Cities and Dosojin-worship

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Dosojin (a wayside Deity) are considered gods of the border. However, this viewpoint alone has not been enough to sufficiently explain the diverse customs that have been handed down in folklore regarding dosojin.

In particular, previous studies had barely included within their scope dosojin-worship in the cities. However, documents point precisely to dosojin-worship in the cities. Before mediaeval times, the capital of Kyoto was the center of activities, but, in the Edo period, there were also a great number of dosojin festivals. In the "Shokoku Fuzoku Toijokotae (Answers to questions regarding customs of the regions)", which records folklore from the early nineteenth century, the dosojin festivals of Akita and Nagaoka clearly reveal how dosojin festivals were conducted, based on the space and hierarchy of the castle towns. This holds true for the cities of Matsumoto and Matsushiro in Shinshu and it can be concluded that the worship of dosojin was closely related to the lives of the people. The function of the dosojin in this respect was not necessarily just closing the border and keeping outsiders from entering. The dosojin also had the function of opening the boundary and was the object of prayers for household prosperity and secure life.

The dosojin came to take on these functions after these border deities came to be given the shape of a double deity with both a male and female body. In the mythology found in the Kojiki and the Nihonshoki, the border deities did not necessarily have any gender and were single-bodied. As these deities acquired sexual characteristics, they came to be regarded as not closing the border but opening it.

A deity originally called "Saeno kami" came to be given the characters for "doso" and later for "dosojin," which led to the pronunciation "do-so-jin". It can be said that, as a result, these deities no longer needed to be restricted to the border and could take on various functions. Even today, dosojin-worship in the cities is repeatedly regenerated.