

Characteristics of Wakame Seaweed Fishing Grounds Use in South Korea

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to clarify spatial and temporal characteristics and cultural background of wakame seaweed fishing ground use forms. The use forms of wakame seaweed fishing grounds are different from each other by society and economic conditions as well as the geographical location of villages. It is used not only as everyday food but also as an offering to the goddess widely in Korea. In addition, natural wakame seaweed yields social and cultural value as high-quality presents, and becomes high goods of economic value.

However, the wakame seaweed fishing ground use custom is put under the pressure of scientific knowledge, and more and more areas disappear by landfill every year without attracting attention. On the other hand, Japan with much wakame seaweed use does not have the fishing ground use custom as Korea.

With its cultural and economic value, the wakame seaweed fishing ground use has continued in various forms for a long time. The reason is that the main incomes of villagers are from agriculture and fishery, and most of wakame seaweed harvest is performed by women divers. Therefore a method to enable sustained use of seaweed fishing grounds may be worked out by getting hints in the fishermen's folk knowledge about wakame seaweed fishing ground use.

The history and use forms of wakame seaweed fishing grounds

Wakame seaweed and Koreans

The seaweed has been used in food, manure, and ceremony food and so on for a long time. And some seaweed is used for cake, cosmetics, and medical care too now.

China is a country which gathers the seaweed the most in quantity in the world. It makes up about 63% of the total volume of the production of the seaweed, and Japan and South Korea follow.

The total volume of the production of the seaweed in South Korea is about 780,000t. Especially cultured seaweed accounts for 97% (750,000t). The kinds of the cultured seaweed produced the most are laver, wakame seaweed, sea tangle, edible brown algae, etc., but the volume of production of laver and wakame seaweed is remarkably larger than others. The volume of production of the Korean wakame seaweed increases year by year, and the production of South Korean natural and cultured wakame seaweed was 4 times more than that of Japanese (Yamada 2000).

The culture of wakame seaweed in Korea was begun in 1963, and the volume of production suddenly increased in 1974. However, the rapid increase brought about a sudden fall of sale charges. Then, the volume of production of cultured wakame seaweed started to be controlled from

the next year, and the manufacturing technique of salting wakame seaweed was spread. Then the quantity of salted wakame seaweed exported to Japan was increased, and the cultured wakame seaweed became the important income source of fishermen (Water friend society 1987).

The wakame seaweed is called 'Miyeok' in Korean, and there are both cultured and natural ones in it as mentioned above. The natural one is one-year nature plant rooted in a rock at a depth of 2-5m and the harvest period of it is about 3 days from March to May in the spring.

Natural wakame seaweed fishing grounds are called 'Miyokddol' or 'Gwagam' by Korea East Coast fishermen. It means the rock of wakame seaweed. The total volume of production is so little that the sale price is very high, namely 15,000 yen per piece in 2004, and the size of a piece is 30cm in width and 2m in length. Korean women divers perform all the work from harvest to drying and sale. Most of the men are not concerned with it.

Dried wakame seaweed must be prepared for the goddess of childbirth and for a parturient woman, by Korean custom. Dried seaweed is offered to the goddess with rice, water and a thread for four weeks and people pray for the longevity of the baby and the health of the mother every day (II 2001, 2004).

At the same time Korean women who gave birth to a baby are to continue eating wakame seaweed soup for about 4 weeks after childbirth. Korean people think that it is the seaweed to make a lot of mother's milk well, and it contains a lot of calcium and iodine which are necessary for the mother's body. Therefore a wide and long piece is chosen and bought without lowering the price. In addition, it is said that the seaweed must be taken home without breaking. The reason is that if it is broken, the parturient woman might have a difficult delivery (II 1999).

Korean people never fail to eat steamed rice with red beans and wakame seaweed soup on birthdays. It is said that it is to thank one's mother who bore oneself. The reason is not clear, but it is certain that wakame seaweed concerns childbirth.

However, it became difficult to harvest and sell a large amount of natural wakame seaweed from 1970s. Cheap cultured wakame seaweeds are produced in large quantities, and it came to sell well. And it is impossible to harvest wakame seaweed in large quantities. The reason is that it involves diving in the sea and depends on the weather of every year.

However, the demand for natural seaweed began to rise due to a healthy boom from 1990s. In addition, the price became as high value products because there was little supply. The prices of natural wakame seaweed vary according to production area and length.

The history of wakame seaweed fishing grounds

According to the "The History of Koryeo " (A.D.940), the oldest record about wakame seaweed fishing grounds is written in the beginning of the 10th century. According to the "History of Koryeo", it is said that the first King of Koryeo granted 12 wards of wakame seaweed rocks to him because Yunung Park (a powerful clan of the Ulsan region) cooperated with the Koryeo dynasty in founding a country in A.D.940. In the meantime, the rocks which Park clan owned have been taken away as the things belonging to the government in the 18th century. But a part of the rocks of Park clan was returned by the villagers at once. The villagers who harvest wakame seaweed

appealed to the government to return the rocks to the original owner because a bad crop of wakame seaweed followed for three years. However, the villagers who were the members of fishery community did not pay tax to Park clan because fishery right moved to fishery community by the revision of the fishery law in 1962. The Park clan submitted a petition to the government, and they were allowed to possess their rocks again according to the presidential decree in 1966.

The messenger SuJing of Chinese Soong wrote "Koryeo Dogyeong" in 1123. It is said that many people without social positions in the Koryeo dynasty (A.D.918-1392) willingly eat wakame seaweed. In addition, according to "the History of Koryeo", it is said that the King granted the wakame seaweed fishing ground to a prince. Therefore it was used well from the 10th century, and the fishing ground became both an object of inheritance and tax collection source of the government like land. In other words, in the 10th century, wakame seaweed fishing grounds had economic value and it was handed down to a descendant like land and served as good tax collection source of the government. However, as time slid, the principle of public ownership of wakame seaweed fishing grounds collapsed like land, and influential power made the grounds their private properties. The possession type of seaweed fishing grounds in the beginning of the 20th century has not changed from before. For example, Hamgyeongnam Province of Myeongcheon District is the biggest production center of wakame seaweed. There are two types, namely the public and the individual wakame seaweed rocks there. The former is the type that four villages use it jointly, whereas the latter can resell harvest rights (Agriculture Commerce Industrial Department fisheries office 1910, 1911).

In addition, local millionaires monopolized wakame seaweed harvest rights of individual rocks and they collected higher collection charges from the villagers (Ishikawa 1924). In other words, millionaires owned wakame seaweed fishing grounds and lent it to the villagers.

In 1945, the Korean fisheries custom was abolished by the U.S. military administration, but a new "fishery law" was promulgated in 1953. Then the fishery law was repeatedly revised and made a public corporation, 'fishermen union' in 1976, and the 'fishermen union' came to manage the joint fishing ground by themselves with the right to use of the joint fishing ground of the village.

The 'fishermen union (Ochongyeo)' is a substructure group of the fishery cooperative by fishermen and the women divers living in a certain district. The fishermen union was founded by the revision of the fishery cooperative law of 1962 to increase fishery production capacity by co-operative production, and then the right to use of seaweed fishing grounds was transferred to the fishermen union of each district automatically.

The use forms of wakame seaweed fishing grounds

There are two types of rights to wakame seaweed fishing ground use in Korea. One is the commons shared by a fishermen union or a village community, and the other is private properties owned by individuals or clans.

The wakame seaweed rock use right that had been in private possession moved to a village or a fishermen group by Fisheries law revision in 1962. However, the wakame seaweed rock right returned to an original master by villages again. Distribution systems to the members of the

fishermen union of the seaweed fishing ground may be divided into two types. One is through ballot, and the other is free distribution. The fishermen union is changing the distribution form of wakame seaweed fishing grounds into free distribution so that resources may not decrease by intense competition, and there are villages that are reducing operation days (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. The use forms according to the village of wakame seaweed fishing grounds in South Korea

Location	Usufruct	Division	Harvest	Share rate	Sale
1 island	village community	ballot	partnership	evenly	individual
2 coast	village community	ballot	partnership	evenly	partnership
3 big city	private→ fishing community	ballot→free	individual	individual(100%)	individual
4 big city	private→ fishing community	ballot	individual/sale/ daily employment	individual(100%)	individual
5 island	fishing community	free	partnership	evenly	partnership
6 coast	private→ fishing community	free	individual	individual(100%)	individual
7 island	fishing community	free	partnership	evenly	individual
8 coast	private		daily employment	evenly(80%)	partnership
9 coast	private→ fishing community →private		individual/ daily employment	individual(50%)	individual
10 coast	private→ fishing community →private		individual/ daily employment	individual(70%)	individual
11 coast	private→ fishing community →private		individual/ daily employment	individual(50%)	individual
12 coast	private		daily employment	individual(100%)	individual

A daily employment wage is 10% of the total volume of harvested wakame seaweed or is given in cash as a daily allowance.

A person's share of wakame seaweed rose to 50% from 20% in No.11 village.

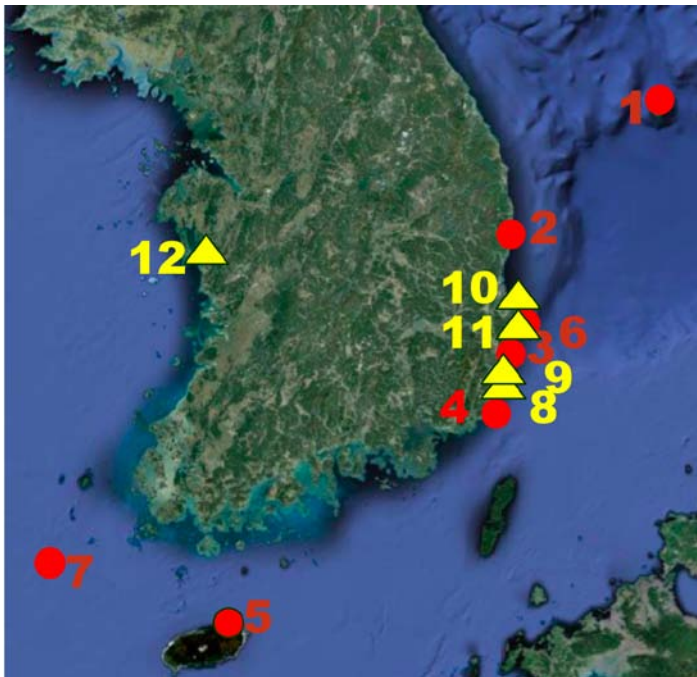


Figure 1. The geographic distribution of wakame seaweed fishing grounds in South Korea. (●commons, ▲private)

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