A Study on the Gonaisho "Private Letters" during the Muromachi Bakufu

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Gonaisho are administrative documents which were signed by the Shōgun. Originally written in the form of private letters, they were delivered as informal documents. The letters dealt in matters not suitable for official documents and were sent to locations and people where official documents were not normally sent. As the Shōgun of the Muromachi Bakufu acted as an autocrat, unlike the Shōgun of the Kamakura Bakufu, these letters gradually came to function as official administrative documents. At that time the most important documents were Gunzeisaisokujō demanding military service of the gokenin, "followers" of the bakufu, throughout Japan and Kanjō promising rewards for their service during warfare. These were mainly in the hands of the Shōgun's brother Tadayoshi. Afterwards in the beginning of the period when Yoshiakira and Yoshimitsu, who became the Shōgun's relatives, were powerful, the documents were issued as the most important official documents called Gohannomigyōsho. Meanwhile, during the time of Yoshimitsu Saisokujō and Kanjō changed to Gonaisho (private letters) and after Yoshinori, all of the documents were delivered as private letters. Through this alteration in the style of documents, an analysis is attempted of the changes in Bakufu politics.