Uchigami in the Ancient Times

---Starting from a Wooden Tablet Excavated from the Isawa Castle Site---

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A wooden tablet excavated from the Isawa Castle site in Mizusawa City, Iwate Prefecture, was a demand for foodstuffs for archers guarding the "Uchigami" (inner god). From the fact that the site of excavation was at the northwest corner of the local government office, at the center of Isawa Castle, the author took this to means that the Uchigami was enshrined there. Then, perusing historical documents from Ancient Times, we find a mention, for example, in the "Konjaku Monogatarishū", that a god was enshrined at the northwest corner of the Tō-Sanjōden (residence of the Fujiwara Clan), and that the god was called "Uchigami". According to "Sandai Jitsuroku", a northwest corner god was enshrined in the Sakyōshiki (office governing the left half of the capital) and the Oribe-no-Tsukasa (Overseer of the Weavers' "be", or groups). On the other hand, in the provinces, "Uchigami" was also enshrined within Kokufu (the provincial capitals). The above documents all date back to the 9th century or later. A document of the 8th century shows that gods were enshrined at the northwest corner of Gōke (district offices). Such enshrinement of gods at the northwest corner was probably carried out from Ancient Times in Japan. Though it is not clear when these shrines came to be set up in the facilities of government offices, it may be supposed that a small shrine was established for the sake of formality at the northwest corner of the most symbolic building of the central or local government offices. It can be confirmed from folkloric examples in various regions that great importance was attached to the northwest corner as a direction which brings good luck. The belief in the enshrinement of a "Yashiki Gami" (House God) at the northwest corner of houses can be understood to have come from the Uchigami enshrined at the corner of government offices since Ancient Times. According to the results of recent archaeological excavations, the ruins of Taga Castle at the provincial center of Mutsu county, for example, showed that in the government area at its center, buildings were symmetrically and regularly arranged from the initial period through the third period, and there existed no buildings in the northwest section. However, in the latter half of the 9th century, new buildings were constructed only in the northwest section. These had a complex building structure, and they were rebuilt several times. It deserves note that the period of these northwest buildings conforms to the trends in the above historical documents. One of the important problems to be tackled is to make clear when the northwest corner god was enshrined in various offices, and what the nature of the god was. This paper aims only to point out, from the discovery of a single wooden tablet and through the examination of a wide range of documentation, the fact that a god was enshrined in the northwest corner of central or local government offices; and also aims to serve as a document to clarify what really was the Ancient structure of government office and basic faith of the Japanese culture.