Later Middle Ages Shoen-system Theory: Results and Issues Raised

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In study of the Muromachi Period today there is a distortion in the continued existence of the shoen-system, which ought to have been dismantled from the power structure due to the contradictions that had been inherent in the ryosyu-system theory. This paper is based on the hypothesis that a later Middle Ages shoen-system theory works well for the overall history of the periods from Nanbokucho to Muromachi, and attempts to reconfigure the history of the research, learning from the results of discussing the major research to date, and taking a foothold in recent research.

In the concept of the shugo-ryokoku-system theory proposed by Keiji Nagahara and Shinichi Sato, factors such as the relatively weak affiliation in the relationship between the shugo and the kokujin, and the reliance on order in the shoen controlled by the shugo have become clear, so the kokujin-ryosyu-system theory has been proposed as an alternative. However, the kokujin ryosyu control was also based in the shoen-system framework on the ground, so it is somewhat unreasonable to envisage a ryosyu-system with the kokujin cut off from the shoen-system and shugo control. In the 1960s, Sato’s “Muromachi Bakufu-ron” proposed a theory of the state in the Muromachi period, and progress was made in elucidating the state functions of the Muromachi period, starting with elucidation of the koden-dansen (public-fields, extra taxes) taxation system by Mutsumi Tanuma. Just how this Bakufu-Shugo setup fitted in with individual ryosyu control and regional society was left as an unresolved issue.

In the 1970s, progress was made with research into Kubo-nengu (public annual tributes) and Kajishi-myoshubiki (rent and services to the landholder) in the later Middle Ages, resulting in the proposal of a shoen-koryo-system, whereby, in the earlier Middle Ages, the shoen and ryosyu could both be seen to have state-like characteristics. Through the 1980s and into the 1990s research emerged that attempted to elucidate the overall structure of regional society without being bound by the framework of earlier work. This was criticized from some quarters as lacking a theory of the power structure, and for this reason, and there is still a need to unearth the opportunities for combining and the variety of interaction between the center and the regions. For that purpose, it is necessary to examine topics such as the significance of the construction of a nationwide military setup, including everything from the structure of credit and trade between the capital and the regions, as can be seen in the daikan-ukeoi-system, to jisha-honjo-ryosyu.