

The activities of provincial land proprietors in the capital of Kyoto:
The Niimi Clan of Bicchu Province and the office of Mikurashiki
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The research done recently on the activities of provincial-based proprietors of the warrior class (*kokujin* 国人) during the Muromachi and Sengoku periods tends to place emphasis on their relationship to the shoguns of the time. However, while it is clear that *kokujin* did profit from their connections to the shogunate while in Kyoto, their activities in the capital were by no means confined to that relationship alone. The present paper attempts to describe the actual circumstances surrounding *kokujin* life in the capital and thus clarify its true meaning.

It was the custom of *kokujin* who managed the provincial estates donated to Toji temple, like the Niimi Clan of Bicchu Province, to locate kinsfolk in Kyoto in order to further their political and economic interests, including appointments to act on Toji's behalf at the temple's estates located in their home regions. In the case of the Niimi Clan, their Kyoto activities resulted in the appointment to the office of Mikurashiki 御蔵職, which involved the management of the storehouses (Kurodo-dokoro 蔵人所) and financial affairs of the imperial family and became intimately connected with iron production in various provinces. During the Tokugawa period it was the Matsugi 真継 Clan who would wrest the office of Mikurashiki from the Niimi Clan and thus govern over the country's cast iron founders; but during the preceding Sengoku period, it was the Niimi Clan who set the precedent of imperial control over the iron founders of the Kinai Region.

As the manager of Toji's Niimi Estate, the Niimi Clan was able to utilize the estate's iron production facilities to its advantage through commercial traffic with the ironmongers of the Kinai Region, whom the Niimis also employed to carry the estate's tribute to Toji temple in Kyoto. In other words, in their close

dealings with Kinai merchants on the commercial routes in search of cast iron, the Niimis used these connections in their successful management of Toji's estate. It was through this process that the Niimi Clan set up its relations with the iron founders of the Kinai Region and profited from the office of Mikurashiki to the benefit of both parties.

The author concludes that *kokujin* of the Sengoku period were ambitiously involved in the aggrandizement of their interests through their activities in the capital of Kyoto in the midst of diverse personal relationships with the capital's most powerful people, including not only the shogunate, but also the great religious institutions and the imperial family, thus protecting their interests both at their local seats of power and at the central core of authority in the capital.