

Fishery co-operatives-1

A saga of success

This is the first in a series on the pioneer of Japan's fishery co-operative movement

We in Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, can not talk about the fishery co-operative movement on our island without recalling the outstanding contributions of Takatoshi Ando. During his long career, Ando worked in every one of the major fishery federations in Hokkaido—Dogyoren, Shingyoren and Shidorenas well as in the national federation, Zengyoren. From the time he began working in the Hokkaido prefectural government's Fishery Co-operative Association (FCA) Section in 1993 until he retired from his post as President of the national Zengyoren in 1971, he was wholeheartedly devoted to FCAs and their development. The Hokkaido FCAs have thrived on the firm foundations established by the work Ando did during the infancy period of the movement.

Takatoshi Ando was born in 1894, the second son in a family that raised silkworms in Fukushima prefecture. After primary school, he began work as an apprentice photographer in his home town, but he soon passed the public servant exam and became a police officer.

As there was not much for a policeman to do in rural areas then, he had plenty of time to study. After passing the necessary exams, he was promoted several times. He then passed an exam administered by the central government, one so difficult that most university graduates could not get past it. In 1925, on the basis of passing that exam, he was appointed by the Hokkaido prefectural government to investigate unlawful fishing operations.

Soon after joining his new job, he began visiting fishing villages throughout Hokkaido. Since there were few railroads running through Hokkaido then, he often

had to travel by boat or horse-drawn carriage and, occasionally, on foot through snowstorms.

He was appalled by the pitiful conditions in which the fishermen lived. He became convinced that the only way to improve the standard of living in the fishing villages was by establishing co-operatives, and he soon decided to work for the well-being and prosperity of those in the fishing communities.

The fishing villages of Hokkaido are now thriving communities, thanks to Ando's many accomplishments. Towards the end of his career, he narrated many of his experiences in his autobiography. I was motivated to translate that work so that members of foreign co-operatives could learn about, and benefit from, Ando's experiences.

Many visitors from Asian and African countries have recently been coming to Hokkaido to study our FCAs. When I explain how the FCAs developed, my audiences often show great interest in the infancy period of the FCAs and they are particularly impressed by the contributions of Ando. Though I have often spoken of Ando and his great achievements, I thought it would be better if these stories were told in Ando's own words.

Therefore, I have selected the most relevant and important episodes from Ando's autobiography, and have narrated them here for the benefit of those in fishing co-operatives throughout the world. I understand that the historical, economic and social conditions of your countries may differ greatly from those of Japan, but I am sure that we all share the same goals—those of economic independence and self-reliance. If you find something of

help in the stories of our struggles and successes, I will be very pleased.

The FCAs, at both the local and prefectural levels, have faced many difficulties and overcome many obstacles. I am sure that we could not have succeeded if we did not keep in mind the fundamental philosophy that Ando instilled in us over the years. He always reminded us that every fisherman must be strong in the face of any difficulties that may arise, and should realize that he must help himself; all fishermen must unite and participate in the operation of the FCAs; and if the fishermen consolidate their finances and product distribution channels through the FCAs, they will then be able to support other people and organizations which need assistance. I hope that you come to realize the importance of these tenets, and that your fishing communities become as successful as those in Hokkaido.

I would like to add that Ando did not actually sit down and write his autobiography; he narrated his memories to his secretary, who simply copied down his stories verbatim. Since he repeats himself on many occasions and sometimes does not make himself clear enough, I have taken the liberty of adding certain words, phrases and sentences, while deleting some others. Be that as it may, I have tried to remain as true as possible to the original.

I have also included a preface and opening and closing chapters which I myself wrote. These should clarify many points Ando may not have referred to and which are essential for a complete understanding of the current situation of FCAs.

I would like to thank James Colyn, my long-time friend, for his great help in correcting errors in grammar and syntax. He rewrote virtually all of the copy to make it as easily understandable as possible. I can assure you that this was particularly difficult, considering how we tried to remain true to the original. We both hope you will find our work satisfactory.

Historical Background of FCAs

The motivations behind the establishment of Japan's fishery co-operatives are unique to the Fishery Co-operative

Associations (FCAs) in Japan—such motivations played no part in the establishment of either agricultural or consumer co-operatives. The FCAs' unique characteristics are largely due to the historical background of Japan's fishing industry and the way in which the industry grew.

Modern co-operatives in Japan developed with the spread of capitalism. During the first half of the 19th century, farmers, labourers and others who had little economic power began to establish co-operatives so that they might overcome the various difficulties brought about by the growth of capitalism.

In Japan, capitalism did not take root until 1868, after the Meiji Restoration. For the previous 250 years, the shoguns had kept Japan isolated and its economy feudalistic. Various customs and habits developed steadily over that long period, and many of these are still evident in the behavioral patterns and way of thinking of the Japanese people.

The hundreds of fishing villages along the coast of Japan had been ruled by about 300 feudal lords. The samurai soldiers worked for these lords, collecting taxes from the farmers and fishermen in the region. The lords and their samurai lived in castle towns, and, once or twice a year, they would go out into the territories to collect taxes. They did not interfere with the management of the fishing grounds. As long as they received the taxes from the fishermen, they were not concerned with who engaged in what kind of fishing or when and where. All such matters were left to the discretion of the chief of the community in question, and, often, these matters were simply decided by the customs and rules of the community.

After the collapse of the shogunate in 1868, the central government tried to strengthen its financial base. One of its first acts was to declare that the sea was the property of the State, and, in this way, it tried to control the fishermen directly. It collected fees and then issued them permits to use the fishing grounds.

This, of course, created problems. A great number of fishermen applied for the permits, with the result that there were too

many fishermen competing for limited stocks of fish. Understandably, many conflicts broke out among the fishermen and among the various communities. Since local administrative systems had not yet been satisfactorily established, the government could not deal with these conflicts properly. In 1886, in order to solve that problem, the government introduced its Fishing Association Regulation, which encouraged fishermen of all communities to organize themselves into associations. These regulations did not contain any reference to fishing rights, but they were the first steps in the movement to allow the fishermen the right to control their fishing grounds according to the rules of their own associations. In this way were sown the seeds of the fishery co-operatives.

In 1901, the Fishing Association Regulation was replaced by the Fishery Law. Under this law, the new concept of 'fishing rights' was introduced. That was a very important landmark in the development of Japan's fishery co-operatives. It was after that that fishermen's associations became established as autonomous organizations with the authority to manage fishing rights.

Legally, the Japanese system is an 'open membership' one—the New Fishery Co-operative Law of 1949 states that anyone who desires to join a local Fishery Association may become a member if he is qualified and meets certain requirements. It should be noted here, however, that most co-operatives are apt to restrict membership to prevent too much of the work force getting engaged in only one field. The binding force resulting from joint ownership of fishing rights by the FCAs is the major reason for FCAs being such strong organizations.

Since the first fishery law was promulgated in 1901, there have been many revisions. These new laws have included provisions regarding marketing, transportation, processing and savings. With these changes, Fishermen's Associations have gradually become multipurpose co-operatives.

In the first few decades of the 1900s, various co-operative ideas from abroad

were introduced into Japan, such as those of the Rochdale Pioneers from England and the Raiffeisen's Co-operative in Germany. The government established the Central Bank for Industrial Co-operatives, and Fishermen's Associations were changed to Fishery Co-operative Associations (FCAs), so that these FCAs could access the financial services of that bank. Equally important, the government also worked to develop infrastructure such as fishing ports, roads and railroads.

In those days, merchants played a large role in the fishing communities. Prior to each fishing season, the merchants supplied the communities with not only fishing gear but also food, clothing and other daily necessities. In order for the fishermen to settle their accounts with the merchants—and partly in return for the services which the merchants provided—the fishermen often sold the majority of their catch to the merchants. The fishermen were thus truly at the mercy of the merchants.

As Hokkaido was still a relatively new and undeveloped region, the fishermen had a low standard of living. Therefore, the leaders of the fishing communities, and Ando in particular, understood that this relationship with the merchants had to be abolished. They realized that the only way to do this was through joint marketing and mutual financing.

Their efforts to achieve those goals, took a long time to bear fruit. Not until the mid-1960s could they claim to have attained any degree of success. But they did succeed, and there are many interesting stories to be told of their pioneering activities. The stories of Ando that follow are among the most informative and helpful. ❧

The Autobiography of Takatoshi Ando was translated, compiled and edited by Naoyuki Tao and James Colyn. Tao is General Manager of Shidoren (the Hakkaido Educational Federation of Fishery Co-operative Associations) and the Director of Hokkaido FCA College in Sapporo, Japan. Colyn works as an editor at ESL Institute in Sapporo