Analysis of Functional Information of Shosoin Documents:
Oral Communication and Documents
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Shosoin documents are government documents no longer needed and disposed of. In this aspect, they have different characteristics from other historical documents; therefore, it is essential to employ methods and procedures appropriate to such characteristics during collection and analysis of their functional information. Analyzing Shosoin documents means analyzing government operations. When extracting information from Shosoin documents, it is crucial to clarify the life cycle of documents, from creation to use, storage, and disposal, and to pay attention to changes in place of use.

In this regard, the three categories of historical documents (textual materials) in the study of paleography, such as monjo (letter), tenseki (book), and kiroku (record), as well as recent arguments against the classification are worthy of note; however, there is some doubt about the direction of these studies. Textual materials are “media to convey information in writing”. They are aimed to influence (induce an action from) information recipients. The point is to distinguish between mere distribution of information and intentional transmission of information. Since accuracy and reliability are important for the latter, a variety of “devices” including document styles and documentation rules (shosatsurei) are made. There are distinctive differences in function depending on whether such a “device” exists or not; therefore, in the analysis of government operations, a close examination of such “devices” helps us extract a variety of information.

From the above point of view, this article investigates the documents which dictate the decisions of higher officials and which apply for sutras and compares their function in carrying out the duties with that of the documents which merely describes the content of instructions or requests. Through these analyses, this study reveals the specific situation where both oral and written communication were used and argues the significance that documents without any “devices” to convey information were reused at various places.

Key words: Shosoin documents, Study of paleography, Senji, Shakyojo (sutra copying office), Study of ancient historical materials