Development of Local Subsistence Activities and Protected Area Regime on the Northern Slope of Mt. Fuji

SAITO Haruo

This paper clarifies the reality of subsistence activities, especially regarding the gathering of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) historically, and investigates how such activities have been influenced by the national park system. Records of local people engaging in various gathering activities on the vast range of the northern slope of Mt. Fuji, where they accessed common lands, date back to the beginning of the 18th century, at the latest. Their activities occasionally reach the alpine area of the mountain. After the Meiji era (1860s–1912), these common lands were owned by the government, then the imperial court, and, finally, Yamanashi Prefecture. Accordingly, the commons became substantially institutionalized; in particular, the license system that allows gathering activities even in the alpine area of Mt. Fuji has been established and refined. While a movement advocating that Mt. Fuji and its surrounding area be declared a national park took place during the Taisho era and the beginning of the Showa era (1910s–1930s), local people did not actively commit to it. As Mt. Fuji was designated as a national park in 1931, the whole area of the commons at Mt. Fuji was brought under the national park system. The current national park system designates the alpine and subalpine zone of Mt. Fuji as special protection areas or special areas, which may prohibit the traditional gathering activities. However, commoners' associations still issue licenses for gathering activities even for the alpine zone. When the current “Natural Parks Act,” which established a new system including special protection areas, was enforced in 1965, the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry agreed that local people's activities regarding agriculture and forestry should not be restricted by the new national park system; this would be possible by treating these activities as “existing practice” before the time of enforcement. This is why gathering activities at special protection areas or special areas of the national park system are permitted. In the case of Mt. Fuji, this paper considers that the legitimacy of treating the case as an “existing practice” is guaranteed by the fact that the local gathering activities at alpine area can be dated back to before the Meiji era and that

The activities can be officially recognized because of the license system. However, it can be stated that there is no proper communication between commoners' associations and the local managers of the national park, so conflict may possibly occur in the future.

Keywords: Yamanashi Prefecture, common lands, national park, special protection area, non-timber forest products (NTFPs)