Primary Examination of Kudashibumi Documents Issued by Estate Stewards

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In the early and medieval periods in Japan, documents were not easily drawn up or understood by everybody because of the high level of formality relating to their function. This is a very important point to note when considering medieval society where the number of educated people involved in the creation and use of documents increased compared to earlier times; this point concerning function and formality will still remain true even when examining the relation between documents and bushi (warrior), who were now included in the ruling class of the medieval period and becoming the new emerging power. This analytical viewpoint is essential, especially in the study of documents given to bushi by a higher-ranking authority, such as the Shogunate government, and then handed down in their families, and also those documents created by bushi and issued to lower rank retainers.

Based on the above-mentioned issues and concerns, this study collected and conducted a primary examination of existing kudashibumi (literally translated as official documents for communicating the will of one who governs to those who are governed) drawn up and issued under the name of an estate steward or their local governor appointed by the Kamakura Shogunate. Most of the examples were kept in local Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, or handed down among the families of leading farmers involved with such temples and shrines, and they were key documents in the legal functioning of local communities.

The format of kudashibumi issued by the Shogunate to estate stewards was not always strictly followed; therefore, a genealogical relation, which was not influenced by Shogunate documents, must be assumed. Strongly associated with this point, the following case is commonly found among kudashibumi issued by an estate steward: kumon (an officer in charge of document creation for a private estate or provincial government land) signed jointly with the estate steward or their local governor, which allows us to infer that kumon were actually the main body who prepared kudashibumi under the name of the estate steward. In this case, kumon had many opportunities to receive or refer to kudashibumi and other top-down documents issued by a provincial governor, provincial government office, or the lord of the manor, and the influence of such a system may be seen in the diverse differences in the format of kudashibumi issued by an estate steward.

The examination of existing examples showed that kudashibumi issued by an estate steward
were not always independently prepared in the course of their administrative work by a *bushi*, who had become an estate steward; based on this finding, a full-scale study and close investigation of the original copies needs to be conducted.

Key word: Estate steward, *bushi*, Shogunate, format, archives