The Custom of Teramoto

HOUZAWA Naohide

Teramoto refers to the right to have sons taken in by particular temples as the head priests, and by extension the right to appoint and dismiss the head priests of particular temples and the right to control temples and the families (or the heads of those families) that possess those rights. The research described in this paper examines several examples of teramoto related to local temples, such as Reisho-ji temple in Wazuka-go Ishitera village in Yamashiro-no-kuni and Konsho-ji temple in Yama-no-bo village Hirose-gun, in Yamato-no-kuni. It is believed that there were no specific social status-related criteria for the teramoto of local temples. Furthermore, local temples that followed the teramoto custom, were not restricted to temples where members of the teramoto families had been buried for generations, but included temples and shrines, and temples with a wide range of member families whose status of members was guaranteed by the head priest. What is more, there are no signs of a relationship between the custom of teramoto and specific religious sects.

During the Early Modern period, the custom of teramoto was to be found in the Kinai region and mainly in Yamato. I would like to suggest that one reason behind this was the influence the custom of teramoto at Kofuku-ji temple had on local temples since the Medieval period. Furthermore, I propose that differences in the thoroughness with which temples were reorganized into the honmatsu system and the extent to which control of temples was exercised by main temples and local neighborhood associations has a correlation with the presence or absence of the custom of teramoto in other regions.