Effects of High Economic Growth on Upriver and Downriver Residents: An Example of the Ohta River

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In this article, the Ohta River in Hiroshima Prefecture is considered as an example. The purpose of this article is to verify the effects of high economic growth through a comparison of both upriver and downriver and the correlation between them. By focusing on upriver and downriver, which are deeply connected through the medium of water, I attempted to approach the actual situation of high economic growth that brought a drastic change never before experienced.

Hiroshima Prefecture through which the Ohta River runs started as an economically less advanced prefecture because of the dismantlement of the military industry after the war and the effects of war damage. In the high-economic-growth period, however, the economy of Hiroshima achieved above the national average and Hiroshima was included amongst the most economically advanced prefectures. In these circumstances, the secondary and the tertiary industries grew rapidly, and the production, income, and population of the downriver cities generally increased, while primary industry stagnated; on the other hand, production and income of the upriver mountain villages fell into sluggish growth, and the population rapidly decreased. This situation was partially promoted by the then government’s and prefecture’s policies in addition to the economic factor, and both factors had considerable relevance to each other.

The main industries in the upriver towns and villages such as Togouchi and Tsutsuga were agriculture and forestry. People lived nearly self-sufficiently, transporting lumber and farm surpluses by the water of the Ohta River and selling them for profit, and buying daily necessities with the money. This continuous relationship drastically changed after the fully integrated development of electrical power was completed in the Ohta River in the high-economic-growth period and forest management toward a commercial forest was strongly promoted under the guidance of the government. Nature now came under the economy. Ironically, the residents of the upriver mountain villages who lost products that had economic value had to sustain their life by going to the downriver cities and selling their labor. As a result, a serious depopulation occurred.

It is considered that the concept of upriver and downriver is based on not only geography but also the additional social factor of their positioning in the period of high economic growth. The loss of something like the upriver communities means the loss of the diversity of the Japanese, and
furthermore, that of mankind. Their recovery is proposed as a common issue.

Key words: high economic growth, upriver and downriver, urban growth, decline of the mountain village, development of electrical power