

Climate change threatens what's left of Japan's cormorant fishing legacy

Youichiro Adachi is the 18th generation of his family to be a master cormorant fisherman, and one of about 50 people carrying on the 1,300-year tradition of using trained birds to dive for fish, writes **Kim Kyung-Hoon**



Source: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/photography/cormorant-fishing-japan-climate-change-b2451090.html>

Cormorants have been a constant presence in Youichiro Adachi's life, and when he was young, he cried whenever one of his family's **birds** died.

Now 48, Adachi still cares deeply for his birds, drawing them out of their baskets each morning and stroking their long necks to confirm their health and maintain a bond.

"For me, **cormorants** are my partners," he said.



Youichiro Adachi, imitates the fluttering of a cormorant to make the bird mimic him, giving him a chance to check on its health (*Reuters*)



A cormorant sits in a basket before cormorant fishing or 'ukai' on the Nagara River in Oze (*Reuters*)

Adachi is the 18th generation of his family to be a master cormorant fisherman, and one of about 50 people in Japan carrying on the 1,300-year tradition of using trained birds to dive for fish. It is considered the ideal way to catch the sweet *ayu* river fish, and his family has a hereditary mandate to supply the delicacy to the Japanese imperial household.

The method, known as *ukai*, was once common in Japan and a version of it has also been practiced in China. But today it is largely supported by tourists, who watch the fishermen and their birds bringing in the day's catch.



Youichiro Adachi (right), controls leashes tied to the cormorants' necks and bodies while his son, Toichiro, 22, manoeuvres their boat during fishing (*Reuters*)



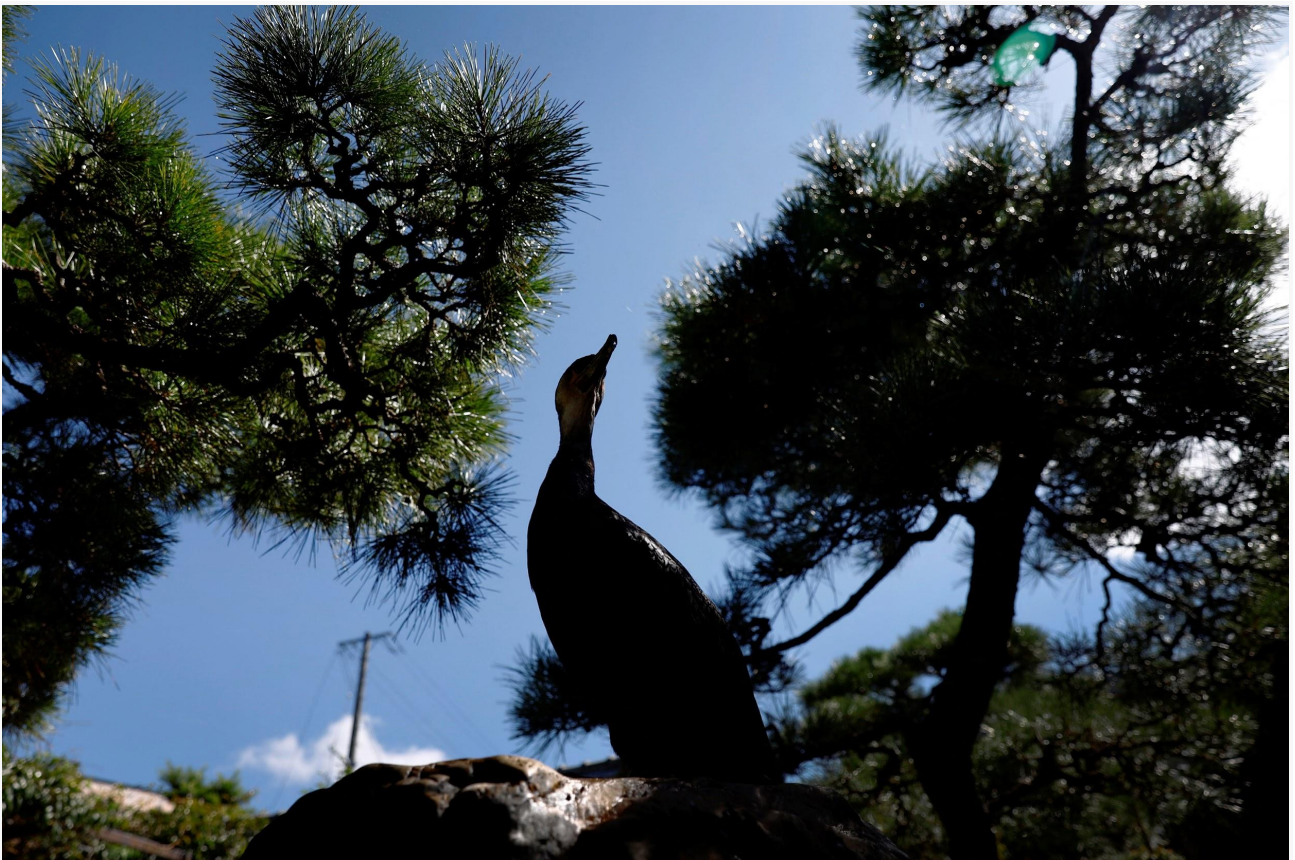
Houkan (male counterpart to Geisha) Tatsuji, 29, and Maiko (apprentice female Geisha), Kikuyu, 20, sit with visitors to watch 'ukai' at a riverside observation deck in the Nagara River (*Reuters*)

Now, **environmental changes** are making the fish ever more scarce and small, endangering the lifeline of the fisherman, known as *usho*, and their flocks.

"I go to the river every day so I can feel the changes," Adachi said, drawing upon nearly four decades of working on the Nagara River in Oze, a town in central Gifu Prefecture.



Youichiro Adachi (right), and son Toichiro, during fishing on the Nagara River (*Reuters*)



A cormorant belonging to Youichiro Adachi, rests in a garden at his house (*Reuters*)

Environmental studies have confirmed his concerns. Temperatures in the Nagara River have risen to a high of 30C (86F), delaying the spawning period of the *ayu* by a month, said Gifu University associate professor Morihiro Harada.

“I want my son to inherit my job, but it’s tough to make a living,” Adachi said. “If we cannot catch fish anymore, our motivation is gone and there’s no meaning in what we do.”



A cormorant splashes water with its wings during fishing (*Reuters*)

Discussion Question

We always discuss the environmental impacts of climate change, such as how increasing temperatures have altered the breeding season of fish in Japan. However, we rarely consider its economic, social and cultural implications. What are some such implications you can observe in this article?