On Takamatsu'in and Chōken: Focusing on an Examination of the Hyōbyaku of Chōken

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Takamatsu’in Shushi was the empress of Emperor Nijō, but their married life together lasted a mere four years. Thereafter, she took the tonsure and was elevated to the ranks of the nyoin (retired empresses) and came to be called Takamatsu’in. She was thought to have spent a serene life in Buddhist practice, but, as Tsunoda Bun’ei and Tanaka Takako have made clear, she secretly had two children (one, Kaie was to become an important monk at Ninnaji and the other Takakura became a lady-in-waiting for Hachijō’in) with the famed Buddhist preacher Chōken, and her early death was the result of giving birth to Chōken’s child.

Based on these studies, the sexual relationship between Takamatsu’in and Chōken has been made clear, but because this scholarship was based chiefly on analyses of fragmentary records in diaries and temple documents, the specifics of the relationship have not been clarified. In this article I chiefly examine the contents of the hyōbyaku (pronouncements read out at Buddhist services) found in the manuscript of the Tenpōrinshō in the Kyū-Tanaka-ke collection at the National Museum of Japanese History and also those composed by Chōken at Kanazawa Bunko as they reveal the relationship with Takamatsu’in and then re-evaluate relationship between the two.

Chōken offered prayers to cure the illness of Takamatsu’in and led memorial services for Bifukumon’in, her mother, thus playing a leading role in the life of Takamatsu’in. One can rightly say that the relationship between the two grew deeper through the repeated experience of being sponsor and officiating monk in these religious contexts.

In the latter part of her life, Takamatsu’in came to respect and rely on the 15-year-older Chōken, who excelled as a preacher, for guidance. Chōken, too, as can be seen in his “Shōten-gu hyōbyaku,” (Pronouncement for the offering service to Shōten), felt more for Takamatsu’in than would be expected of an officiating monk. After her death, he attentively led memorial services and thus maintained his bonds with the nyoin.

The majority of Chōken’s hyōbyaku were composed for the court or others, and while one can discern Chōken’s cultivation, the eloquence of his preaching, and faith in these efforts, those that reveal his true feelings and inner thoughts are few in number. In this sense also, the hyōbyaku for the Shōten offering service in which he states forthrightly his own feelings regarding his relationship with
Takamatsu’in is extremely valuable, and is indicative of the potential of hyōbyaku as useful sources in future studies of Chōken.

Key words: Takamatsu’in, Chōken, Hyōbyaku, Tenpōrinshō, shōdō