Development and Problems in the Study of Shakyojo Documents
(the Documents of the Sutra Copying Office)

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A new trend in the study of Shoso-in documents started with two university seminars: the seminar of Kan’ichi Minagawa, beginning in 1983 at the University of Tokyo; and the seminar of Towao Sakaehara, following in the wake of Minagawa and beginning in 1988 at Osaka City University. They considered Shoso-in documents as dankan (fragmentary pieces of writing) “rearranged” by Hoida Tadatomo and his successors, and regarded it essential to first restore the documents to the original form made by Shakyojo (the sutra copying office) of Todai-ji Temple in the Nara period by presuming and verifying the sequence of the pieces. Through this preparation work, they classified the documents into categories according to individual sutra-copying projects and, more broadly, to extensive account book collections, each of which consists of multiple sutra-copying projects. Thus, the study of individual sutra-copying projects was conducted as a fundamental research for Shakyojo documents, and it came to fruition as the Shoso-in document database of Osaka City University. Moreover, through this study, new findings were published one after another, covering a wider range of topics, such as essays on account books, the internal structure of Shakyojo, salary payment methods, and the life of Shakyojo workers. At the same time, the research derived from the traditional study of Shoso-in documents also developed and flourished, leading to research on the transition in the sutra-copying system; the construction of Todai-ji, Ishiyama-dera, and Hokke-ji Temples; financial aspects of Shakyojo; the reality of Shakyojo workers and low-rank government officials; the inheritance of Shakyojo documents traced back by examining the relationship of both sides of the paper; and the “rearrangement” of Shoso-in documents. Outcomes were also produced by the research that incorporated the perspective of Shoso-in documents into the study of ancient paleography and that analyzed Shakyojo documents from the viewpoint of Buddhist history. Since 2000, Shoso-in documents have drawn attention from researchers in other academic disciplines. In particular, such a study has been advanced in the fields of Japanese language and literature while the study environment has been developed. Researchers in the fields of archaeology, art history, architecture, and other disciplines have also started to pay attention to the documents. Thus, interdisciplinary joint studies are being carried out. Now that Shoso-in documents are attracting world attention, they can be considered as a global cultural asset. Expectations are growing that they can lead to even more findings.

Key words: Minagawa’s seminar, Study of individual sutra-copying projects, Study of ancient paleography, Buddhist-historical analysis, Interdisciplinary joint research