

The Depopulation and Reorganization of Community Life  
—The Case of the colony of Amagase in Nishihara  
Section, Kitayama Village, Nara Prefecture—

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Traditionally, folklorists have had a marked tendency to choose depopulated areas as their favorite field, because it was these remote places that seemed most likely to maintain folkways permitting them an efficient investigation. They never tried, however, to study seriously the problem of depopulation itself. In natural consequence, it has been rare for them to try methodological examinations, such as those aimed at discovering how to interpret depopulation and change in folkways.

In accordance with these reflections, we tried to analyze the colony of Amagase in Nishihara Section, Kami-Kitayama Village, Yoshino District, Nara Prefecture. Three viewpoints, that are 1) the ecological viewpoint 2) the social viewpoint and 3) the religious view and consciousness structure, were defined as analysis indicators to be used in comprehension of the transformation of folkways.

Nishihara is composed of five colonies of Amagase, Hiura, Izumi, Hosohara, Obara. The first two colonies are called "Amagase-gumi" (Amagase group), and the last three are called "Mikumi" (three groups). The Amagase and Mikumi groups were separated from each other by four kilometers, but the abolition, during the Meiji era, of the highway passing through the Amagase area left it abandoned far behind the main highway and urged some of inhabitants to move into the Mikumi area. The reparation works of the National 169 around 1970 made for a decisive urge to leave the Amagase area completely abandoned. Facilities for shopping and traffic communication as well as the human inclination for togetherness must have concentrated inhabitants' dwellings along the roads of Mikumi.

However, even after they dispersed among the inhabitants of Mikumi, members of the Amagase group maintain their original unity performing their

group duties in festivals or mutualaid association events and showing a greater attachment to the Kumi (group) than to the Daiji (section).

In any case, it may be said that the Amagase group, in a way, overcame the danger of depopulation by moving to the Mikumi area and reorganizing their colonies. What made it possible was the their ownership of common forests and worship of a god as symbol of their unity. However, both the Amagase and Mikumi group show great attachment to the Kumi, and it is not so that the life of Nishihara area as a whole is reorganized. Depopulation of the Nishihara area as a whole is, as slow as it is, in progress. The area on the whole will face the need of some action in near future.