Historical Environment of Kitayama-go

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The Kami-Kitayama village in Yoshino-gun, Nara is located to the south of Mt. Obamine and spreads along the Kitayama River and its tributary streams. Mt. Obamine is a steep pass forming the watershed of the Yoshino mountains and famous for its legendary "one foot bellow". In old days, the mountain blocked all contact between its north and south sides.

The reason why the village is called Kitayama (northern mountain) while it is located to the south of Mt. Obamine and in the south of the Yamato Province as a whole is that it is located to the north of Kumano. This is why the Simo-kitayama Village (which means "lower northern mountain village") is found even to the south of the Kamikitayama Village (which means "upper northern mountain village"), nearer to Kumano. Administratively integrated in the Nara Prefecture now, the area in fact has long been in cultural and economical area of Kumano rather than that of Yamato.

Thus in medieval times, Kitayama was in the same chain of mountains as the Kii province, and their borders were not very clear. The name Kitayama itself was not used in very precise way, meaning vaguely the whole neighborhood. Until modern feudalism was established, the area had enjoyed an extraterritoriality free from the control of State power and called "area with no ruler".

It was after the land survey by Hideyoshi in 1595 that Kitayama was integrated into the rule of central government, but even then an accurate survey was impossibly disturbed by the sabotage of the inhabitants: the government allowed them to pay their land tax in compulsory labor, but even so this tax was paid in the form of timber.

In fact, however, the forest of Kitayama was not very profitable one because of its natural and geographical conditions. In addition, it was a plundered and exploited by yearly cutting of wood. The limits of this method were felt by the middle period of the Edo era, and reforestation was actively promoted.
from that time on.

Private possession of forest was exanneded but communally owned forests remained vast and, as the demands for timber grew in modern times, the need for managing systems for communally-owned forests became pressing. The sections of the village were formed into autonomous councils to organize incorporated foundations, which became from that time on, important or ganizations in the life of the village.