Miya-za Studies: Past and Present: Concept, To-ya System, and Change

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This article studies miya-za, which is spread widely as an organization for religious services in Shinto shrines mainly in the western part of Japan. It deals particularly with miya-za in the Chugoku area and northern part of Kyushu, and analyzes them by comparison with miya-za in the Kinki area, aiming to clarify the structure of miya-za and its regional variations and also examine the modern changes of miya-za.

The first discussion in this article focuses on the concept of miya-za. The study discusses the internal structure of miya-za to define its concept. Miya-za is defined as an "organization for religious services in Shinto shrines on the principle of the to-ya system in certain local communities." Paying attention to the internal structure of miya-za, whether it takes the form of kabu-za or mura-za, miya-za may be defined as an organization for religious services with the characteristics of internal equality among houses and external closure and exclusiveness (sometimes secrecy).

The second discussion focuses on the problem of the regional varieties of miya-za. This article presents the "ie to-ya system" and "kumi to-ya system" as regional types of miya-za. The ie to-ya system is a to-ya system on the principle of direct assignment of member houses of miya-za for the turn of to-ya. This to-ya system is seen in the Kinki area. On the other hand, the kumi to-ya system does not assign directly each member of miya-za for the turn of to-ya, but determines indirectly the turn of toya according to the order of region, kumi (group), etc. This system is seen in the Chugoku area from the Harima area in Hyogo to the west, and in the Kunisaki Peninsula in northern Kyushu.

The third discussion focuses on the modern change of miya-za. The following points are clarified through miya-za in the Chugoku area and the Kunisaki Peninsula. One is the change from kabu-za to mura-za particularly by the spread of the ideas of human rights and equality. The other is the change of the method of bearing the cost of festivals. It was changed from the "to-ya burden type" (a particular to-ya bears the cost) to the "miya-za burden type" (all houses bear the cost equally). The modern miya-za studies must continue to examine the severe reality of miya-za.

Key words: Organization for religious service in Shinto shrines, Miya-za, To-ya system, Ie to-ya system, Kumi to-ya system