The Transformation and Reorganization of Miyaza in the Villages of Medieval and Early Modern Japan

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This paper investigates the transformation and reorganization of the miyaza (council of elders who represented families who claimed association with a local shrine and who annually elected a shrine official to run festivals) and the background to these changes in the village of Hattori, Heguri-gun in Yamato-no-kuni (present-day Hattori Oaza, Ikaruga-machi, Ikoma-gun, Nara Prefecture) during the Medieval and Early Modern periods. The materials used for this study are 225 documents that have been handed down by the Hattori Kagura Association of Hattori Susano-in-ji shrine.

A miyaza association (kesshu) began to appear in Hattori village in the 14th century in connection with Shinpuku-ji temple and a shrine dedicated to Gozutenn. The association became an association of elder sons in the 17th century. There was a conflict between the miyaza association and non-miyaza members among village officials, but a compromise was reached by establishing arato, who were new miyaza members, and wakiza, who were subordinate to the miyaza. However, discrimination within the miyaza meant that the barriers between both became stronger, with the result that the miyaza transformed into an elder sons’ association, which was organized with the family as its basic unit. This signifies the formation of a system of family rankings that lies at the core of the miyaza. It was accompanied by the disappearance of the miyaza’s function of overseeing the entire village, and resulted in the functions of the miyaza being restricted to a religious function, such as performing religious services and Buddhist memorial services, and a regulator of social position.

In the second half of the 18th century, the structure of the elder sons association was altered so that its membership of 26 was reduced to a membership of 12, whereupon the conflict with village officials rekindled and deepened. Then, as a result of talks at the shrine (宮出入) the village officials moved in to take control of the tutelary guardian SHUFUKUDEN, and on top of this the right to control Gozutenn shrine dedicated to the tutelary deity and Shinpuku-ji temple was also taken over by the village officials. In the meantime, the Shinpuku-ji temple elder sons’ association became the Gozutenn shrine miyaza during the second half of the 18th century, and then in the first half of the 19th century it became a kagura association. At this time, whereas the main guild (miyaza) had been a fourteen member association, a new nine member association was formed against the backdrop of pressure from village officials, resulting in a dual sys-
tem for the miyaza. The main guild adopted the name Kagura Association for the new guild, which was fully cognizant of the Kagura religious services performed by the eight associations from three hamlets that belonged to the Tatsuta-jinja shrine (Tatsuta branch shrine). The purpose behind this was to use the authority of Tatsuta-jinja shrine to flaunt their supremacy over the new guild. With underlying pressure from the village officials, the new guild became closely associated with Susanoo-jinja shrine, which was the successor to Gozutenno shrine, and is believed to have developed into the Keichin Association which was fully cognizant of the traditional celebration called KETCHIN. This reorganization which was a consequence of the transformation of the miyaza made discrimination within the miyaza become firmly entrenched, and saw the right to control miyaza celebrations shift from the Kagura Association to the Keichin Association, within which village officials wielded power behind the scenes.