A Study of the Process of Settlement of Itinerant Fishermen and Itinerant Merchants in Choshi

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The Boso region is known for attracting many fishermen from other provinces who came there to fish during the Edo Period. In particular, there have been numerous research findings on the activities of fishermen from Ki Province (in present-day Wakayama prefecture) in the region that spans the Kujukuri coastline. This paper does not focus on the region along the Kujukuri coast, but instead pays attention to the process of settlement within Choshi society by people referred to as "itinerant fishermen" and "itinerant merchants" in the region known today as Choshi city district in Chiba Prefecture. In other words, it looks at the process through which these "itinerant" workers ceased to be itinerant.

Choshi, situated near the mouth of the Tone River, is an area of land that prospered as a distribution center. The process of unearthing information about the places of origin of the "itinerants" who came to Choshi and the sorts of processes they went through in order to settle in Choshi society also reveals one aspect of a unique cultural foundation that came to be formed by the inhabitants in this region with respect to the way they embraced many "itinerants".

I examined the death register of Jokoku-ji temple belonging to the Jodo Sect (in present-day Kasuga-cho, Choshi City) covering the period from the second half of the seventeenth century through to the beginning of the eighteenth century in order to find as many details as possible about the places of origin of the "itinerants." As a result, I discovered that they did not only come from Ki Province as has been previously suggested, but that they encompassed a variety of visitors from an extremely wide variety of regions. Furthermore, it may be conjectured from the occupations of those who had a memorial service held for them at the temple that during the same period there was a wide variety of occupations in Choshi and that it was an extremely prosperous town.

Also, for the purpose of finding details about how these "itinerants" came to settle within Choshi society, I conducted a survey of the households of those that came from Ise Province (in present-day Mie prefecture) and Ki Province. This survey revealed that some of the "itinerants" boarded with leading "local" families, and it was under this patronage that they built cooperative relationships with "locals," resulting in turn in their settling down as "locals" themselves.