whole family. The former complicated familial relationships (especially the historical relationship between the head family and branch families) in the village, and the latter caused a decrease in the number of households and a drop in population. The familial and social bases supporting life and folk customs have drastically changed during the course of history. Projects to improve the fishing industry were undertaken. In the process, customs related to fishery and fishing organization have largely changed, penetrated into the lives of the people, and have come to be recognized and committed to memory by them, as described in the text.

On the other hand, looking at aspects of faith and communal events in the village, customs seen throughout the Tsugaru Region are also seen here; for example, Kamisama-asobase involving Itako and Kamisama, Jizo-bon, Hyakuman-ben, Kamisama-kake (visit to seven shrines), etc.

In order to grasp the regional characteristics of everyday life and folk customs, the author focused on the Imatsu community in Tairadate Village, and carried out investigations, aiming to describe the life-style woven by the changes in the main industry, the changes in customs in conjunction with living conditions, and customs distributed over a wide area. It is my pleasure to report the results in this paper. However, I have to comment that I was forced to devote most pages to the presentation of basic data, and that the description of the regional study is limited to a simple sketch.