

The Nature of 'Iron Mine Administrators' during the Edo Period in the First Half of the 19th Century: The Case of 'the Middle Class' in the Hachinohe Clan

Suzuki Yoshitoki

The iron mines of the Chugoku and Nambu districts provided the iron supply of Japan in the Edo period. Most of these iron mines were run by clans, until falling under 'government control' in the later Edo period. 'Clan management' has been discussed in earlier studies, but few have investigated the Nambu district or its 'iron mine administrators'. In addition, it has been argued that the local 'middle class' derived profit from its special privileges, such as that of the 'iron mine administrator', a powerful position. Therefore, I studied the Ono iron mine in the Hachinohe clan territory, which had direct clan management, in order to clarify this type of supervision and the nature of 'the iron mine administrator'. I also illuminated the consciousness of 'the middle class' during the period of the 'iron mine administrators'.

I demonstrate that the authority of 'the iron mine administrator' was limited to that of requests and the use of the 'onshiirekin'. For example, Ishibashi Tokuuemon Nakahide (1766-1838) served as manager for the clan and reduced the salaries of the iron mine workers, causing riots and disturbances in the Tempō Era (1834). In contrast, Fuchisawa Enuemon Sadahiro(?-1871), who became 'the iron mine administrator' after the riot, showed consideration for the mine workers. He told the clan that he planned to improve their salaries. Thus, not all administrators sought to maximize profits. The administrators of the iron mine clearly differed in their policies before and after the riots. In conclusion, it is hard to generalize that 'the middle class' obediently obeyed the clan.