Vegetation landscape changes since the rapid economic growth period and their backgrounds of two areas in the west Chugoku Mountains Region in Japan were studied based on literatures, photos, interviews of elders and old maps. One of the studied area is Yawata Highland which is located in the northwest of Hiroshima Prefecture, the other is Akiyoshidai, a famous limestone area which is located in Yamaguchi Prefecture. Results are as follows.

In the Yawata Highland, grassland is now rarely seen except for a ski resort etc., however before the rapid economic growth period, grassland was commonly seen there as it was used for grazing cattle and horses etc. Most of the grassland transformed into forests, and most trees of forests have become high and much bigger due to the changes in fuels etc. after the rapid economic growth period; big trees were not commonly seen before the period. The grassland was more wider in the area until the Taisho era or the very beginning of the Showa era, which go back some decades; the grassland area was at least nearly equal to that of forests or it might exceed the forest area in those days. One of the backgrounds of the change was the thriving of charcoal making from the end of Taisho period, and another one of the backgrounds was the large decrease of the number of cattle and horses kept in the area; the main uses of the land changed greatly from keeping cattle and horses and gathering grass for fodder and fertilizer to making forests to secure wood for charcoal.

Meanwhile, in Akiyoshidai, grassland is still widely seen. This is because the area is designated as a quasi-national park etc., and it is important to keep the landscape of grassland to maintain the value as a tourist spot. However, the area of grassland in Akiyoshidai has been also decreasing and that of forests has been increasing after the rapid economic growth period, although the speed is rather slow. Moreover, large changes in quality have been observed in the grassland; the plant community has been changed and some species are rare now. Furthermore, forests surrounding the grassland also have been changed greatly; the rate of tree species has been changed greatly and most trees have grown bigger. Such changes are due to the great changes of people’s engagement in the grassland and its surrounding forests.

Key words: vegetation landscape changes, rapid economic growth period, west Chugoku Mountains Region, Yawata Highland, Akiyoshidai