

A reexamination of the Ashikaga Clan: The Ashikaga-style political order and its destruction

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This article addresses a number of questions about the Ashikaga Clan that have remained unclarified in the research to date: namely, Who made up that Clan? What is meant by the Ashikagas being as a “clan” (*ichimon* 一門)? What does “the Ashikagas becoming a clan” mean? By reexamining these questions, the author hopes to better understand how the Ashikaga period came to a destructive end.

The author begins by showing that the heretofore vaguely used term Ashikaga-shi Goikka 足利氏御一家 has been used in the two different senses of Ashikaga Gosanke (Three Branches of the Ashikaga Family) and Ashikaga Ichimon. And about the comment by the Tokis of the Sengoku period---After the Goikka, I am the leader of the all the other families, the author shows that “Goikka” means Ashikaga Ichimon.

Secondly, the author reexamines the similarly vague term “Ashikaga Ichimon” by identifying its members from the available medieval historiography. One characteristic feature that has not been noticed to date is that both the Nitta Branch of the Minamoto Clan and the Yoshimi Family were included among its members. In particular, 1) the Nittas regarded themselves as members from the very beginning, since the Ashikaga Clan was essentially part of “the Yoshikuni branch of the Minamoto Clan”; and 2) the perception that the Nittas did not consider themselves part of the Ashikaga Clan can be traced back to the exclusive self-identity “*ware-ware* 我々” consciousness described in the *Taiheiki* 太平記.

Next, after stating that there is yet no piece of research that has tried to present the Ashikaga Clan in a holistic fashion, but should be, the author shows from the medieval historiography that the above-mentioned perception of the Tokis that the Ashikaga Clan surpassed in status and prestige all other warrior

clans was universally widespread during the Ashikaga period.

Finally, the author inquires as to why such families as the Miyoshis and Odas of the Sengoku Period tried to debunk and alter the above-mentioned perception of the Ashikaga Clan's superiority, concluding that it was necessary to first switch the prerequisite for "changing the system from above" from kinship (i.e., membership in the Ashikaga Clan) to actual organizational ability as one indispensable step in the destruction of the existing order.