Sei-no-o in Divine Performance

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Sei-no-o, a dance performed by human being and marionette, is one of the riddles in the history of Japanese performing art. Conventionally, Sei-no-o has been understood from the viewpoint of Hōjōe (ceremony in which captured animals and fish are released to mountains, fields, ponds, rivers, etc. on the basis of Buddhist thought) at the Hachiman Shrine in Kyushu, and there was an implicit understanding that it was transmitted from Kyūshū to the Kinki District. In contrast to this understanding, the author considers that Sei-no-o performed by human beings came into being as one of the artistic elements at large temples and shrines in Nara and Kyōto. Sei-no-o dates back to the end of the 9th century at the Tōdai-ji Temple, and to the 11th century at the Goryōe (ceremony to placate revengeful spirits) in Kyōto. The existence in the 12th century of Sei-no-o with a white mask and a drum has been proven. At the Wakamiya Festival of the Kasuga Shrine, Sei-no-o appeared at festivals from the Heian period on. In the Middle Ages, Sei-no-o was also seen at the Hōryū-ji Temple.

The Sei-no-o performed by human beings was transmitted from the Kinki District to the Hōjōe of the Usa Hachiman Shrine, where it was given a mythological significance as a ceremony symbolizing the enhancement of divine prestige after the repulsion of the Mongol invasions. It followed the same pattern as the transformation of the Hachiman Engi (History of the Hachiman Shrine) and its illustrated history. Sei-no-o was also transmitted from Usa to Yusuhara Hachiman and Aso. It was transmitted to Ōtori, Suwa and Kitsuki Shrines as a part of the religious rites of the first-local-shrine and local-government type.

On the other hand, the existence of Sei-no-o performed by a marionette in the Kamakura period centering around the Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine can be proven. It was performed by two marionettes (Takeuchi and Korashin) at the Hinotō Festival served by Ōyamazaki Jinin (subordinates at the shrine of Ōyamazaki). Marionette performances also existed at the Hōjōe of Usa in the Kamakura period, but these are not recognized as Sei-no-o. The marionette performances and Sei-no-o of Usa were dedicated to Hyakudayū (guardian deity of marionette players). The Sei-no-o of Yusuhara Hachiman Shrine is not a marionette performance, either; however, traces of marionette performance do remain, and Zenjinō and Takeuchi were the gods of marionette players. Sei-no-o and marionettes were inseparably related to each other, and it can be said that the Sei-no-o dance by human beings had the meaning of placating the gods of marionettes. The gods Zenjinō and Takeuchi Okami (the great god of Takeuchi) at the Ebisu Shrine in the Tongu (temporary shrine) of the Hōjōe of the USA Hachiman Shrine, and at the Hamadono of the Yusuhara Hachiman Shrine, symbolize the relationship between the market established at the Hōjōe, Ebisu as the god of commerce, and the marionettes that serve Ebisu.

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