Use of the Character Database for Comparison of Rekihaku A and B Versions of Folding Screens of Scenes in and around Kyoto

KOJIMA Michihiro, MORISHITA Kana, OYABU Umi

A database has been compiled of all the figures depicted in two sets of early folding screens of Scenes in and around Kyoto (Rakuchū-Rakugai-Zu) in the possession of the National Museum of Japanese History, Rekihaku A and B Versions (containing 1,426 and 1,172 persons, respectively), and prepared for federated search. Using this database, this paper makes a quantitative comparison of the two paintings to present their differences while focusing on Version B, which remains unknown in many aspects.

In general, depiction is more simplified in Version B than in Version A. Version B tends to bring certain types of people together in a scene while showing the relationship between these characters and the scene. Meanwhile, the painting as a whole lacks the variety of characters. Version B does not describe a wide variety of occupations or distinguish priests by their sects. Moreover, the selection of characters is unbalanced. It contains no old men and only a few priestesses.

However, this does not mean that Version B is of lower quality and quantity than Version A. This is merely a result of selection depending on the specific perspective and preference of the Version. While including only a few priestesses, Version B contains many women in beautiful attire as well as many unique scenes depicting vegetables handled by street vendors and farmers. Version B also portrays two festivals with portable shrines carried around as well as the lively scene of Sagichū Festival held at the Imperial Court. These features imply the intention to adorn the whole scene.

These differences can be attributed to the preferences of the clients and painters but also ascribed to the difference of times. The reason why only a few priestesses are included in the picture seems to be because they lowered their profile as representatives of their families after their social status had dropped. The early-modern phenomena described in Version B, such as the emergence of decorative helmets, the wide variety of vertical flags and banners, and the spread of the chonmage knot hair style, imply that it was painted later than Version A. With regard to the date of the painting, this analysis finds no evidence against our assumption that Version B dates back to the 1580s under the rule of Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

Key words: folding screens of scenes in and around Kyoto (Rakuchū-Rakugai-Zu), Rekihaku A version, Rekihaku B version, pictures of figures, database