

A Love of Paper

Author, Novelist, Screenwriter, **Shion Miura**



PROFILE

Shion Miura

Born in Tokyo in 1976. Naoki Prize in 2006 for "Mahoro ekimae Tada Benriken". Book Store Prize in 2012 for "Knitting the boat". In the summer of 2014, the movie "WoodJob" based on her novel "Kamusari Nana Nichijyo" will be released.

Combining everybody's wisdom together, we can revitalize the forests and mountains

Shion Miura is a popular writer. She has written about many subjects, including young forestry workers. We interviewed her about paper and about Japanese forestry.

I have loved paper since I was very young. I especially like the very thin paper used for dictionaries. Long before I was able to read, I would turn the pages of my parents' dictionary, pretending to be all grown up.

That type of paper is so smooth, it feels cool to the touch. It even sounds nice when turning over the pages. It was my preference for dictionary paper that eventually inspired me to write my novel, 'Hune wo Amu' (Knitting the boat). I also like brown kraft paper, especially those sharp sounds it makes when you handle it. I really love it. Paper can be bent, and folded. It

makes it so good to read books, magazines, and newspaper when relaxing or even lying down. Tablets just can't work like that – they're inflexible, hard to hold, not comfortable to read. And paper doesn't need batteries like a tablet does!

Before writing 'Hune wo Amu', I wrote about people working in forestry. I chose that subject partly because of my love of paper, partly because my grandfather was a forester.

I was born and raised in Tokyo, but my father's parents lived in a little village called Misugi deep in the mountains of Mie prefecture, and when I was little, I went there every summer. Then, almost everyone in the village worked in forestry. It was only natural that I wanted to know what it was all about.

Later, as an adult, I asked my grandparents to introduce me to their neighbors so that I could hear their experiences. When writing my novel, I referred to the stories they had told me, but, at the time, I just wanted to know about forestry. Listening to them, I gradually began to think about environmental issues.

For example, I learnt that their work helps to improve the condition of rivers and even the sea, that forests can prevent landslides, and that taking care of the mountains is very important. It was then that I realized – wow, that's what the forest is for!

Now, however, I hear that Japanese forestry is in decline. With its aging population, my grandparents' village deep in the forest is a microcosm of Japan itself. It represents our future, the future of current cities in Japan. How can we vitalize the community by the wise use of industry? That is the important question when thinking about the future. By using various methods to gather together the wisdom from everyone, I hope that forestry and the mountains can be re-vitalized in the future.



Shion Miura interviewing people involved in forestry around Misugi village.

Marunuma tree planting 2014

Nippon Paper Group, held a tree planting on Saturday, May 24, at Marunuma plateau in the Nikko National Park. About 100 people joined together, and 1000 seedlings of five different local species were planted. The weather was fine, and under the blue sky people enjoyed the planting in Marunuma Plateau's wonderful scenery.



Editor's Note

I went to watch WOODJOB, the film based on Miura's novel. The film follows a young man in his growth from immaturity through forestry work. The present state of Japan's beautiful forests is featured throughout the film, and I felt that the importance of caring for and reviving the forests of Japan was very clearly shown.

Keiko Fujita

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紙季折々

Shiki Oriori

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It's Time to Revive Japan's Forests and its Forestry Industry

Forests enhance our quality of life in many ways;
providing resources,
conserving watersheds
preventing disastrous landslides.

Two thirds of land in Japan is forest, but Japanese forestry is in decline, forests are being neglected.

We ask;

What has caused these problems?

How can Japan's forests be revived?

1 In Japan, although forest resources are plentiful, they are little used, and forest neglect is on the increase.

Two thirds of Japan is covered by forests, of which 40 percent is plantations. Annual forest resources have now reached 100 Million cubic meters; far more than the total Japanese demand of only 70 Million cubic meters*.

2 The history of forests and forestry in Japan

The challenges facing forestry in Japan are closely related to the history of Japanese forests since the end of WWII.

2.1 Post war to 1950s

Large-scale deforestation had been carried out during the war for essential war supplies. Post-war reconstruction made further demands on the wood supply industry, resulting in the forests being effectively devastated. From 1950, tree plantation was being promoted as a greening of the ruined forests. (Figure 1). By the mid 1950s, the demand for firewood and charcoal was decreasing due to society's conversion from using wood to using oil and gas for fuel, but high economic growth was rapidly increasing the need for construction timbers. Therefore, the natural forests, which were good for producing fuel wood, were replaced with plantations of conifers which are better suited for producing building materials.

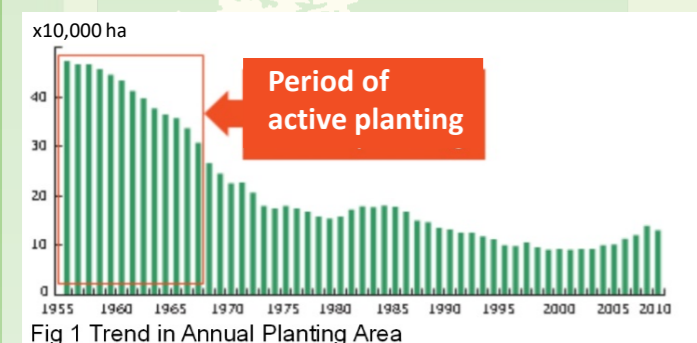


Fig 1 Trend in Annual Planting Area

2.2 1960-70's

Lowering of self-sufficiency ratio by de-restriction of wood imports

Restrictions on wood imports were removed in 1964. Because foreign wood is available in much larger amounts than domestic timber, and because supplies are stable, the demand for imported foreign wood increased, and the relative self-sufficiency ratio of domestic timber was reduced.



Fig 2 Trends in forest resource amount and wood self-sufficiency rate

However, the Japanese domestic utilization rate is only about 30 percent. This is mainly because Japanese wood producers cannot provide the stability of supply required by large scale wood users. Forest owners are now becoming reluctant to continue in forestry. Therefore, the amount of forest neglect is increasing, and Japanese foresters are unable to supply domestic wood in sufficient quantity.

*SOURCE: Annual Report, Forest Agency, Government of Japan (2013)

On the other hand, each year, the total amount of forest resources was increasing due to tree growth (Figure 2)

2.3 Around 1975 and later

Decline of forestry and sluggish domestic timber prices

The exchange rate of the Yen rose continuously after 1975, and the volume of wood imports kept on rising. The price of the domestic timber peaked in 1980 and then declined to the point where the costs of logging in and out, tree nursery, and thinning* work, were not being covered. Forestry, and the numbers of forestry workers declined (Figure 3).

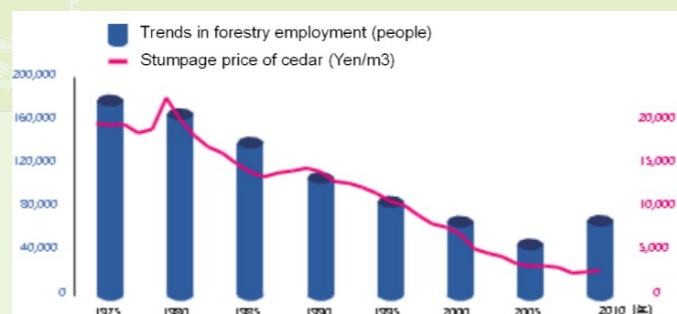


Fig 3 Reduction of forestry workers and the price slump of domestic timber

As a result, artificial forests planted when planting was being encouraged, are still growing, even though they have entered the harvest season. Without proper harvesting, areas of neglected forest are now noticeable. This means that the man-made forests are now aging, and that leaving the next generation in Japan with forest resources in a vibrant state has become difficult (Figure 4)

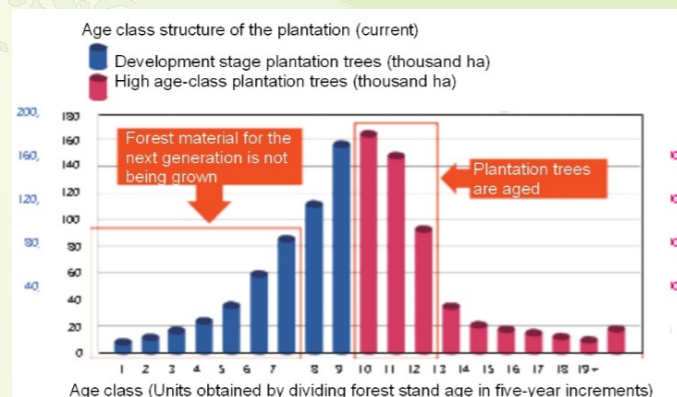


Fig 4 Age class structure of the plantation

* Thinning: In a forest trees grow in high density, requiring 'thinning out' by selective cutting down.

3 Reduction of the benefits of forests due to the decline of forestry

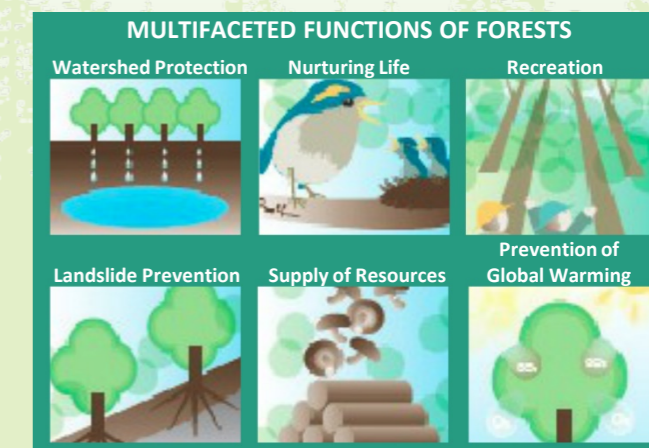
Multi-functional effectiveness of forests is being reduced, leading to social problems.

Forests play many important roles, not just the supply of resources such as wood. Forests guard against landslides, protect water sources, absorb carbon dioxide (the main cause of global warming), and conserve biodiversity (by providing a habitat to a wide variety of flora and fauna).

In artificial plantations, where care such as thinning has been delayed, undergrowth is inhibited, resulting in exposed ground and increased risk of soil flowing.

When thinning is not carried out and forest density increases, tree trunks grow tall and thin. This not only

increases susceptibility to wind, snow and pest damage, but also decreases the effectiveness of watershed protection and landslide prevention.



4 Forestry regeneration efforts

A variety of initiatives are now being promoted, aimed at regenerating and revitalizing forestry in Japan.

● National efforts: Forestry regeneration plan

In 2009, the government announced the "Forest and Forestry Regeneration Plan". Forestry revival requires cost reduction, and forest management education. Efforts have been put in place to realize this plan.

Main initiatives in the forests and forestry revival plan

- 1 Road maintenance and the use of the machinery. To perform forestry operations effectively, good road access is important. Roads enable the use of forestry machines, resulting in increased productivity.
- 2 Intensification of forest management. A system has been devised, for adjacent forest owners to cooperate in implementing many forest operations.
- 3 Human resource development. To improve productivity, a human resource development program has been designed to empower managers to train workers in knowledge, technology and skills.

● Efforts of Nippon Paper Group: the two values of company-owned forests

With 90,000 hectares of company-owned forests, Nippon Paper is one of the largest private sector forestry owner in Japan.

Nippon Paper has included the concept of "sustainable forest management", as proposed by United Nations' 1992 Rio Summit, in the company's basic policy. This includes both the pursuit of economic value, and the pursuit of environmental and social values.

Pursuing economic value

Nippon Paper Lumber handles the products of Nippon Paper's forests. They have expertise in dealing with everything from high quality industrial timber to wood chips for paper-making or fuel. Thus, the company can

use all wood from the forests without waste, marketing the products efficiently and profitably.

In 2014, Nippon Paper signed an agreement between the company-owned forests in Kumamoto, Yatsushiro district, and other private forests, such as Yatsushiro, and the Yashiro Forest Association, to co-operate in logging, thinning, etc., reducing costs and improving efficiency for all.

Pursuing environmental and social values

Nippon Paper's approach to a "social contribution through the exertion of environmental protection function" is typically as follows.

1 Acquisition of forest certification

All company owned forests in Japan have SGEF forest certification, signifying that its "sustainable forest management" procedures have been examined and certified by a third party.

2 Installation of environmental forest area

20% of the company-owned forests in Japan, are kept free from timber felling for production. These "environmental forest areas" preserve the functions of forests such as watershed ecology and conservation.

3 Conservation of biodiversity

The company promotes the conservation of Blakiston's fish owl in cooperation with Wild Bird Society of Japan.

4 Implementation of environmental education

Nippon Paper runs environmental education for the public, using the company-owned forests.



Fun school for learning about forests and paper (Suganuma forests, Gumma prefecture)



Reserve survey of Blakiston's fish owl