

TAKEMOTO Taro*

School Forests in Japan: from cash cow to environmental education

Abstract

More than 3,000 schools in Japan have “School Forests.” Many of the forests involved began as commons held by natural villages, but over the last century they have been used and abused in many ways. Today, like other surviving descendants of traditional commons, they are increasingly valued for their environmental functions. The Meiji government (1868-1912) created a new system of local government that consolidated natural villages into larger administrative units, perhaps as “administrative rationalization” but also as a way to convert the assets of natural villages – their commonly-held resources – into government property. One use of forest land consolidated in this way was to create school forests, as a source of funds to finance school activities. With the creation of School Arbor Day more than a century ago as a trigger, school forests became widespread all over Japan. School forests were meant to be self-governing at first, but from the 1920s they became less important than before. Then, in 1938 when Japan went to war, the central government found school forests to be a useful tool in national mobilization. The government promoted young men’s associations, originally set up to be self-governing also, as governmentally controlled entities, and promoted school forests as national resources, devising a “Forest-Loving” campaign to convert simple hometown nostalgia into national patriotism.

Since the war, Arbor Day has returned and school forests have been transformed from tools of nationalism into outdoor science laboratories and environmental resources that benefit the schools. Property rights over school forests have continued to change, due to two more waves of administrative consolidation of municipalities, harming school forests in both numbers and quality. But the latest trend is for school forests to become preserves for environmental education and conservation.

Key words

School forest, Arbor Day, municipal amalgamation, environmental education, environmental services, economic benefit

* Forest Policy Laboratory, Department of Forest Science, Graduate School of Agriculture and Life Science, the UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO

1. Introduction

Now in Japan, we can find 3,057 schools holding forests. These forests are called School forests. Whole area of school forests is 20,106ha (the number of primary schools is 1859, and the area is 7,009ha). This is 7.8% of all primary, junior high and high schools (8.1% of all primary schools). However today most of the school forests are not used and those histories are almost forgotten.

This paper firstly intends to clarify why school forests have been introduced, how they have spread and what kind of role they have played, in the dual structure of natural villages and administrative villages, which the Meiji (1868-1912) local autonomous system produced. Secondly, this paper explains functional and systematic change of communal relations¹ in the dual structure of natural villages and administrative villages from the Taisho period (1912-1926) to the Showa prewar period (1926-1945). Lastly, in relation to the communal relations around school forests from the Showa postwar period (1945-1989) to the present, the paper aims 1) to make it clear that the reason why Arbor Day and school forests resumed in the Showa postwar period, 2) to find what communities ask for school forests, observing movement of property rights of school forests, accompanied by the consolidation of villages and towns from 1958, 3) to explain why school forests declined in numbers and in quality after the consolidation and to report new trends of school forests, which are being setup for environmental preservation or education.

2. Establishment of school forests in Meiji period

In the very early period (from 1872 to 1889), school paddies and school forests were introduced as a way of making a school fund. Though most of them were set on lands owned by natural villages, some of them were set on lands sold by the Meiji government.² In this period number of school paddies was larger than that of school forests. Especially in Aomori Prefecture, school paddies developed considerably.³

The first period (from 1889 to 1894), because of the Town and Village Act 1889, About 75,000 natural villages were consolidated to 15,000 administrative villages.⁴ As new administrative villages carried responsibility to establish primary schools, natural villages lost the right of establishing their schools, but still had a lot of real estates used as communal properties⁵ called iriai forests.

This is because the Meiji government didn't unify real estates under compulsion when it consolidated the natural villages. In 1890, the school fund was made possible by the enactment of the Rural Education Act. Thanks to the act it was able to set up school forests as a way of making the school fund. Because administrative villages didn't own lands for themselves, they used natural villages' lands when they set up school forests.

The second period (from 1895 to 1896), with the "The School Arbor Day" instruction told by Nobuaki Makino, who was the Vice-Minister of Education, as a trigger, establishment of school forests became widespread all over the country.⁶ The Arbor Day was first established in Nebraska, the United States in 1872 by Governor Morton because of the restoration of devastated land. Then B.G.Northrup, the chairman of the board of education in Connecticut State, came to Japan in 1895 and did a lecture tour on the School Arbor Day which was developed from Morton's Arbor Day.^{7 8} Makino was affected by Northrup's lecture. In the course of top-down spread, Makino's School Arbor Day was tied up with the school fund institution.

The third period (1897-1903), still administrative villages didn't own enough lands for School forests. To solve this problem Meiji government started to sell unreserved national forests to administrative villages. Meanwhile, three major acts related to forests were enacted, which prescribed the sale of unreserved national forests. Until 1906, number and area of school forests set up by using national state forests increased.

The fourth period (1904-1905), when the Russo-Japanese War broke, Ministry of Education further promoted to set up school forests with Division of forest, Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. The Division of Forest thought that school forests were important to propagate their afforesting policy. That is why school forests were increasing in number and area in this period. And 2,968 school forests (7,200 ha) were set up by using unreserved national forests in 1906 at the peak. However, by the case studies we conducted, we can see many school forests whose landowners were natural villages or individuals.

The fifth period (1906-1914), Expenses for education piled up because the compulsory education extended from 4 years to 6 years. Because of this expense, rural governments were put in financial difficulties. Therefore the Ministry of interior started the rural improvement project. In this project the Ministry wanted to make administrative villages sound in financial aspect, at the same time keeping order of natural villages. So the Ministry approved to unify natural villages' forests to school districts which existed between natural villages and administrative villages. Additionally, Sale of unreserved national forests to

administrative villages continued in this period.

Fundamentally the school fund institution was an "excuse" by the Meiji government for getting corporation of natural villages. However, school forests in this institutional framework made plural natural villages reorganize into one community. As the result of reorganization, a community whose basis was school forests was born.

3. Change of School Forests in the Taisho and the Showa Prewar Period

The first period (from 1912 to 1928), the communal relations established school forests as its self-governing function when the modern education system was introduced. Until the commemorative forestation for Taisho Imperial accession, school forests were established for the purpose of forestation and making school funds.⁹ Mostly, in the community of this time we can find several organizations such as a young people's association, a local fire brigade, an alumni association and a local credit cooperative. However, as to forestation and management of school forests, natural villages or school districts played active role as before. When the government started to expend money on compulsory education from 1918 and on forestation from 1920, purpose of school forests turned to be relatively unimportant.

The second period (from 1929 to 1937), the Great Depression in 1929 led Japan's rural communities to impoverished condition. In such context Dai-Nihon Sanrinkai, the association for Japan's forest started "Forest Loving Day" from 1934 with reference to the commemorative tree planting which had been implemented in colonial Korean peninsula since 1911.¹⁰ Ootosaku Saito, the chief of forest division of the Government-General of Chosen introduced the commemorative tree planting with reference to Makino's School Arbor Day and succeeded to turn devastated mountains into green.¹¹

The third period (from 1938 to 1945), under the national mobilization system which was started in 1938, the central government started to hold Forest Loving Day and take school forests forestation as useful apparatus in order to infiltrate the Emperor system.¹² The young men's associations which were set up as self-governing functional organizations were promoted to be an administration-governed organization when the government regarded afforested school forests as national resources for the 2nd World War.¹³ To change such communal relations, there was "Hometown patriotism" logic which converted the spirits of loving hometown into patriotism.¹⁴ To put it in other words, tree

planting and school forests are utilized as intermediation between loving hometown and patriotism.

4. Restructuring of School Forests in the Showa Postwar Period and the Present

The communal relations around school forests, which were born in the Meiji period (1868-1912) or the early Taisho period (1912-1926), can be called "Property communal relations". However, when national mobilization system was started, they have changed themselves into "Patriotism communal relations".

There were three actors in connection with resuming Forest Loving Day and school forests. The actors are GHQ/SCAP, bureaucrats and communities. GHQ/SCAP considered that "Forest Loving Day" and school forests could alleviate social anxiety existed immediately after the 2nd World War. The Japanese nation felt uneasy because she has lost the absolute Emperor. Owners of forests also felt uneasy because of the possibility of forest emancipation. However, to make the Emperor as a ceremony master on Forest Loving Day alleviated first anxiety and the school forestation along with the other forestation movement alleviated the second. Actually bureaucrats proposed resumption of Forest Loving Day and School forests to GHQ/SCAP¹⁵ because they wanted to keep their system and organization. Therefore they emphasized that Forest Loving Day was first introduced from the United States, that is B.G.Northrup's School Arbor Day and that a tree-planting campaign has nothing to do with the war campaign. On the other hand, communities needed fund to build their new schoolhouses especially for junior high school which was introduced under the new school system in 1947. During postwar rehabilitation, Forest Loving Day and school forests encouraged communities physically and mentally. Thus "patriotism communal relations" were strengthened autonomously.

Accompanied by the consolidation of villages and towns from 1958, usually property rights of school forests owned by municipalities went to new municipalities or new property wards (Zaisan-ku) which were settled in order to manage former municipalities' properties such as forests.^{16 17} However, property rights of some school forests went to other ways. For example Matsuo ward in Nagano prefecture set up a new property ward to keep its school forest only.¹⁸ Takase school forest in Oita prefecture was established as natural village's forest

before Takase administrative village's forest was established.¹⁹ As the symbol of administrative village's consolidation, school forest has moved to Takase forest producer's association together with other village's forest. Property rights of Aihara school forest in Tokyo metropolitan prefecture established in the Meiji period finally went to a legally incorporated foundation.²⁰ Residents of Aihara regarded school forests as the symbol of public welfare. Concluding from these examples, "Patriotism communal relations" insisted that they have managed their school forests for public welfare. Thus, they prevented their school forests from unifying into new municipalities or returning to property communal relations, by fitting them into the other legal framework, such as incorporated foundation. They turned to be "Public welfare relations".

Japan became independent from GHQ/SCAP in 1951, then, the 2nd school afforestation plan was started. However school forests have lost its role as school funds because subsidies for education and forest management were already provided to new municipalities. Therefore only a peaceful image of tree planting was left. Most of school forests have faded out into municipalities' fund ordinances from the mid.1960s to the mid.70s. Increasing interest in destruction of nature since 1970s, school forests were regarded as fields of environmental preservation and education. From the late 1990s, municipalities, prefectures and the state started new institutions to settle school forests for environmental education.

5. Conclusion

Through this paper, a brief history of school forests and tree planting was clarified. In the history we found that communal relations around school forests had changed from "Property communal relations" to "Patriotism communal relations" and finally to "Public welfare relations".

¹ Abiko, Rin., 1986, Farm land revolution and community, *Rekishu Hyouron*, 435, pp.32-45 (in Japanese)

² Chiba, Masashi., 1962. *Study of school district*. Keiso-Shobo, 489pp. (in Japanese)

³ Inoue, Yonosuke., 1940. Research of school paddies as commons, *Kagami-kenkyu-houkoku*, 49, pp1-62 (in Japanese)

-
- ⁴ Ohishi, Kaichiro.(eds), 1991. *Administrative villages in Modern Japan*. Nihon keizai hyouron-sya, 774pp. (in Japanese)
- ⁵ Stevenson, Grenn G., 1991. *Common property economics : a general theory and landuse applications*. Cambridge University Press, 256pp.
- ⁶ Sonobe, Ichiro., 1940. A secret history of Arbor day movemnent in Japan, Sanrin, 689, pp.2-13 (in Japanese)
- ⁷ Shaufler, Robert H., 1909. *Arbor Day*. Moffat Yard and Company, 376pp.
- ⁸ Dai-nihon Sanrinkai, 1895. Arbor day in school, Dai-nihon Sanrinkai Kaihou, 150, pp.1-20 (in Japanese)
- ⁹ Division of Forest., 1916. *The commemorative forestation for Taisho Imperial accession*. (in Japanese)
- ¹⁰ Sonobe, Ichiro., 1934. Background of Forest Loving Day. Sanrin, 616, p.10 (in Japanese)
- ¹¹ Saito, Otosaku., 1935. A Secret history of commemorative tree planting in Korea. Chousen Sanrin Kaiho. 120. pp.11-18 (in Japanese)
- ¹² Division of Forest., 1938. *School forests of primaly schools*. 131pp. (in Japanese)
- ¹³ Association of imperial flood control committee., 1941. *School forest*. 53pp. (in Japanese)
- ¹⁴ Maruyama, Masao., 1944. Pre-formation of Nationalism, Kokka-gakkai zassi, 58(3・4) (in Japanese)
- ¹⁵ Kokudo ryokka suishin iinnkai., 1970. *20 years of Tree planting*, 363pp. (in Japanese)
- ¹⁶ Kawashima, Takeyoshi et al., 1959-1968. Dissolution of communal property rights I-III. Iwanami-Shoten. (in Japanese)
- ¹⁷ Tsutsui, Michio., 1973. *Study of forest community*. Nourin-Syuppan, 494pp. (in Japanese)
- ¹⁸ Matuo sonsi hensan iinnkai., 1982, *History of Matuo*, 898pp. (in Japanese)
- ¹⁹ Takase seisan shinrin kumiai., 1990. *History of corporative*, 169pp. (in Japanese)
- ²⁰ Aihara Hozen kai., 1978. *History of Aihara communal property*, pp.209. (in Japanese)