Deep-sea Long-lining Fishermen’s Fishing Ground Recognition and the Significance of Folk Models

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This paper attempts to 1) clarify characteristics of fishermen’s folk knowledge by looking at how fishermen locate fishing grounds for deep-sea fishing, and 2) argue for the positive significance of folk models in the study of folklore, based on the results of 1).

Studies of folkways within the fishing industry have revealed a variety of folk knowledge and skills possessed by fishermen. In particular, there has been considerable research into yamaate (targets used to locate one’s position and course on the sea) for recognizing fishing grounds. In the future, we need to shed light on the full picture of how fishermen search for fishing grounds, including cases where they have nothing to guide them at sea (i.e., yamanashi-no guideposts). In this paper, I examine a tilefish trawler based in Tamaeura, Yamaguchi Prefecture, which operated in the East China Sea, as an example of how fishermen search for fishing grounds when they have no guideposts.

In this paper, I made active use of narrative recording, working through a folklore lexicon, and in order to compensate for the shortcomings of this method, I compared the materials I gathered that way with information on actual fishing operations gleaned from "Gyoro Nisshi (Fishing Diary)". Using this information, I examined the changes in the recognition and use of fishing grounds due to the introduction of modern instrumentation by identifying commonalities and differences between perception and action as well as by comparing how fishing grounds were located both before and after modern instruments were introduced.

A brief summary of my results is as follows: 1) fishing grounds are recognized without guideposts in a variety of ways, including observing the relationship between the fishing grounds and the quality of the sea floor, mixed catches, and so forth; 2) present-day operations are based on this recognition but do not necessarily follow it and instead are structured in a more flexible manner; 3) the ability to recognize fishing grounds is based on individual fishermen’s experiences; and 4) the introduction of modern instrumentation has led to increasing concealment of the knowledge of fishing grounds and at the same time has changed the quality of that knowledge, which has contributed to the achievement stable hauls of fish.

Nevertheless, folk knowledge of fishing grounds is not necessarily a reflection of the ecol-
ogy of fish, and there is a gap between folk knowledge and science. Lastly, in light of the existence of this gap, I argue that folklore studies should interpret folk knowledge in terms of a folk model and must explain the effectiveness of that model.