History of Akita Castle
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Akita Castle is a josaku (government fortification) located in the northernmost domains of Japan and among the ancient josaku it is unique and of great interest in terms of significant changes to its historical background. This paper traces the history of Akita Castle, from the formation of Akita district through to the Gangyo War and clarifies its distinctive characteristics.

The foundation of Akita Castle originated with the creation of Dewa no Ki (a government fortification in the Dewa area), which was moved out of Ideha County and relocated to Akita Village in 733. Akita Dewa no Ki was positioned as a controlling stronghold in the northern districts governed in accordance with the ritsuryo codes; however, unlike regular josaku, its control of its domains was weak. Subsequently, due to a period of reorganization of josaku by the Nakamaro administration, Monou Castle and Okachi Castle were constructed, and at this time Dewa no Ki was renamed Akita Castle, and connected with Mutsu Province by a route on the post-station system, alleviating its isolated location to some degree. However, later, reinforcement of territorial control brought conflict with the natives of Ezo or the northerners, so it became difficult to defend, and in 770 the Dewa Province requested the closure of Akita Castle. The central government approved the request, but a little later the Thirty-Eight Years’ War broke out, and residents in the castle area refused to move to Kawabe County in the south; for this reason, the closure of the castle was postponed.

The reorganization of josaku conducted in the reign of Emperor Kammu, aiming at controlling the Ezo mountain route marked a great turning point in the history of Akita Castle. Thanks to the construction of Isawa and Shiwa Castles the boundary of the Mutsu Province was finally expanded north to the same line as that of Akita Castle, and construction of Hotta no Ki (the secondary Okachi Castle) finally ended the isolation of Akita Castle. Moreover, Akita County was established and just like regular josaku, a two tier system of josaku control (castle head and county head) started. Afterward, the “castle area” governed by the castle head was expanded to the basin of the Yoneshiro River, and the government system of Akita Castle was massively strengthened. Consequently, this caused new problems: escapes of peasants to “the interior” and increased exploitation of Ezo villages in the castle area; although helping to develop society in “the interior” (the basin of the Yoneshiro River and Tsugaru region), also invited rebellion among those captives taken from the Ezo villages in the castle area, and before long, led to the
outbreak of the Gangyo War.

Key words: Josaku in the northernmost domains, stronghold in the northern districts, Dewa Kokufu, issue of castle closure, reorganization of josaku, castle area control