

This book examines the transformation of the nobility's social status order and the development of family rank in Japan during the Heian period (794–1185), which marked the transition from ancient to medieval Japan. While extensive research exists on both ancient and medieval Japanese history, these two fields often have conflicting historical interpretations, and a unified understanding is still lacking for the Heian period, which spans both domains. This creates problems, particularly when studying the social status hierarchy of the medieval period, as it developed largely upon the foundations of the Heian period nobility.

In the ancient *ritsuryō* 律令 bureaucratic society, social status was defined by the relationship between the emperor and officials. However, amongst Heian nobility, bloodline and family lineage—rather than the individual—served as units for defining status. Hierarchical structures were solidified based on human relationships centered around powerful families, and family ranks took shape amongst nobles based on court noble rank advancement pathways. Thus, medieval social statuses and classes were based on bloodlines that belonged to specific family ranks. Family rank was an element that reflected this medieval social status order.

The terminology employed to denote social status and family rank in the medieval period provides an effective analytical framework for examining the social statuses of the time. Many of these terms appeared in ancient texts and continued into medieval times. However, their meanings and referents evolved. In this book, three key terms—*kishu* 貴種, *kindachi* 公達/君達, and *ryōke* 良家—are examined to trace the evolution of concepts of social status and the formation of family rank.

First, chapters one through three address status terms containing the character *shu* 種, such as *kishu*. *Shu* refers to a person's origin, lineage, and the descendants of that lineage. *Shōshu* 將種 (general's lineage) and *kishu* appear in sources from ancient times. In medieval times, the idea that birth determined status came to be expressed as *shushō* 種姓. Chapter 1 examines how the expression *shu* found in ancient texts developed into the medieval concept of *shushō*. Chapter 2 focuses on historical examples of the term *kishu*. This term represented the highest rank in the basic social status structure of the medieval period. It has been a central concept in both ancient and medieval historical studies but has not been precisely analyzed as a term in historical sources. Prior studies have often referred to descendants of the imperial bloodline as *kishu*. However, the term in historical records designated the people from families of officials ranking highly in the *ritsuryō* order (those of third rank and above or court nobles), and this book follows that usage. From the mid-eleventh century onward it shifted to designate a family rank that continually produced government ministers and court nobles. Chapter 3 highlights the term *bonshu* 凡種, a concept rarely mentioned compared to *kishu*, despite its potential relevance to *shushō*. The term *bonshu* frequently appears in the diary of the high-ranking noble

Fujiwara no Yōrinaga 藤原頼長 (1120–56), from the regent Fujiwara clan. Through analysis, this chapter examines Yōrinaga's perception of *bonshu* and his class consciousness.

Then, chapter 4 examines the term *kindachi*, which first appeared in records in contexts related to family rank as such-described families came into existence in the late tenth century. Through an analysis of examples in historical records, this chapter traces the evolution of the term, exploring the factors behind these changes and providing clues to the period when family rank came into existence. Initially, *kindachi* referred to the sons of high-ranking nobles, but by the mid-eleventh century, it came to refer to a family rank after it became short-hand for the new *jige no kindachi* 地下公達, referring to noble families whose lineage still held the designation of court minister but had limited prospects for advancement.

Lastly, chapters five and six cover the terms *ryōke* and *ryōkeshi* 良家子. The former means “good family” and was a social status term of the nobility, sometimes referring to families of higher than third, or sometimes fifth, rank. Chapter 5 discusses the concept of *ryōke* within the nobility and the existence of *ryōke* monastics of noble origin at temples. It examines how the noble social status hierarchy was integrated into the temple community and how status terms developed distinct meanings in this context. Chapter 6 explores the warrior-noble social status, the class structure of warrior society, and class mobility among warriors during the conflicts of the late twelfth century by focusing on the Echigo Jō 越後城 clan, a group of warriors who were located within the nobility as mid/upper-class noble officials and called themselves *ryōkeshi*, that is, sons of good families.

In conclusion, this book argues the following. Terms denoting social status in the medieval social order were adapted from expressions related to official ranks used since ancient times. As these terms were employed to represent changes in status consciousness, their meanings and nature evolved. The terms denoting family ranks—*kishu*, *kindachi*, and *ryōke*—first appeared in the latter half of the eleventh century. The social status order centered around the nobility at the time was comprehensively applied throughout society, encompassing monks and warriors as well.

(Translated by Dylan Toda)