



Tsurumi Yoshiyuki, *Namako no Me* [Sea Cucumber Eye]

Suzuki Yuki

Namako no Me is a monumental work in mono-studies, or the study of things. Mono-studies is, in a narrow sense, an examination of the economic cycle of a particular consumer product, from its production, to its distribution and consumption. In a broad sense, it is the attempt to illuminate the history and culture of the local community behind that product by focusing on the various things that pertain to it. Tsurumi Yoshiyuki takes as his subject *namako*, or sea cucumber, not simply to analyze its routes of distribution but also to discuss the history of exchange or the intersections created by people mainly in Southeast Asia, the islands of Oceania, and East Asia.

And why *Namako*? The subject of *Namako*, or sea cucumber, seems to strongly reflect Tsurumi's orientation towards decentralization. Compared to universal products like sugar or tea, sea cucumbers are products of which the degree of involvement of Western societies is low. Records concerning sea cucumbers are also fragmentary. Throughout history, sea cucumbers were produced by many people living in marginal areas who did not possess writing. Tsurumi sought to illuminate from reverse the histories and cultures of nations and their rulers by looking at the land through the eyes of a sea cucumber, a creature with no visual organs, lying at the bottom of the sea. Penned with deliberation as he traveled freely and actively around the oceanic habitats of sea cucumbers, *Namako no Me* is Tsurumi's formal objection to the human race so often being land-oriented.



Source:

- Tsurumi Yoshiyuki, *Namako no Me [Sea Cucumber Eye]* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1990 / later Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 1993)



Tsurumi Yoshiyuki in Penang, Malaysia, January, 1975

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Harvesting sea cucumbers by using a long spear in the Sulu Sea, the Philippines, March 23, 1987

Photo: Tsurumi Yoshiyuki © Rikkyo Educational Corporation, Collection of Research Center for Cooperative Civil Societies



Sun drying sea cucumbers in Sulawesi, Indonesia, March 31, 1986

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