The Formation and Development of Royal Goganji Lands: The Saishokoin Temple Lands in Early Medieval Japan

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Royal and regent household shoen of the medieval period were established and transferred as lands attached to their household administrations (i.e., the offices of retired monarchs and their wives, the mandokoro of the regent family) and to temples founded by royal prayer (goganji). By analyzing the formative principles and developmental processes of royal temple shoen, this study addresses the true nature of the emergence and transformation of medieval-period shoen from a perspective different from that of individual research. Specifically, the study investigates the set of shoen attached to Saishokoin temple (founded late 12th century with the prayers of Shunkemon'in) through a combination of related documents and aristocratic diaries. The Saishokoin lands were secured immediately following the temple’s completion with the founding of six shoen for the purposes of provisioning the temple. This was subsequently followed by the creation of additional shoen in response to increased Buddhist services performed on behalf of the state, including hokke hakko services in memory of the temple’s founder. This growth was premised on donations of tax-exempt fields (menden) and kokuga lands by central aristocracy with deep ties to the founder and the Heiji (related by marriage).

The shoen that were eventually established subsumed kokugaryo and other lands, creating a composite shoen the formation of which involved negotiated tax arrangements (i.e., the creation of appended and tax-exempt fields, kano and yoden respectively) with the local kokuga offices of allied administrative officials (kokushu, kokushi). The familiar connection between the shoen and temple activities as exemplified by Saishokoin effectively tied the prayer temple to any transfer of the shoen. This reveals the underlying principle by which successors to the temple, responsible for conducting Buddhist services, requisitioned their means from the attached shoen.

Following the Kamakura bakufu's establishment in the 13th century, the ryoke of the central aristocracy, who controlled the offices of azukarisho for individual shoen, frequently failed to submit temple taxes. This led, under the guidance of the betto and kumon of the temple’s administrative office (mandokoro), to the parceling of land within each shoen for temple use and the exclusion of the ryoke from administrative positions. Including cases in which no subdivision occurred, the principle guarantors of temple needs were the local managers (jito-akesho), a fact from which a backdrop of coordinated policy with the bakufu can be inferred. This conclusion differs markedly from prior studies of land parceling and jito-akesho conducted within the parameters of research on the ryoshu system. With the new issues it raises, the study provides a perspective that questions the relations between the power of the Kamakura bakufu and transformations in the system of control over shoen.