Memorandum on Transmission of Tang Ceremonies

—Rites and Ceremonies in the Provinces—

FURUSE Natsuko

The establishment of ceremonies in ancient Japan, together with other systems of the legal state, cannot be discussed without considering the influence of Tang. Compared with the study of statute, however, the study of how Tang ceremonies were passed on, and comparative studies of Japanese ceremonies with those of Tang fall far behind. This paper deals with rites and ceremonies in the provinces, and examines their relationship with Tang ceremonies, from the viewpoints of regulations and reality, to clarify one aspect of how Tang ceremonies were passed on.

First of all, Japanese ceremony books edited in the early Heian period do not contain regulations on rites and ceremonies in the provinces. As background to this, it can be said that the Japanese administrative system was not as centralized as that of Tang. Bureaucracy did not reach the rank and file in the provinces, and many aspects of authority were delegated to provincial governors. Because of this, the central government did not stipulate detailed regulations on rites and ceremonies in the provinces. In particular, after the early Heian period, the system of entrusting local politics to provincial governors was established, and this tended to become more and more common. Customary laws were formed in each province from the early Heian period onwards and detailed regulations concerning rites and ceremonies came to be stipulated in them. In Japan, provinces followed other provinces’ examples, so it may be supposed that in fact there was not a great deal of difference, even if the central government did not enforce uniform regulations.

Secondly, when the "Great Tang Kaigen (name of era) Ceremony Book" was brought to Japan, and the personal experiences of Kentōshi (Japanese envoys to China) were accumulated, the central government imitated the way of Tang for ceremonies and ceremonial sites from the end of the Nara period to the early Heian period. This was the second stage in the transmission of Tang ceremonies. A similar situation can be found in the provinces. The ceremony of "Commencing business" seen on the "mokkan (narrow strip of wood on which an official message was written) excavated
from the remains of the 'provincial office of Shimotsuke' was the handing-down of the rites on the occasion of the provincial governor's first attendance at his provincial office, shown in volume 126 of the "Great Tang Kaigen Ceremony Book". In the 9th century, the front building of the provincial office disappeared and the front yard was expanded. This paper points out these examples of Chinese customs brought to the provinces by provincial governors.