

Japan's "Blue Economies"? Coastal Fisheries between Growth and Demise

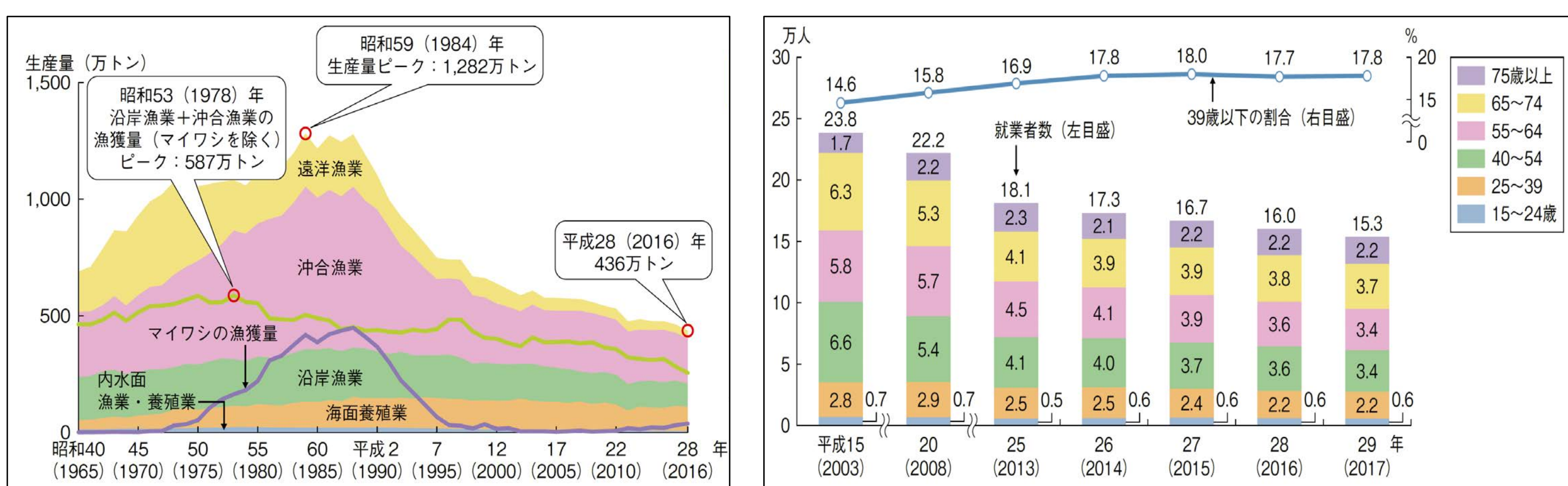
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Traditionally important fishing port in Saga Prefecture

Since the late 1970s, Japanese fisheries have been grappling with global, national and regional transformations, and these have gained increasing momentum and intensity since the turn of the millennium: Dwindling resource stocks, the intensified territorialization of maritime space, the emergence of global commodity chains, the proliferation of Japanese supermarket chains, shifting consumer preferences and stagnating fish prices are contributing to a general decline in profitability. Consequently, total numbers as well as the ratio of younger fishers is dramatically decreasing, reinforcing the socio-economic demise of many rural coastal communities. In response, fishers as well as policy makers and civil society organizations are developing a range of revitalization and reform strategies, often centering on ideas like the establishment of alternative marketing channels, the creation of new value-added products, and the invention and marketing of local traditions.

Shrinking Fisheries in Statistics



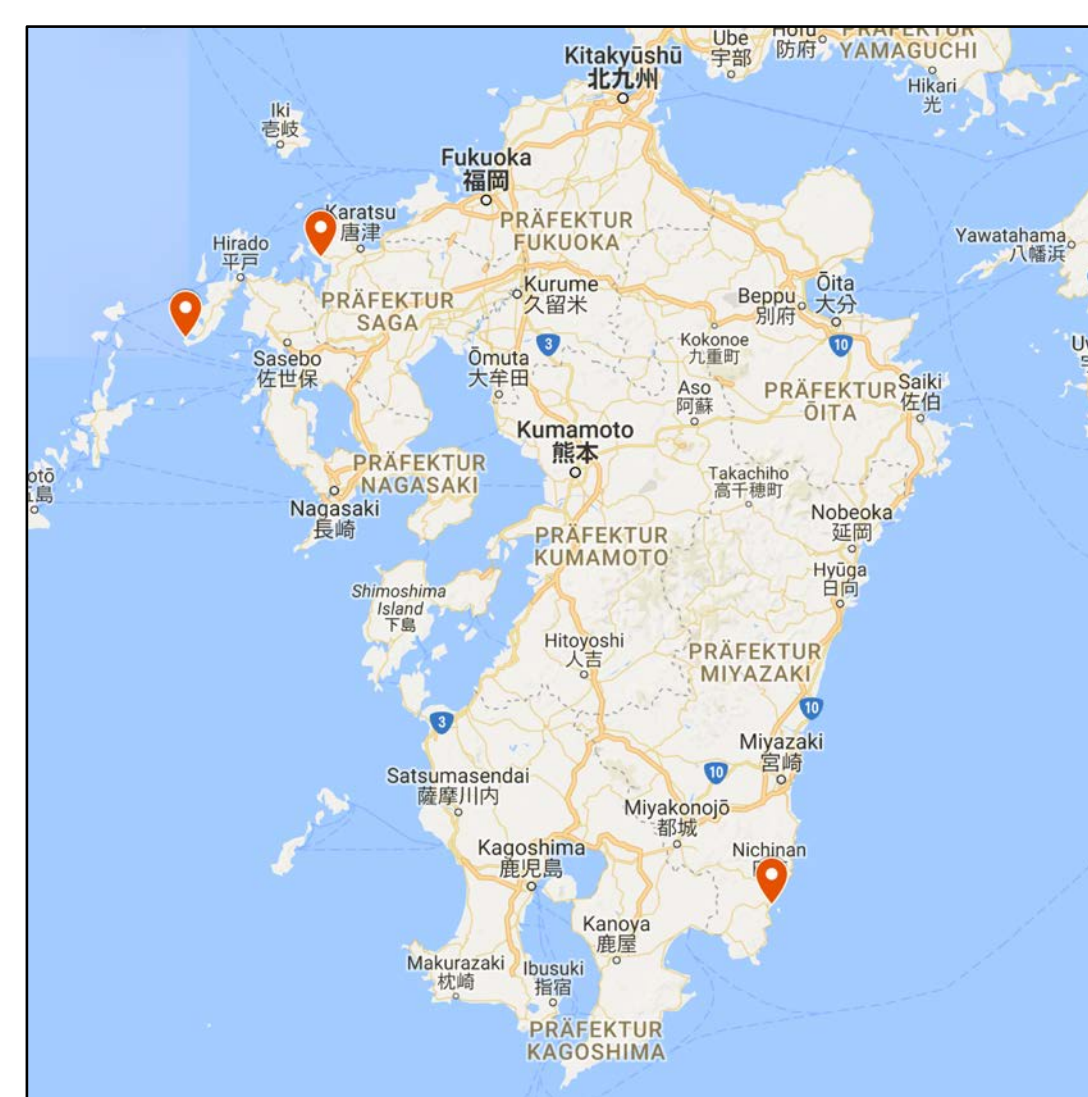
Japanese fishery production and workforce (MAFF: *Heisei 29-nendo suisan hakusho*, 2018: 66, 79)

Research Questions

- How are the livelihoods of Japanese family fishing businesses challenged and defended in the context of global, national and local transformations?
- Who is able to seize new opportunities within these changing conditions and who loses out? What are promising coping strategies?
- Which conditions are conducive to successful coping, and which risk factors and vulnerabilities can be identified?
- What discourses are framing policies, interventions and strategies, and are thus shaping coastal spaces?

Data and Methods

- Field research since 2010 in Saga, Nagasaki and Miyazaki Prefectures, Kyushu
- Qualitative interviews with fishers, household members and fishery cooperative staff
- Participant observation during fishing, landing, sorting, packaging, auctions and sales
- Analysis of grey literature (cooperative, prefectural, national and administrative reports and statistics, NPO studies, business reports, marketing material etc.)
- Semi-structured expert interviews with staff of municipal, administrative, federational and cooperative staff, seafood traders, auction houses, large companies, academics
- Questionnaire in three case towns



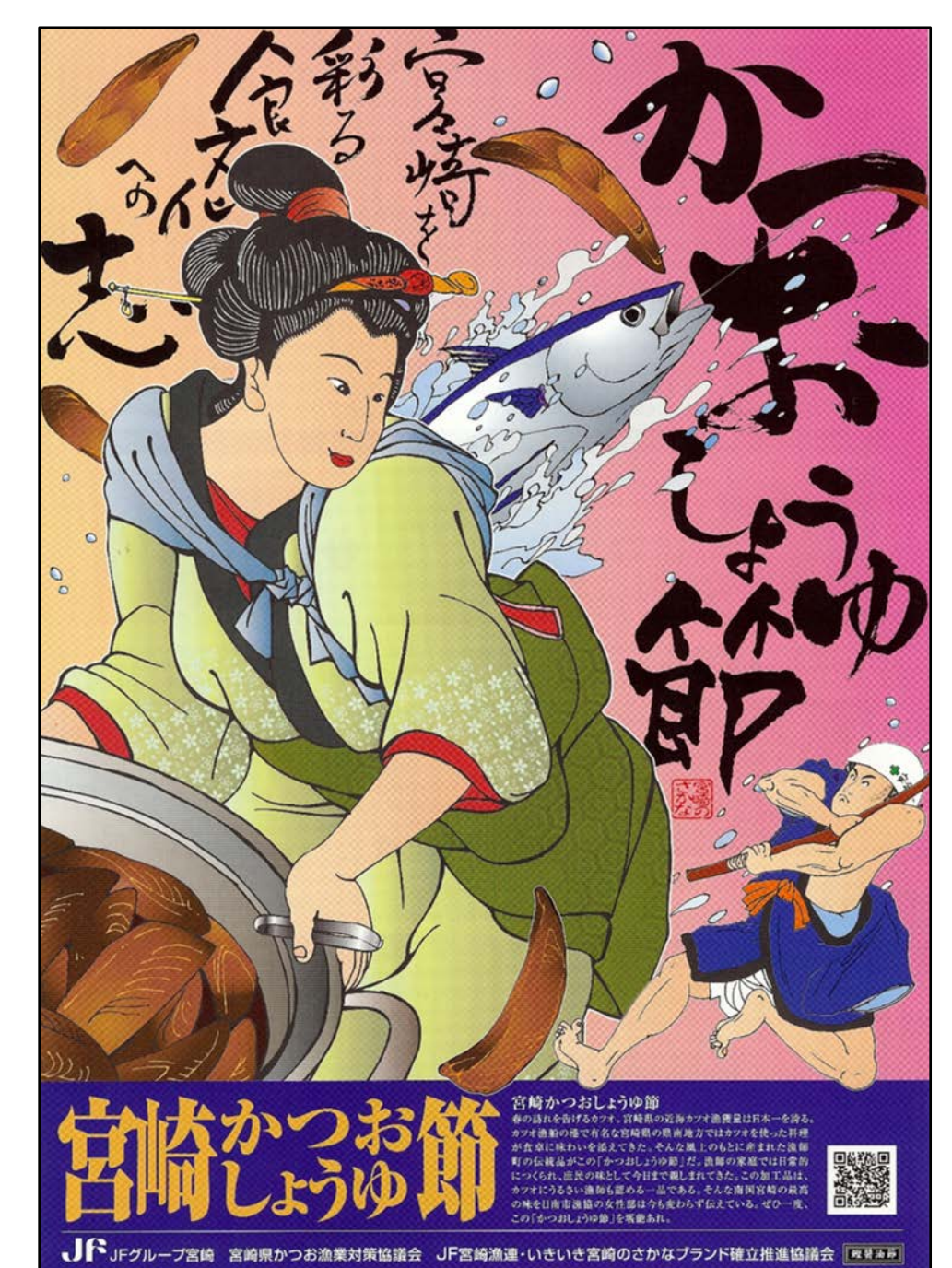
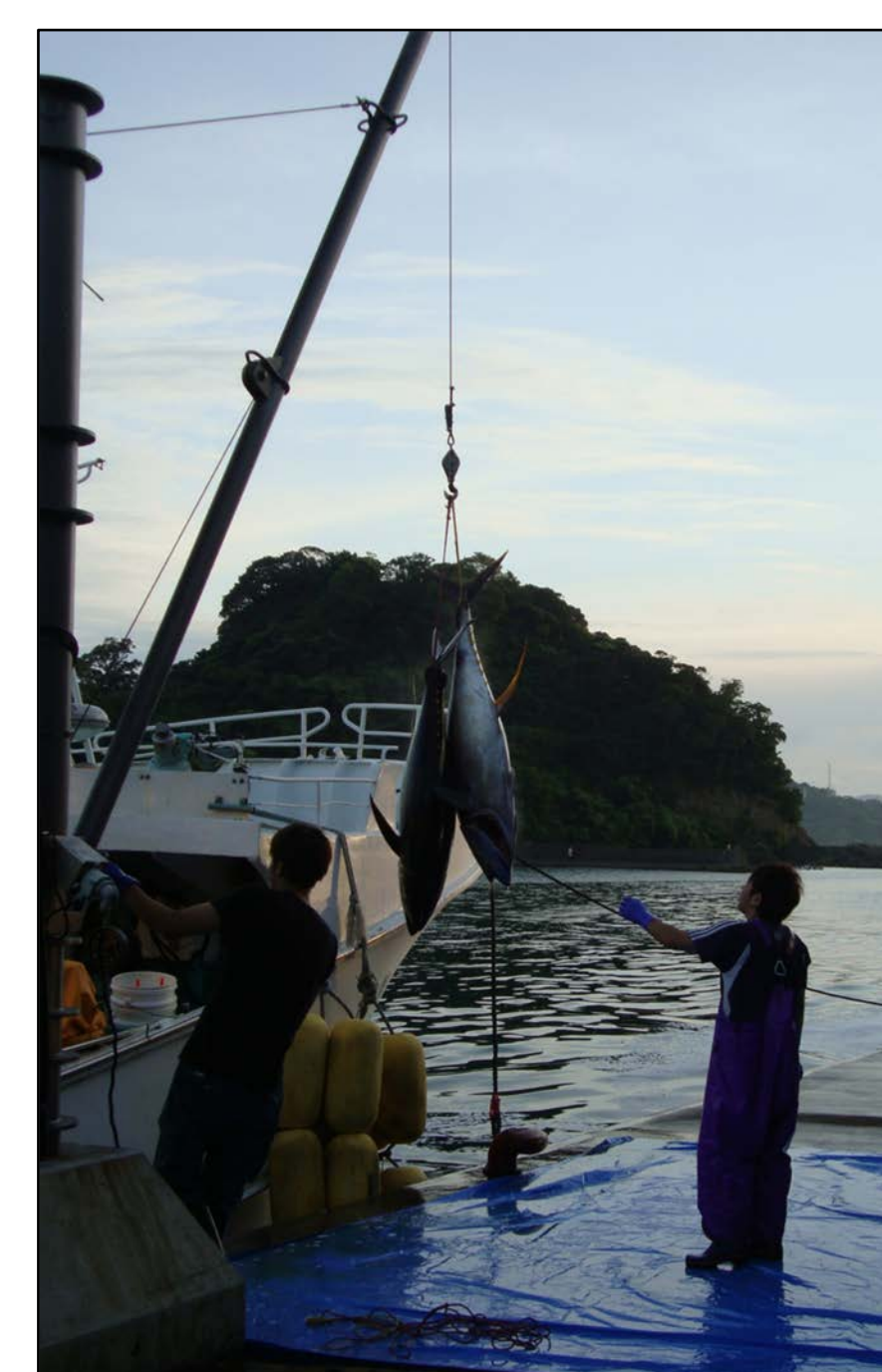
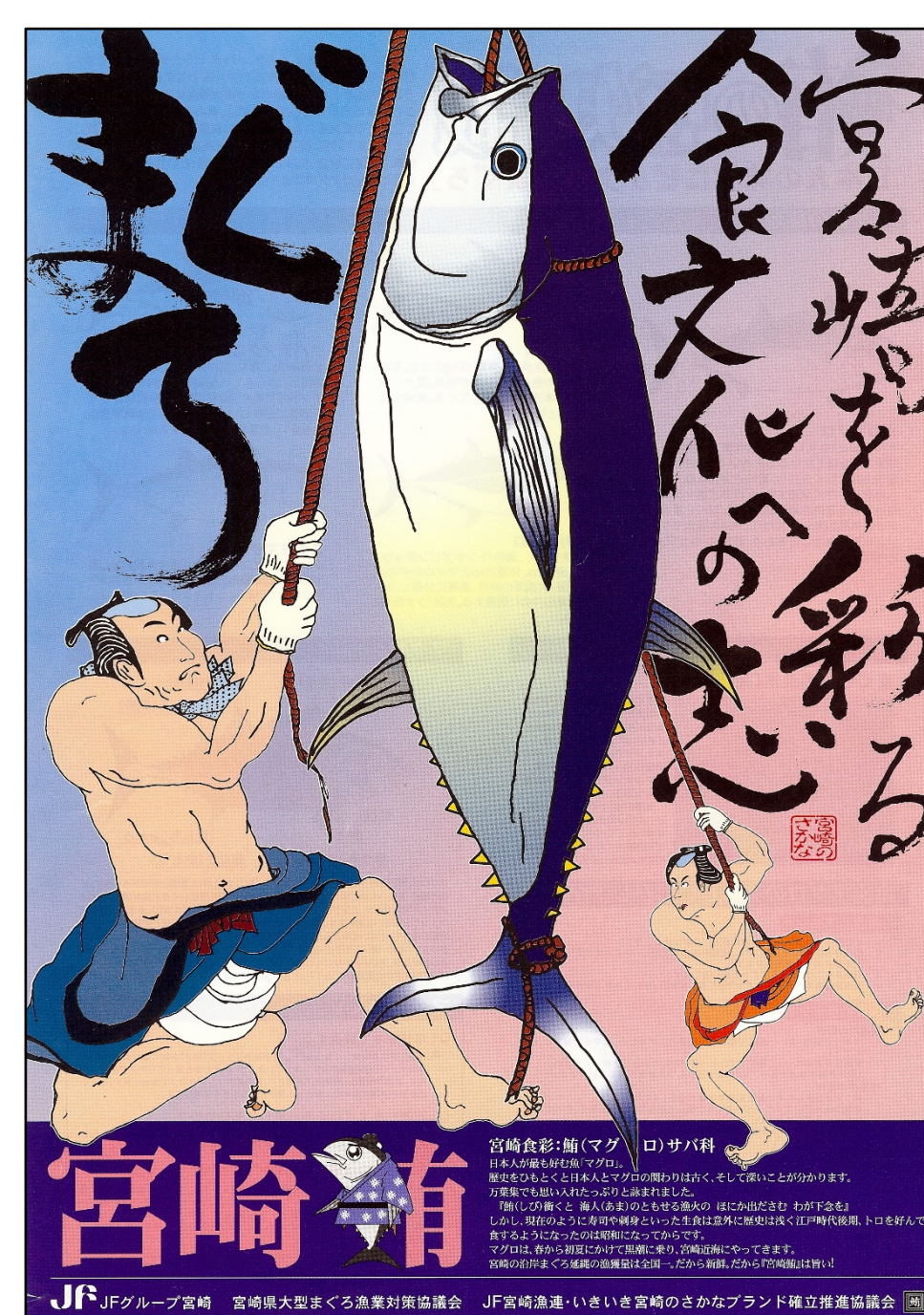
Field research sites



Fishing port in Nagasaki Pref.

Preliminary Findings

Income diversification strategies are very common and an economic necessity for many fishery family businesses. Strong local institutions like the fishery cooperative as well as relational factors such as networks, family, experience and gender are crucial for businesses small and medium alike. Informal and collective local knowledge is still very relevant, but weakening traditional institutions and public revitalization programs require new forms of knowledge. Fishers need to become competitive, self-marketing entrepreneurs, designing and selling innovative value-added products. This marketization and individualization entails a shift towards the commodification of the fishery itself as a cultural product and reinforces economic, educational and geographic inequalities. At the same time, resource problems remain unsolved. A possible reform of the cooperatively administered fishing rights to admit more corporate actors is likely to compound these disparities.



Traditional tuna and bonito fisheries in Miyazaki Prefecture

