The Transfer of Land along the Kujukuri Coast Tow Net Fishing Zone: a Study of the Land Documents of the Iitaka Family

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This paper sheds light on mortgage finance along the Kujukuri coast where tow net fishing was developed beginning in the middle of the Early Modern Period and the situation and nature of land transfer that accompanied this mortgage finance. This study will help us understand the significance of land ownership for the villagers whose main occupation was fishing and mortgage finance with respect to the interaction of villagers. The historical materials used in this study consist of three volumes of land records dating from 1835 through to the early Meiji period called Denpata-okuincho, that have been left behind by the Iitaka family from Ao village situated in the middle of the Kujukuri coast who operated a fishing business. The following facts have come to light as a result of a study of these land records. First, one notable feature of mortgaged land is that most mortgaged land consisted of poor quality rice fields and that each entry is accompanied by details of the mortgaged land area. Further, there is not necessarily a correlation between the value of the loan and the size and grade of the land. Another aspect deserving attention is that there were extremely few cases where the loan was unable to be repaid resulting in a change in land ownership. We may conjecture from an examination of the return of mortgaged land that the majority of mortgaged land was returned to those who took out mortgages on their land. A look at the regional distribution of mortgages and repayments reveals that they centered around Ao village and extended to surrounding settlements. An examination of the situation within Ao village shows that many mortgages were held by people from the so-called Naya settlements. Names of both the mortgagee and mortgagee are listed in 30% of cases, and these include fishing hands and tenant farmers belonging to the Iitaka family, and people living in Naya settlements. Repayment was possible because if there was a huge catch, people across the whole region became prosperous so that huge sums of money fell into the hands of even fishing hands and tenant farmers. In such circumstances, even though they had temporarily mortgaged a small area of land, it was possible to redeem this mortgaged land if there was a good catch, a custom that existed in Kujukuri as late as the middle of the eighteenth century. These aspects are important when reconsidering the existing portrayal of tenant farmers and fishing hands.