

History of Tosashimizu (2)

Business booms

In the 1700s, some people in Tosashimizu started carving out a place for themselves in the maritime trade. These business-savvy entrepreneurs were led by the Yamashiroya shipping company, based in the village of Nakanohama. The Yamashiroya traders dealt mainly in firewood, charcoal, and other local products, and amassed considerable fortunes over the years. They also expanded into the *katsuobushi* (dried bonito fillet) business, helping Shimizu dried bonito earn a reputation as the best in all of Japan.

[Caption]

A *banzuke* (sumo-style ranking) of *katsuobushi* by region, published in 1822. Shimizu is number one, while nearby Tosanoura is also given a favorable ranking.

From sea to land

The lack of flat, arable land in Tosashimizu forced local people to look to the sea for sustenance. Solid ground, however, was not completely overlooked, and ambitious land-use projects were undertaken here long before modern roads made overland travel possible.

- Salt production (close to central Tosashimizu)

Seeking to reduce dependence on salt imports, local rulers in the Edo period (1603–1868) reinforced hillsides with stone, artificially flattening the ground and initiating salt production on the plots.

- Terraced fields (Ashizuri peninsula)

Steep hills were also flattened gradually and converted into terraced fields, which were mainly used to grow sweet potatoes. These fields remained in use until the late 1960s, but have now largely been reclaimed by nature.