Background Factors for the Introduction of Foreign Technology in Medieval Japan: Impact of Marine Transport

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This article examines the conditions, or background factors, for the introduction of foreign cultures as well as the transfer of imported technology in medieval Japan.

Firstly, this article analyzes the role of public authorities such as state and regional authorities in the introduction of foreign cultures. In ancient times, the ritsuryō state dispatched diplomatic missions to the Tang Dynasty and selectively brought back technology. In medieval times, however, the state did not play a leading part in the import of technology. As illustrated by an example of yuioke (hooped wooden buckets) brought to Hakata by Chinese marine traders, technology was introduced through commercial interaction and selectively accepted depending on the demand of residents in Hakata.

In the early 16th century, artisans were organized by daimyō warlords. For example, the Odawara Hōjō family invited artisans from Nara and Kyōto. The Ōtomo family also had craftsmen live around their residence in Funai, Bungo. Tanegashima Tokitaka ordered his swordsmiths to produce muskets.

Secondly, the transfer of imported technology is examined by using the spread of musket-making technology as an example.

Teppōki (Record of the Musket), written by Bunshi Genshō, describes the transfer of musket-making technology from Tanegashima Island to the Kinai region in two stages: (1) introduction of musket-making technology and firing procedures and gunpowder formula to Negoro-ji Temple and (2) introduction of musket-making technology to Sakai.

Ōtomo Yoshishige from Funai, Bungo, paid a tribute of Western muskets to Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshiteru. Ordered to produce muskets modeled after one possessed by the shōgun, Yoshishige started the production of muskets.

Thirdly, marine transport and trade are examined as a background factor for the introduction of musket-making technology to Tanegashima Island. The first half of the 16th century saw active interaction among Hyūga, Ryūkyū, and Tanegashima.

Trade between Tanegashima and Ryūkyū started around the 1510s. Shōshin, the King of Ryūkyū, exempted Tanegashima Tadatoki from customs duties for a ship of cargo.

In Hyūga, Shimazu Tadatomo (the Hōshū branch of the Shimazu clan) had his people escort vessels sent to the Ming Dynasty as well as build ships. He also established close relationships with
Ryūkyū. An attendant of Genei of Rinkō-ji Temple in Aburatsu came from Ryūkyū. Moreover, Rankō Zuisa, a Japanese envoy dispatched to the Ming Dynasty, heard in Hyūga that someone from Ryūkyū heard about him in Ming China.

Key words: musket, imported technology, Tanegashima, Ryūkyū, Teppōki (Record of the Musket)