

Fishery co-operatives

Three birds with one stone

This seventh instalment from the pioneer of Japan's co-operative movement talks of negotiating to maintain the fishing rights of the co-operatives

For several years after the war, distribution of rice was often delayed, and the people in the fishing villages often went hungry. Therefore, I devoted my efforts to procuring rice for these fishing villages. Although rice sales were controlled by the central government, I negotiated directly with the Agricultural Organization of Fukushima Prefecture, a rice-growing area.

There was a severe shortage of food, particularly in Hokkaido, where not much rice was grown, but the residents of Hokkaido managed to get by on potatoes, corn, pumpkins and other such food. The fishermen, however, needed rice in order to remain healthy enough to do their work.

I then told the Agricultural Organization how we had exchanged one 90-kg bag of fishmeal for each 60-kg bag of rice, and that I considered that rate unsatisfactory. If we could have dealt with Niigata Prefecture, which had the highest rice production level in Japan, we could have received one-and-a-half bags, or 90 kg, of rice for 90 kg of fishmeal.

I requested that the government allow us to trade officially with Niigata. After much discussion, I promised that we would each give an extra half-bag of rice (30 kg) to the government if it approved such an exchange. The government realized that it would then have more rice to distribute equally throughout the nation, and we received official approval to trade with Niigata.

We called this the Rice-Link-Trade System, and we continued to deal in this system until the government relinquished its control of food distribution in 1949. The fishermen in Hokkaido were thus able to

work harder and increase fishery production; the rice farmers were able to increase their production levels 20 per cent every year by using the fertilizer we supplied; and the government had more rice, which it could distribute to the citizens.

You may know the saying, "Kill two birds with one stone." In this case, I was very pleased to say that we had killed three birds with one stone.

Eventually, we began to trade sardine fishmeal as well, and the peak amount of fishmeal production reached 50,000 bags annually. As the processing of fishmeal required much labour in those days, I sent many fishermen to other areas to make fishmeal during the kelp off-season to ensure that a sufficient amount of fishmeal could be produced.

The manner in which we did all our work was based on the co-operative ideal. I think we succeeded, since the farmers and fishermen came to understand the spirit of co-operatives, and they all worked together for their mutual benefit.

I should add that one of the biggest problems we faced was how to deal with the policy of the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the occupation forces, which ruled Japan under General McArthur, after the Second World War. The GHQ purged not only the military leaders, but also many leaders of industries, for war crimes. Furthermore, the GHQ threatened to dissolve many associations that had been organized by the government.

No exception

The fisheries associations were no exception. The National Federation of Fisheries (Zengyoren) had been dissolved in 1947, and the Hokkaido fisheries

industry organization (previously, Dogyoren) was also targeted for dissolution.

At that time, Demachi was re-elected as President of Dogyoren. As I mentioned before, I did not get along with him very well, but he urged me to accept the post of managing director. I finally accepted his offer on the condition that he would never speak ill of any of the excellent staff members, and that he would consult with me prior to making any decisions about personnel.

He was often misunderstood by others because of his strong personality, but it worked to our advantage in his negotiations with the GHQ. He showed himself to be a tough negotiator, and he was instrumental in retaining the fishing rights of the FCAs. The GHQ had originally tried to establish another organization, apart from the FCAs, to govern fishing rights. We invited a certain colonel of the GHQ, who was in charge of restructuring the FCAs, in order that he might understand the situation in Hokkaido.

Demachi suggested that the FCAs economic functions not be separated from the management of the fishing rights. I then took the colonel on a tour of the Noboribetsu FCA area. I explained that the fishermen had joint ownership of the fishery rights, and that these rights were

exercised democratically, not in a communist fashion. In this way, the FCAs in Japan were unlike co-operatives in other countries.

I also told him that I believed agricultural co-operatives should have control of the land, and that the farmers should be allowed to use the land freely. If the co-operatives did not have these rights, there was a chance that many farms would be taken over by a few rich farmers.

I asked him to consider this matter seriously, and he nodded in agreement, as we parted. A short while later, GHQ decided that the FCAs could retain their fishing rights. 

This is excerpted from the *Autobiography of Takatoshi Ando*, translated by Naoyuki Tao and James Colyn