Words and Objects in Portrait Expression: The Positioning of Nise-e, the Portraits

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In this article, I have attempted to sectionalize the period of Nise-e using "Nise e kotoba" as a pivotal point. "Nise e kotoba" was produced by order of the Emperor Go-Horikawa, and is the explanation section of the volumes of portraits, which consist of Nise-e of eight people distinguished in practical arts at the time. Before and after the formation of "Nise e kotoba", Nise-e, featuring a single art - the same as or similar to the eight practical arts adopted in the above volumes - have been produced intensively. A point that attracts attention is the way in which "Nise e kotoba" summarizes the movements of Nise-e production during this period, and issues a strong canonicity to create a single unit.

The philosophy of Nise-e shown in "Nise e kotoba," also evident from the fact that it tries to display how active practical arts are, has a Confucian theocratic doctrine, whereby the rise of elegant accomplishments is evidence of the prosperity of a state. Nise-e on the theme of practical arts were produced during the period when Kujo Michiie led court politics. It is thought that Michiie also led the formation of the aforementioned philosophy of Nise-e. Michiie's political thinking can be recognized by its attempt to consciously return to the Confucian Tokuchi doctrine (governed by moral virtue). It is understandable also from the fact that his thinking is in line with the trend of Nise-e from around the period of the Emperor Go-Horikawa, favoring practical arts as their theme, represented by the "Nise e kotoba". Nise e was tangible proof of Tokuchi.

However, Nise-e after Michiie passed away changed in nature from its role as evidence of Confucian theocratic doctrine and Tokuchi. By contrast, Nise-e before Michiie appeared fused with an area containing strong specifics called Gyoji-e, pictures of events, and was unable to establish ample intellectual abstractiveness. As such, the history of Nise-e can be divided into three periods, with the Michiie period in the middle and beforehand and afterwards.

Due to the fact that a portrait is a reproduction of an absent body in general, it tends to be regarded as a matter of natural materials and lives rather than one of cultural expression. Therefore, the relationship with magic, which tries to artificially intervene in the physical principle, is brought into question. As described above, however, Nise-e expresses linguistic thoughts, rather than material nature including lives. Study on Nise-e needs to shift its viewpoint from objects to words.

Key words: Nise-e, Nise e kotoba, Kujo Michiie, portrait, magic