Management of Prince’s Palace

—The Eldest Prince and Imperial Brother—

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The term, “Prince’s Palace” is used to mean a royal palace which is the main residence of a prince and run separate to the imperial palace, in ancient times. This paper aims to examine what kind of royal person was able to become the head of a prince’s palace, and under what conditions.

As a result, it was confirmed that the head of a prince’s palace was not necessarily limited to the eldest brother, though there was a close connection with the eldest-prince system. An influential member of royalty with the right of succession to the throne was in charge of the management of the prince’s palace. The eldest prince, that is the eldest of brothers born from the same mother, became the head in most cases. However, the right to manage the palace was often authorized to a brother born from a different mother, but gifted with excellent character and talent. Such a brother was given the special title of “Imperial Brother (Sumeirodo)”. Princes Anahobe-no-miko, Hatsue-no-Naka-no-ô, Karu-no-miko, Ōama-no-miko, and Yuge-no-miko are considered to be examples of such princes. There exists a conventional understanding that “Sumeirodo” meant a brother of the Emperor. However, an examination of examples of usage shows that there were in fact few Imperial Brothers whose brother born from the same mother was on the throne, as the conventional theory supposes. The term was generally used as a title for influential princes, such as Anahobe-no-miko and Yuge-no-miko, who were not the eldest of brothers. If we assume that the usage of “Sumeirodo” cannot date back to before the use of the title of “Tenno” (Emperor), it may be supposed that these princes were originally called “Ôirodo”, as opposed to the title of “eldest brother”.

However, we should note the fact that not all Irodo princes of the same generation as the Emperor were called “Sumeirodo”. It may be considered that only when there was a prince of outstanding character and talent among the second and subsequent brothers, the title of “Sumeirodo” was used supplementarily. The succession to the throne was not determined only by the “principle of the eldest brother”. It is supposed that there underlay a secondary and supplementary principle of succession, which may be called the “principle of Sumeirodo”. It allowed for the possibility of succession from among brothers born from different mothers and took into account the character and talent of the successor, even after the Keitai era, which is regarded as the “age of the eldest brother”.

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