Transformation and Development of Miya-za in Okayama Prefecture: Focusing on the Case Example in Takase, Niimi City

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This article studies the transformation and reorganization of miya-za in Takase, Shingocho in Okayama Prefecture (current Takase, Niimi City) known as the Niiminoshio area from a folkloric viewpoint.

In the Chugoku region including Okayama Prefecture, the organization for religious services based on a unit of "myo" that was allegedly started in the Middle Ages is developed, and its vestige is seen even in today's religious services in the region.

In Himuro Shrine and Kameo Shrine in Takase, the name "myo" is used in an organization for religious services called "miya-za" even today, and "myo" is the condition of showing the right for religious services. Among ujiko (shrine parishioners), the role of "myoto" who is a member of miya-za and the role of "yoriko" who is not a member of miya-za are clearly-differentiated, and the qualification and the status of "myoto" are succeeded by holding "myo." "Myo" was also a means of showing off social status in a local community. Therefore, the number of "myo" was limited to six in Himuro Shrine, and ten in Kameo Shrine, and the qualification of "to-ya" and the right to conduct religious services were given only to each house that succeeded myo.

Himuro Shrine served as a village shrine and gathered cults from every place in Takase. However, after the war, villages except for the villages of Nakamura and Chokyu resigned ujiko. Because of this, myoto who attended from villages other than those two villages also resigned. Being affected by this situation, miya-za of Himuro Shrine was reorganized with some of the six "myo" succeeded by those two villages as "myo" held by a village. Kameo Shrine with ten "myo" also went through a similar process, and its miya-za is currently organized by three villages. However, "myo" given up by other villages except one have been succeeded by individuals.

However, such system was followed by depopulation and the aging society, and whether miya-za should be maintained or eliminated was discussed. As a result of the discussion, in case of Himuro Shrine, it was agreed that "myo" held by individuals (houses) be abolished in the near future, and each three out of six "myo" be distributed to each village of Chokyu and Nakamura for alternate services of to-ya. Because of this reorganization, the elimination of miya-za was avoided. However, together with the future transformation of local communities, the structure of religious services based on "myo" may become fragile, distorted, and transformed.

Key words: Miya-za, myo, myoto, yoriko, to-ya