The Background of the Changes of Vegetation in the Meiji Era in Kyoto Prefecture

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Vegetation of Japan has greatly changed since the beginning of the historical era. Ways of managing it by man have been generally the biggest factors to change vegetation. For example, plantations of Cryptomeria japonica and Chamaecyparis obtusa expanded rapidly after World War II, while the number of Pinus densiflora have been greatly decreased during last 30 to 40 years. Other than such changes of wood species, the appearance of woods used for long time by man has changed greatly: the trees of woods have generally become bigger and higher. The great decrease of grassland during the last century is another feature. The background of the changes of vegetation in the Meiji era in Kyoto Prefecture was studied in this paper by reading papers of the era and relating materials. Remarkable changes of vegetation seem to have started in the era.

Consequently, erosion control, restriction and prohibition of fire to hills and mountains, afforestation were the main background of the changes of vegetation in Kyoto prefecture in the era: erosion control effort started in 1871 and felling of trees or taking grass were restricted or prohibited, restriction and prohibition of fire to hills and mountains also became stricter in the early Meiji era to protect forests and to promote afforestation, and afforestation increased gradually supported by the fire restriction and other political acts in the second half of the Meiji era.

It seems that those factors made it possible the great changes of vegetation in Kyoto prefecture since the Meiji era: naked hills and mountains have almost disappeared in Yodo river valley; grassland and shrub-land in the rural areas also have almost disappeared; plantations of Cryptomeria japonica and Chamaecyparis obtusa have increased remarkably; trees of woods and forests have become bigger and higher.