

Precious Items Passed Down in the “Kamiya” Suzuki Family

—From the Results of Research on Folk Utensils and Historical Documents—



▲ *Shiki-fuzoku-zu (Shimin-zu)* (“Seasonal Customs [People in Four Classes]”) (folding screen painting)

The “Kamiya” Suzuki family has handed down many historic items, including tools for daily use, furnishings, and historical documents, in addition to the residence building, which is designated an Important Cultural Property. Research has been conducted on these items.

The tools for daily use and furnishings total about 4,000 items, and range widely from clothes, chests of drawers, and tableware items, including sets of trays and bowls, through brewing tools, such as miso barrels and lighting apparatus, such as paper lanterns and paper-covered lamp stands, to folding screens.

Those items also include a double-balance clock, which dates back to the final years of the Edo period, and a folding screen with the painting *Shiki-fuzoku-zu (Shimin-zu)* (“Seasonal Customs [People in Four Classes]”), which is attributed to Hanabusa Itcho II. Items like these two, in particular, symbolize the abundant life of the “Kamiya” Suzuki family and suggest that the family had a network that allowed it to obtain such precious items.



▲ Double-balance clock

[COLUMN] What the research has revealed and what has still been left unrevealed



▲ Left: Accounting documents and tableware items stored in the Okura warehouse

▲ Right: Letters before research



▲ Set of trays, bowls, and other tableware items



▲ Tools for applying tooth black

Approximately 20,000 documentary materials, including letters and accounting documents, were stored in the Kamigura warehouse and the Okura warehouse. The task of organizing these documents was carried out from FY2012, resulting in a catalog published in 2021. These materials include a huge number of accounting documents, which prove the earnings and expenses of the family, such as those concerning the family’s business and those concerning the management of land owned by the family.

To date, it has been revealed that the family lent money not only to the Honda family, the local feudal lord, but also to the family of Watanabe Hanzo, a senior vassal of the Owari Domain, as well as to the shogun’s direct vassals who were the feudal lords of villages near Asume. It has also been revealed that the Suzuki family obtained new paddy fields in Hekikai and Hazu Districts along the Mikawa Bay during the Tenpo to Ansei eras (1830–60).

Meanwhile, few historical documents confirm that the family dealt in paper as suggested by its trade name “Kamiya” (literally “paper dealer”), leaving that aspect of the family business unclear. It is expected that, as research progresses on the historical documents from now on, it will be further revealed how the “Kamiya” Suzuki family accumulated wealth and how the family developed.