A Re-examination of Mountain Gods Worshiped by Stonemasons: The Realities of Religious Rites and a Question as to the Strength of Their Belief

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This paper is aimed at revealing the real state of religious rites of stonemasons who engage in quarrying in mountains and worship mountain gods. To this end, it is necessary to overcome three problems caused by the study focusing on relations between occupation and religious belief. More specifically, the occupation covered by the study is limited. In addition, despite many reports about the form of rites, their real state remains unknown. Furthermore, the study is premised on the fixed relationship between a particular occupation and occupational gods.

With these three problems in mind, we specifically examined the religious rites of mountain gods performed by stonemasons in the Seto Inland Sea area. The results discovered that some shrines are not connected to specific deities while others are sacred to neighboring gods such as Ohoyamazumi-no-Mikoto from Ohyamazumi Shrine and the God of Ishizuchi from Mount Ishizuchi. There are many festivals on the seventh or ninth of January, May, and September, and the study indicated that this custom might be developed by mixing the idea spreading in the Kinki, Chugoku, and Shikoku regions that the seventh or ninth of the month is the feast day of mountain gods with the idea spreading centered on the Kyushu region that January, May, and September are the feast months of mountain gods. Moreover, there are a variety of worship places, ranging from shrines to simple religious sites at specific places in mountains, and stonemasons pray for protection against unforeseen accidents, production of quality stone, and so on.

These forms of rites, however, cannot clarify their realities. Therefore, we paid attention to talks of people involved in mountain god festivals. By comparing it with talks about gods of forges that stonemasons also worship, we revealed that their belief in mountain gods is not necessarily strong. This argument indicates the risk of study premised on the fixed relationship between a particular occupation and occupational gods, as described above.

key word: Stonemasons, religious belief, occupational gods, mountain gods, forge gods