A Review of Japan’s Herring Cultural History

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Outline

• Ainu and Herring
• Significance of Herring in Japanese History
• Current Restoration Efforts
Ainumosir
“the quiet land inhabited by humans”

http://ramat.ram.ne.jp/ainu/outline/area.htm
Herring in Ainumosir Archaeology

Major Jomon and Epi-Jomon Sites (5500BP~700 AD) (Nishimoto 1984)

Major Okhotsk, Satsumon, Epi-Satsumon (Ainu) Sites (700AD~) (Nishimoto 1985)
Ainu and Herring
- Ethnology-

Mashiho Chiri (Life of Sakhalin Ainu, 1973)
Ainu Geographic Names
• Herokikaru’ushi = Heroki-kar-ush-i
  heroki = herring, kar = to catch, ush = always, i = place
Japanese (Wajin) and Herring (nishin)

- 鰤 = “fish-not”
  - Herring used for taxation in lieu of putative rice yield
- 二親 = “two parents”
  - Herring substituted for two parents; agriculture and machine
- 二身 = “two bodies”
  - Dried herring
- 鰭 = “fish-to select”
  - = “fish-to paste”?
- 鰭 = “fish-east”
(Japanese) Herring History

1548  The word 鮭 appears in a historical document
1604  The establishment of the Matsumae feudal domain
1716-1735  Herring fishing expanded to Western Ezochi
1739  Dried herring and herring roe exported throughout Japan
1772-  Herring fisheries expanded to Eastern Ezochi
1772-  Mass-production started with newly innovated nets
1793  Contract system thrives, and fishing areas expanded throughout Hokkaido and Sakhalin
1876  Herring fishery opened to market
1897  Highest herring harvest record
1958  Herring fisheries collapsed
Exploitation of Ainu and Herring for Japan’s Modernization

- Herring meal fertilizer for the agricultural development of western Japan
  - Exploitation of Ainu as forced, cheap labor
  - Abundance of herring
Collapse of Coastal Herring Fishery

- Overfishing
- Habitat Destruction
- Oceanic Environmental Changes
  - Regime shift
- Problems in the food web?
Industrialization and Modernization of Hokkaido Herring Fishery
Akkeshi Maritime Museum
Kamuyčep to Phantom Fish

Fluctuation of herring catch in Northern Hokkaido (Okhotsk and Japan Seas)

Hokkaido Prefectural Wakkanai Fishery Experiment Station, AFFRC 2006
Herring Restoration Projects
- “Fishery That Generates” -

Hokkaido Prefectural Fisheries Experiment Station
(http://www.fishexp.pref.hokkaido.jp/shidousyo/fishery/jinkou/j_nisin/j_nisin.htm)
“Fish-Breeding Forests” and Herring’s Forest Restoration Project

(Source: Mashike Fishery Cooperative Association)
Conclusion

• Archaeological and etymological records suggest that herring fishing was an integral part of cultural history in Hokkaido, esp. coastal areas.

• Herring population declined as large-scale herring fishery developed in the 19th to early 20th centuries.

• Exploitation of the Herring and Ainu for modernization and industrialization of Japan

• Lack of ethnographic records

• Community-Based Restoration Project
  – LEK and scientific knowledge
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References


