Emperors and Folk Wisdom Regarding Shokue and Shojin-ho in the Middle Ages

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This article looks at how magic and religion in the pre-modern age regulated occupations and technology, moves of authority, and moreover, common people’s lives through the ways in which shokue, touching impurity, and shojin-ho existed during that period. Then, from a demonstrative point of view, it criticizes the generally accepted theory of government control over the impurity conception and the view whereby sacred space was maintained for emperors, the imperial palace and the Ise Shrine and eta, kiyo-me and kawaramono built up “impurities that could not be eradicated even through bukki, mourning or misogiharae, a form of Shinto purification.” In this article, I have pointed out historical evidence that shokue repeatedly occurred at the imperial palace in the Muramachi Period and that emperors carried out shiko-hai, Prayer to the Four Quarters (a Japanese imperial New Year’s ceremony) and mainichi-hai, everyday prayer, as political operations even when they were impure under the excuse that these were not Shinto rituals. Wheneve a joko (a retired emperor) or kokubo (an empress dowager), the genealogical father or mother, passed away, a humble hermitage called Iro was made to retreat in mourning for fourteen days. I reveal that this was a magic ritual designed to lustrate the impurity of death through misogi and harae, forms of Shinto purification. As such, I have pointed out that the medieval emperors and their palace were in a world where impurity and purity co-existed.

Secondly, I have examined the historical papers of “Bunpo-ki,” which is regarded as the first bukki ordinance by the Ise Shrine, and point out that this was a collection of individual shojin-ho cases on how Shinto priests and common people in the Tokai area dealt with shokue. I have unfolded that through folk wisdom in the area in order to carry on occupations on a preferential basis, periods of monoini, fasting, and hinki, taboo, were reduced, and an order that “a person who cleans dead cows and horses must not hesitate after the period of impurity” created, Additionally, social thought existed that the impurities of discriminated people could also be dissipated and eradicated.

Thirdly, lower class people in the Tokai area between the end of the Kamakura Period and the Northern and Southern Courts Period recused themselves from funerals of dead people, and carried out a unique way of burying by abandoning a corpse called "nosute” and “hayagake” “in a bid to avoid shokue.” This was because of “suspicion of death” in medieval society and people took this action in the hope of resurrection. I have pointed out that nosute and hayagake were folk wisdom of the lower classes based on a rational intellectual system.

I have indicated that while medieval emperors and their palaces functioned within the frame of the shokue principle, regional folk wisdom made the shokue principle relative and prioritized occupations activities for survival.

Key words: shokue in the imperial palace, ritual of Iro, suspicion of death, nosute, hayagake, folk wisdom

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