Magicality and Rationality in Medieval Buddhism

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When thinking about the issue of magic in medieval society, there are two directions to the argument. The first is to look at the Middle Ages from the viewpoint of escaping from magic, while the second is to acknowledge that the Middle Ages structurally made magic indispensable. The former angle was suggested by Mr. Hidetoshi Akamatsu and Mr. Susumu Ishii. However, in medieval society curses functioned as substantive violence, and the emperors and shoguns' gojio-so - the monks who prayed for peace and security - prayed for defense against these curses using immense wealth and vast labor. From this point of view, the idea suggested by these two men that the fear of curses waned during the Middle Ages cannot be justified.

Having said this, however, as rational mentality was steadily developing, the focus of the issue becomes the relationship between Kenmitsu Buddhism and rationality. Therefore in this article, I have examined the book "Tosan Orai", and explained that (1) rationality and critical faculties were secured by the principle of adducing evidence, whereby the answer was found after searching at length through domestic and foreign literature and (2) the above principle was nurtured from the Kenmitsu Buddhism debate and philology research as the seedbed. Moreover, I have pointed out that also in Mikkyo (Esoteric Buddhism) prayers (1) monks prayed for cure of diseases, incorporating medical technology and (2) advance celebration rituals at Ichinomiyas, the first shrines, with the hope of abundant harvests, were based on accomplishment of agricultural technology. As such, I have argued that sophisticated rationalism fused with magic and magicality that adopts advanced rationality is characteristic of Kenmitsu Buddhism.

Furthermore, as reasons why Kenmitsu Buddhism managed to reign at the top of the magical establishment throughout the Middle Ages, I have raised three points, namely, (1) fullness and depth of quality in bibliographical references, (2) day-to-day disciplines of monks who conducted prayers and (3) highly developed theories in justifying curses.

Lastly, I have concluded that the co-existence of rationality and magicality and mix of magical rationality and rational magicality are not only characteristic of Kenmitsu Buddhism, but should be regarded as having a super-historical capacity at one level or another, and penetrating through to modern society.

Key words: Kenmitsu Buddhism, Tosan Orai, gojio-so, curses, the principle of adducing evidence.