The Bugyōnin Hōshō of the Muromachi Bakufu:
A Fundamental Study

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The bugyōnin hōshō (literally “administrative directives”) make up the largest number of monjo (documents) of the Muromachi Bakufu that still remain today. A thorough analysis has not been attempted due to the great number of directives. By examining various names of the gozen-bugyō, not including those in the hōshō that were exempted from tansên (special national tax), the paper proves that those who signed ikenjo (briefs) and hōshō were not the bugyōnin (“administrators”), but were a few of the gozenbugyō who possessed special qualifications. Such a qualification would be, for example, to serve at the onshō-gata (office of rewards).

The statistics of those who signed the hōshō taken from the remaining documents, show that most of the hōshō were signed only by some of the gozenbugyōshū (corps of administrators). This is because some of the bugyōnin exclusively exercised most of the bugyō.

This oligarchic system comprising a handful of powerful bugyōnin, led to the intervention of official bureaucrats in Bakufu politics around the Eikyo era. As a result, they were, (1) prevented from serving the Bakufu (2) ordered to be put on their good behavior by the shōgun and the kanrei (deputy shogun), and some of the bugyōnin committed suicide.

In the second section, attention is paid to changes in the matters dealt with in the bugyōnin hōshō. As the position of the shōgun was enhanced, bugyōnin hōshō tended to substitute the kanrei hōshō. When Yoshimori became shōgun, the contents of the bugyōnin hōshō diversified immediately. Directives that were related to military rights of command, such as gunzei saisokujō and kanjō were issued, usurping the kanrei’s authority.

Later on, shōgun Yoshiki, who feared excessive intervention by the bugyōnin in politics and military affairs, deprived them of the military right of command pertaining to yuhitsu-kata (secretaries).

After the fifth year of Eishō, they were in charge of merely official administrative documents; gunzei saisokujō and kanjō were all issued in
the form of gonaisho.

In the final section, a brief sketch is given of the characteristics and features of the Muromachi Bakufu after the Onin War, taking into consideration the previous discussion of the bureaucratic system in relation to the issue of hōsho.