Yoshida Kanetomo and Yoshida Shinto/Saijo-sho

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In the late Middle Ages, Yoshida Shinto was established by Yoshida Kanemoto. It was in the first and second years of Bunmei (1469 and 1470), around the same time that the Shinto theory and saijo-sho, the religious facility, were established. Shinto theory and saijo-sho were constructed in a joint relationship. Up until Onin, Kanetomo was keen on deifying spirits in the court at the position of jingi-kan as a member of the Urabe family. However, owing to the turmoil of the Onin war, political operations and Shinto rituals were forced to backslide. In addition, Kanetomo encountered the destruction of his own residence and Yoshida Shrine by fire as well as a murder case. As such, he started to embark on a new understanding of Shinto.

Kanetomo steadily advanced a counterfeit of the Shinto theory and its concealment in the first part of the Bunmei Period. Based on research by Osamu Kubota and Nagao Nishida to date, it is now clear that Yoshida Shinto was established at the beginning of the Bunmei Period. However, credibility of the historical papers has not been sufficiently discussed. In particular, ‘Sogen Shinto seishi’ in “Nihongo-seigi” is an important historical paper that makes it possible to determine the establishment of Yoshida Shinto. For this reason, I have examined initiation documents included in the paper, together with their credibility. Kanetomo, who became a “virile age” at the beginning of Bunmei, overcame difficulties at Onin and established a new Shinto theory by writing the ‘seishi’. ‘Seishi’ was the confirmation of his own intention.

Together with the construction of the Shinto theory, saijo-sho was also constructed in the early days of the Bunmei Period. Enshrined there from the beginning were the deities of about three thousand official shrines across the country listed in engi-shiki ordained in ancient times. Going as far as creating a counterfeit, Kanetomo obtained the authentication for this by official documents. Here we can see a bold move by Kanetomo to deceive even the noble society. The creation of saijo-sho meant the end of traditional worship since ancient times. At the same time, most worship of the Imperial court faced cessation here. After fabrication of the secret by frequently deceiving noble society, Kanetomo’s Yoshida Shinto deepened its connection with regional shrines from the latter half of Bunmei, and established the position of “Shinto chojo” family as the leader in the shrine world.

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