Traditional Activities and the “Commons” in an Ecotone Lagoon: The Ecosystem and Use of Fauna in and Around the Hachiro Lagoon from the Early Modern Period through to the Modern Period

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Recently, there has been a reappraisal of the ecological functions of waterside ecotones. For humans, the significance of waterside space with a high level of biodiversity has been as a “place with an abundance of fauna”. The object of this research is to examine traditional work activities of people and the use of natural resources in this type of waterside ecotone and the impact that these have on the ecosystem. In this course of this examination we will obtain a clear picture of a “waterside ecosystem that includes human beings”.

The findings outlined in this paper are based on fieldwork carried out around Hachiro Lagoon, the largest lagoon in Japan. It contains an analysis of the abundant forms of fauna such as aquatic plants, fish and birds created by the lagoon and the diverse ways in which in habitants of the shores of the lagoon have used such fauna since the Early Modern period. At least until the Meiji period, village communities placed strict controls on important fauna that belonged to the “commons”. We also find that there was an awareness of the continuous and fair use and management of these resources. Furthermore, as a waterside ecotone, an ecosystem developed around the lagoon that incorporated the work activities of humans, whereby the diverse use of the lagoon by humans developed a circular system. An examination of the consolidation of used space and its trajectory since the beginning of the Modern period reveals the destruction of the “commons” and the appearance of problems related to the destruction of the reed habitat and the excessive taking of resources.

If a waterside ecotone such as a lagoon is “secondary nature” maintained through a balance with human activity, the future preservation of the lagoon will require the maintenance of an appropriate relationship with humans that does not reject human assistance. A reexamination of folk cultures concerning the use of lagoons that have been accumulated all over the country will provide a basis on which to determine the extent of human involvement and the “conservation and wise use” of the lagoon in the future.