

The Faith in Prince Shotoku and 'The Sun Road'

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On the line 34 degrees 32 minutes north, the ruins and shrines of the Sun Faith are lined from east to west, centering on Hashihaka tomb (箸墓古墳). This line is called 'the Sun Road' (太陽の道) like the so-called ley line.

If the width of this line is considered to be a band of about 100 meters, to the west of it are Funaki-ishigami shrine (舟木石上神社) and Ise-kuruma shrine (伊勢久留麻神社) in Awaji Island, Otoritaisha shrine (大鳥大社) in Sakai City, Mt. Nijo (二上山) on the prefectural border between Osaka and Nara, and Oh shrine (多神社) in Tawaramoto town of Nara prefecture, to the east are Hashika tomb and Mt. Miwa (三輪山) in Sakurai city, Hasedera temple (長谷寺), Muroji temple (室生寺), and Itsuki Palace (齋宮) in Mie prefecture.

Although it seems that some historians consider Hashihaka tomb to be the central point of the Sun Road, I guess in fact the important point of this line is Mt. Nijo.

The Okuninushi's (大国主命) bliss and miracle soul in Mt. Miwa go to the west on this Sun road, and it is linked with his rough soul of Kishinomiya (喜志宮) in Tondabayashi city. Furthermore it advances to the country of Izumo where the world of the dead is supposed to be. The characteristic view of the religion that his soul is to be eventually connected with the harmony soul of Izumo Taisha (出雲大社), that is unique to ancient times, is highlighted there. Takenouchi road (竹内街道), an ancient public road built parallel to the Sun Road was part of the ancient way from Mt. Miwa to Izumo. And it can be imagined that it had been thought as a way for the soul to return for its relief and settlement in ancient times. This also applies to the myth that Yamato-takeru's (日本武尊) soul became a swan and flew this line west.

In the Middle Ages, the view of the religion was transformed into the Pure Land beliefs (浄土信仰). It is Genshin (源信), who was born in the village of Taima (当麻里) at the foot of Mt. Nijo, that appeared in the period of the great revolution. I inferred here that the symbol of the philosophical and religious transformation can be found in Yamagoshino-amida figure (山越阿弥陀図) conceived by Genshin. On the other hand, the center of the Pure Land thought that took place by Taima-mandara (当麻曼荼羅) conclusively moved from Taimadera temple (当麻寺) to Shitennoji temple (四天王寺), which was considered to be the center of the east gate of the Pure Land.

The active movement by the Nenbutsu saints (念仏聖) happened. In their faith and activities, we saw a new development on the faith in Prince Shotoku, centering on his sepulcher (太子廟). In Kamakura period, a unique form of faith was created in which many Nenbutsu saints visited and stayed there to receive the revelation and the miracle of dreams. It was also a kind of practical training for the Nenbutsu saints to obtain the experience of miracle in proof of the disappearance of the sins and the rebirth to Pure Land.

In this way, a route from Shitennoji temple to Taimadera temple via the sepulcher of Prince Shotoku was established here. Takenouchi road has come to have the aspect of 'Sacred Road' (聖の道) where the Nenbutsu saints come and go as such a road of the Pure land beliefs and the faith in Prince Shotoku.

keywords : The Faith in Prince Shotoku (聖徳太子信仰), The Sun Road (太陽の道)
Mt. Nijo (二上山), Takenouchi Road (竹内街道)