The Sagami Oyama Faith in Toso during the Early Modern Period: Various Issues Surrounding the Re-organization of Parishioner Association

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Sagami Oyama in Isehara City, Kanagawa Prefecture was the center of a faith that dates from ancient times that had a great many followers from mainly the Kanto region. Considerable work has been undertaken by TANAKA Sen’ichi and others on the activities of the Oyama priests who contributed to the dissemination of this faith. In other words, there have been attempts to demonstrate numerically from records passed down through the families of these priests the process through which this faith prospered at the end of the Edo period, largely through the Oyama Fudo temple.

The object of this paper is to conduct a study on the formation and development of the Sagami Oyama faith from the Edo period through to the first half of the twentieth century using the Toso region in Chiba Prefecture as a model on the basis of previous research and materials from some of the faith’s followers. The method adopted for this study first entails an analysis of the inscriptions on wooden swords presented as offerings in 1763 to Ryufuku-ji temple in Unakami-machi and related materials, for examining the sphere of the Oyama faith in this region and the structure of Oyama associations. This data is also matched against the records of Oyama priests who gave the followers accommodation. By restricting the region under investigation and conducting a comparison of materials from those who contributed to the faith and those who accepted the faith in this way, the methods by which the religious leaders obtained their faith and the conditions for accepting the faith on the part of the believers becomes clear. Next, I study the changes to the faith as a result of the forced separation between Shintoism and Buddhism, and the response of followers to this separation. In other words, mainly through materials that belonged to the Oyama priests, I study the reaction of the people in the Toso region to the abolition of Oyama Fudo, where the wooden swords were presented as offerings, and the shift to a unilateral focus for the faith centered on Aburi Shrine.

These studies reveal that during the middle of the Edo Period the Oyama faith in the Toso region was characterized by a physical presence mainly centered around Ryufuku-ji temple. However, at the end of the Edo Period the enthusiastic development of family temples following the danka system (temples supported by their parishioners) by the Oyama priest MASUDA Gennoshin in the Toso region resulted in the formation of Oyama religious associations that served as a type of religious fraternity. However, even though from the start of the Meiji period the Oyama establishment pursued the separation of Shinto and Buddhism and attempted to reorganize the Oyama Fudo association into Keishin associations that are based on the Shinto religion, it was
only about 20% successful in its attempt to do so. Although the relationship between the dissemination of the Oyama faith and the spread of the Neo-Confucianism of OHARA Yugaku in the Tosō region at the same time is not clear, it is evident that Keishin associations were formed in the regions where there was Neo-Confucianism, though it is questionable that Neo-Confucianism that had turned to Shinto from the Meiji period matched the teachings of the Keishin associations.