Seizure of Castles and Assets of Samurai Families: Castles in the Early-Modern Times and Their Component Parts

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On April 9, 1618, with reference to the seizure of a castle where a daimyo (feudal lord) usually resided, the Shogunate decided on a policy that after daimyo kaiki (punishment by removal of samurai status and expropriation of territories), any arms belonging to a seized castle must be left in place. Moreover, the Shogunate demanded to know the quantity and any storage conditions of jomai (rice originally reserved for military purposes).

Employing historical evidence concerning the seizure of Tsuwano Castle in 1617, which is found in documents relating to the Kamei family of Iwami Province in the possession of the National Museum of Japanese History, this paper focuses on possessions (assets) that were handed over upon seizure of the castle.

Before accepting a castle, a complete inventory of all goods and materials within the castle was created, and based on this list, the castle was handed over. In the preparation process of the inventory, the assets of a samurai family were divided and assessed as belonging to either the government or the family.

Government ownership concerned arms, tools, and jomai that belonged to the castle; they can be considered as possessions originally given by the Shogunate, not a daimyo’s private possessions. That is to say, any right of possession was in the end attributed to the shogun. On the other hand, family possessions were arms, household goods, and miscellaneous tools of retainers, and their disposal was left to the individual daimyo’s discretion.

Such a trend was probably triggered by a shuinjo (shogunal charter for trade) given by Hideyoshi Toyotomi to Masayuki Sanada on April 29, 1590. Hideyoshi gave directions to seize and secure a castle sufficiently provided with a military capability, more specifically, to receive surrendered castles complete with all food provisions, firearms, ammunition, and armor, in order to maintain the military power of any castle delivered without resistance, and not to destroy the castle immediately after seizure. Hideyoshi carried through the subsequent Punishment of the Ow region, during which he was actually putting into practice the concept that the castles in the provinces belonged to Hideyoshi.

Understanding the quantity of military equipment and jomai that belonged to a castle by creating an inventory also allowed the assessment of the military capability of the castle. Therefore, one can
safely state that the component parts of a castle in early-modern times were the weapons of war and
jomai belonging to that castle.

It can be considered that the Edo Shogunate, which understood and controlled the arms and jomai
belonging to a castle, allocated some state authority to each loyal daimyo, and against the background
of such a policy, while promoting the specialization of ruling and administrative work, the Shogunate
was incorporating the policy into its own state ruling system.

Key words: Tsuwano Castle, seizure of a castle, assets of samurai family, belonging to a castle,
documents on Kamei family of Iwami Province