The Shoen System and Akuto

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When an overall view is taken of the shoen system in the Muromachi period—late Middle Ages—emphasis is placed on the Nanbokucho period as a transition point, pointing out a change of nature exemplified by the keyword ichien-ka (standardizing on one range). However, it is known that in the Nanbokucho period, in addition to this sort of change of nature, there was also disturbance by akuto ("bands of evildoers"), and it has recently been suggested that it was the change in nature of the shoen system (or to be more precise, the change in nature of the shoen policy) that led to the emergence of the akuto. Seen from this viewpoint, rather than analyzing the akuto themselves, it is possible to examine the reality of the changes in nature of the shoen system that formed the background. This paper takes the Yano-sho in Harima as the base for analyzing the akuto that emerged there, attempting to bring characteristics of the shoen system in the Nanbokucho period into relief.

First of all, one phenomenon that should be pointed out is that the activities of the akuto can be seen to accompany changes and fluctuations in shoen possession (specifically, changes in ryoshu, or power struggles between ryoshu). Next, when the akuto activities in the zaichi are examined, it can be seen that the in the shoen itself, the situation of the satanin and myoshu / peasants is that they are in opposition to each another. This sort of opposition and competition in the land can be seen throughout the history of the shoen system, but it is thought that it was the combination of this with the changes and fluctuations in shoen possession that lead to the appearance of the akuto. Earlier research had determined changes and fluctuations in shoen possession to be a structural phenomenon occurring from the end of the Kamakura period through the Nanbokucho period, and it is in this period that the activities of the akuto are concentrated.

It is thought that it was the shoen ryoshu and the shouke in the shoen itself linking directly together (ichien-ka) against the akuto that changed the composition of the shoen system in the later Middle Ages, but the when the structure of the shouke keigo is analyzed, it can be seen that there are elements that cannot be sufficiently explained by ichien-ka alone. They are thought to have a similar nature to the akuto that plunged the shoen system into crisis, and it should be considered that the Nanbokucho period shoen system changed its nature to incorporate the akuto situation. Taking this approach, it becomes clear that ichien-ka alone is insufficient, and that to understand the shoen system
in the late Middle Ages the viewpoint should be refocused to also take in the issue of the variety of people situated on the periphery.