

Chapter 3-8

Water and the Culture of Everyday Life

Abstract

The culture of everyday life that has developed since ancient times has become firmly rooted in Lake Biwa and its environs. It can be said that, rather than the use of water from Lake Biwa, it has been the use of water from the rivers and natural springs in its surrounds as water for daily life that has produced a unique culture that can be thought of as characteristics of the area.

Keywords: Lake Biwa, Use of water, Daily life, Water culture

1. Natural Spring Water at Izumi Shrine

As part of the administration of water quality conservation in Japan, famous excellent waters designated in 1985 by the Ministry of the Environment were named the “Selected 100 Exquisite Waters of the Showa Period (1926-1989)” and that included the natural spring waters of Juomura, Hikone City and Izumi Shrine in Maibara City, Shiga Prefecture.

Mt. Ibuki, 1,377 m above sea level, is the highest peak in Shiga Prefecture, and towers over the border with Gifu Prefecture in the northeast of the Omi Basin. Located on the southern alluvial fan of Mt. Ibuki, the village of Oshimizu in Maibara City was called Oizumi Village in olden times, a name deriving from the spring water that flows from the valley at the foot of Izumi Shrine where the local deity is enshrined.

Nowadays, the natural spring produces 4,500 tons of spring water each day and this is channeled to the front of the shrine where a “sacred water drawing spot” is provided. Tens of thousands of visitors make the trip to this spot to draw the spring water. The spring water designated as one of the “Selected 100 Exquisite Waters of the Showa Period” and the surrounding environment is maintained and managed through the daily efforts of the local community.



Fig. 3-8-1 Spring water at Izumi Shrine

2. “Kabata” in Harie

In the Harie district of Takashima City located in the west of Lake Biwa, underground water from the Ado River System flows in abundance and each household in the area has a catchment, called a “Kabata.” It is set up in the garden or a corner of the kitchen to accumulate this spring water for use in the daily lives of the residents. This water has been named “the Living water of Harie” and designated by the Ministry of the Environment as one of the “100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters of the Heisei Period (1989-).” The water culture that was developed around the traditional “Kabata” has been used down through the generations. It has prompted local residents to undertake various unique initiatives.

These initiatives are intended to support the unique local water environment, which include cleaning activities, known as “Kawazarae,” the promotion within

the local community of the use of natural detergents, the establishment of environmental conservation events, the setting up of biotopes and holding animal, plant and nature watching meetings for children. Local residents engage in diverse exchange activities such as proactive participation in the World Lake Conference and regional exchange meetings.

Thanks to the efforts of the local community to “work together to protect water,” declining populations of freshwater species such as sweetfish and Biwa salmon are reviving and the number of people with “knowledge and experience” of the “Kabata” culture is gradually increasing, generating popularity.

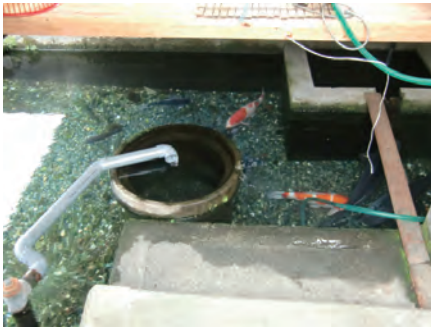


Fig. 3-8-2 A “Kabata” in the Harie district

3. Water Usage at Ebie

Water usage customs similar to the “Kabata” tradition of Harie have also been handed down in communities in Ebie in Nagahama City, located in the north of Lake Biwa. Three independent rectangular-

lar-shaped water tanks are set up at different levels at the frontage of each house to provide a constant flow of water from the highest tank to the lowest. During the summer months, residents place vegetables such as eggplants, cucumbers and gourds in the tanks to chill and use the tanks to pickle Japanese white radish, carrots and other vegetables, reflecting the value placed by the local community on this natural source of water in their daily lives.



Fig. 3-8-3 Water at Ebie

4. Transmitting Water Culture

While the culture of water usage in the form of “Kabata,” for example, still continues to be passed down through the generations in the environs of Lake Biwa and areas throughout Japan to this day, in areas where the water from natural springs is designated as exquisite water, it is also used as a valuable resource tied to regional revitalization.

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