Reexamining the History of Eri in Lake Biwa Based on the Early Modern and Modern Historical Materials

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Eri is a stationary fishing method with traps set in the shallow waters of lakes and rivers. The large-scale and sophisticated Eri that stretches for one kilometer is considered as fishing culture seen only in Lake Biwa. This research reexamines the conventional explanations about the history of Eri in Lake Biwa by analyzing the early modern and modern historical materials, and also analyzes the reasons why Eri has developed at high levels only in Lake Biwa from the viewpoints of topographic and ecological conditions.

It is assumed that the primitive Eri was a simple device set in a reed bed, but the lake Eri that extended to the lake had been in existence in the Middle Ages. As a result of the analysis of early modern paintings and written materials, it was found that while the lake Eri before the 17th century had a bending structure that connects only the Tsubo part, Eri was transformed in the second half of the 18th century to the combination of a bamboo mat that stretches straight from the shores and a large umbrella which is close to the current form. It is clear that Eri in Lake Biwa was changed significantly in the second half of the Edo period. It was also found that there were two directions in the development of the fish catching device inside the umbrella of Eri: the complexity of Naguchi (fish luring system) and enlargement of Tsubo (fish catching part) with five stages and four stages respectively, and in the Tenpo period, the technology had reached the stage of large-scale Eri called “Kaeshi” Eri. It is assumed that the technology of “Kaeshi” in the Tenpo period may have been established by the artificial environmental changes: the drawdown of Lake Biwa.

The development of Eri in Lake Biwa, particularly in South Lake can be attributed to the ecological conditions of endemic species in the Lake Biwa water system which is the target of fishing as well as the topographic conditions of the lake bed. It became clear that the spawning migration to South Lake of Carassius auratus grandoculis in particular is deeply involved in the positioning of Konohama Village, Yasu county as a “parent village of Eri.”

Key words: Paddy field, Lake Biwa, Eri, early modern and modern periods, iconography