Fishing Operations and Villages in the Middle Reaches of the Lower Tone River during the Shotoku and Kyoho Periods (1711–1736)

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This paper is an examination of a dispute over fishing grounds that occurred in the middle reaches of the Lower Tone River during the Shotoku (1711–1716) and Kyoho (1716–1736) periods for the purpose of shedding light on one aspect of the structure of fishing society in the Toso region. During 1714 and 1715, a dispute arose between the three villages of Sawara, Shinohara and Tsunomiya in Katori-gun, Shimousa Province and collectors of a river transportation tax who received tax payments for compensation for fishing grounds upstream from the three villages. By claiming that the fishing grounds by their villages were not part of the river but were a sea inlet, the three villages succeeded in their bid to avoid having to pay this river transportation tax, though the scope of their fishing grounds was reduced as a result. In this dispute, the primary concern of the river transportation tax collectors was to maintain a channel in the lower reaches of the river for fresh water fish to swim upstream, and to this end they stressed that any new fishing operation that impeded this should be stopped. However, this was not recognized in the decision handed down by the Bakufu authorities as priority was given to fishing using dragnets in the river beside the three villages. In the middle reaches of the Lower Tone River fishing using dragnets in the fishing grounds of the villages was not recognized as a fishing operation that impeded the running of fresh water fish and from that time on permission to operate freely was granted in accordance with the wishes of the villages along the lower reaches of the river. Then, later in Kyoho period, farmers in the river basin increased their activities centered on attempts to set new net taxes on dragnets in the river alongside other villages as a substitute for paying even higher river transportation taxes. The three villages paid double the amount of net taxes and sea taxes, and stressing that they had a history extending back many centuries of using the fishing grounds alongside the villages they ended up having to maintain exclusive possession of their own villages' fishing grounds. In this process, they emphasized the differences they had with the farmers who were attempting to set a new net tax, and the three villages claimed that payment of the net tax was nothing more than compensation for use of the dragnet tax and that rather it was the payment of sea taxes that enabled not only fishing operations but also the development of sand banks and fertilizer extraction in the area around the villages' fishing grounds. In this way, the three villages secured the fishing grounds, although the effect of the dispute in Shotoku period was that three villages were not able to intervene in the establishment of new net taxes for dragnets by villages further down the river, with the result that from the Kyoho period onwards these villages had to cope with poor catches.