OHARA Yugaku and Groups of Sei-gaku Disciples: the Formation and Development of the Zen'ya Organization

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OHARA Yugaku was an advocate for the movement for agrarian reform through the practice of moral education and through economic and technical practices such as the Senzo-kabu Kumiai, and was active in the Toso region during the latter part of the Early Modern Period. These practices referred to as Yugaku's "Sei-gaku" were practices that generated excellent results and were rated highly among peasants, thus earning him a great many disciples. However, this success attracted the suspicion of the Bakufu authority, and, beginning with the Ushiwata Village Incident, the court case against Yugaku lasted six long years, culminating in his suicide in 1858. This paper throws new light on Yugaku and his groups of disciples beginning from the time when Yugaku was an itinerant earning his daily food by telling fortunes and through reciting waka poems, through to the rise of Yugaku's Sei-gaku in the Toso region, particularly in Nagabe village, and the construction of Kaishinro, his educational center, and also investigates the organizations created by Yugaku and his disciples. It is not conceivable that Yugaku's Sei-gaku managed to obtain more than 600 disciples over the course of a few years in the early 1840s as a result of the individual activities of Yugaku alone. Further, there is also a problem in methodology employed in works written on Yugaku where in the process of honoring the man all of the practices are attributed to Yugaku. It is important that we turn our attention to organizations, of which the Zen'ya is a representative example, which were created mainly owing to the existence of high-ranking disciples such as ENDO Ryozaimon of Nagabe village and SUGAYA Matazaemon of Shotokuji village who were largely responsible for these organizations. It was the peasants themselves who formed the organizations that pursued vigorous activities and were linked by means outside the framework of an authoritarian mechanism during the time that Yugaku was engaged in activities across the Toso region. This paper also sheds light on the specific nature of these organizations. These organizations supported Yugaku's activities and resulted in the construction of Kaishinro, his educational center. In the respect that they are closely related to events that occurred from the construction of Kaishinro up to the Ushiwata Village Incident, they are significant when considering Yugaku's Sei-gaku activities. I also expose the relationships of these organizations with the Narita district disciple group, the Ueda and Komoro disciple groups in Shinshu (in present-day Nagano prefecture) and also with the Takamatsu family, which appears at the prosecution of Yugaku in Edo.