A “Shinnomi-batake” in Sawara: Vegetable Growing and Peddling in the Suburbs of a Provincial City

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Before Japan’s period of high economic growth that began in the late sixties, fresh vegetables that did not keep very long were restricted to locally grown produce. This paper uses oral histories from farmers who peddled their produce and vegetable sellers to describe the supply of vegetables to Sawara, which at that time was a provincial commercial city situated on the southern banks of the Tone River in the northeastern part of Chiba Prefecture.

Farmers who cultivated vegetables fell into one of two categories. One was the "Shinohara-type", which can also be called the "Shinnomi-batake—peddler-type". These farmers produced small amounts of many types of vegetables in fields near their houses (Shinnomi-batake) that had originally been small fields supplying vegetables for their own use. They then went around selling these vegetables. The other category is the "Niijuku-Araku type", which can also be called the "shipment-type". These farmers specialized in several vegetables that grew particularly well on their land which they mass produced and shipped to the market. To those in the town who purchased this produce, these two types of farmer were known respectively as "peddlers" and "vegetable sellers", Both co-existed in Sawara and were also transferable and continuous depending on the situation surrounding a farmer’s area of cultivable land and his workers.

Expanding the perspective to a macro level and putting the "Shinomibatake—peddler-type" and the "shipment-type" together, they can also be called the Sawara "Shinnomi-batake". In days gone by Sawara had consisted of small self-supply vegetable plots and hills, and an independent region had been formed where the inhabitants were self-sufficient in vegetables and fuel to a certain extent. The decline of vegetable cultivation in the suburbs has been part of the process of the splitting up and expansion of this region.