

Flood, drought and lack of sunshine in an East Asian monsoon region. A comparative economic, cultural and environmental history of the 19th century Japan

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Amakusa islands in Kyushu are belonging to southwestern Japan. They are strongholds of typhoons and severe rains. However, in terms of agricultural damage, we were able to confirm that flooding was not occurred in the top season of typhoons, but the heavy rain especially during the rainy season had caused enormous flood damage. In addition, it was understood that the concern about the lack of rainfall all the time, suggested by rain seeking rituals, was worried because the number of years for which such rituals was performed exceeded 70% of the years within the observed years. Furthermore, it was confirmed that 1. sunshine was expected in July and prompt rainfall also expected at the same time as securing the amount of solar radiation accompanied by fine weather in August, and 2. rhythm and balance of rainfall amount and solar radiation amount were important for growth of rice. This importance of rhythm and balance of the weather, relatively homogeneous dependency on seasonal precipitation patterns, could be observed in annual working and instructive diaries of three villages of another region, Maidsuru, Kyoto, in western Japan. Agriculture, fisheries, and forestry constituted the backbone of the subsistence economy and life community of most villages during the 19th century. Some villages concentrated on rice production for tax obligations and for sale in the market, while other fresh or saltwater fishing villages specialized in fishing products and mountain villages offered timber products. A complex integrated economy consisting of all three factors (agriculture, fishing, and forestry) in different compositions appears to have been a common feature of many traditional Japanese villages. The sites of rice production, the most important one in Japan, were located predominantly in areas with a high risk of flooding, because they needed a sufficient water supply and sunshine, and cultivated rich soils.