Izumo Kokuzo and Ochi-mizu

WADA Atsumu

In ancient Japan, there existed a belief in the water of youth (elixir of life), known as "ochimizu". In the poetry anthology the Manyoshu there are references to "ochi" and its variant "otsu" in eleven poems in twelve passages, written using various different characters, and it was believed that ochimizu is found on the moon or in Tokoyo, the land of eternal youth. Other historical documentation on the water of youth include those regarding the belief in "Tokoyomushii" (eternal worm) spread from eastern regions (Tougoku) to the Kinai region by Ooube no Oo in the third year of the Kogyoku era (644), the legend of Mizunoe no Urashimako, and a reference to the Bisen (beautiful spring) of Mt. Tado in the imperial edict of November 17 in the third year of the Reiki era (717) changing the name of the era to Yoro (the era of caring for the aged). These examples have been the subject of many discussions to date. However, with regard to the ochimizu associated with the Kokuzo (local ruling family) of Izumo, there is little mention. This paper analyzes the words to the Izumo Kokuzo Kanyogoto (Shinto prayer of the Kokuzo of Izumo) and by comparing it with the offerings mentioned in the Kanyogoto section of Article 36 of the Engi Shiki regulations (Codes of the Engi Era) regarding extraordinary festivals, to show the fact that the water drawn by the newly-appointed Kokuzo of Izumo in Misawa in Nita-gun, Izumo was offered as ochimizu to the Emperor.

In the fourth section of the Izumo Kokuzo Kanyogoto, eloquent words are used to describe the various offerings presented to the Emperor by the Kokuzo of Izumo on the occasion of reporting the Kanyogoto. However, with regard to the passage "(he) became as youthful as the young seaweed growing on the old river banks here and there, youthful as if the still water cleansing the offerings flowed back upwards", there are no corresponding offerings to be found in the Article 36 of the Engi shiki regarding extraordinary festivals.

There been few, if any, interpretations of this passage that consider it as an example of ochimizu; however, it can be said that the Kokuzo of Izumo offered ochimizu to the Emperor. This ochimizu is the water of Misawa in Nita-gun, Izumo, mentioned in the "Izumo no kuni Fudoki (Records of Izumo)" and in this paper the author gives his views on this point, based on field studies in Misawa. The paper also touches upon the historical significance of the fact that ochimizu was offered to the Emperor by the Kokuzo of Izumo and on how the ochimizu was used.