

The changing and declining use of *shobunjo* from the perspective of medieval Japanese inheritance: The case of the Kujo Family

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This article discusses the changing and declining use of the document form known as *shobunjo* 処分状 during the Kamakura and Nanboku-cho periods in Japan from the perspective of Japanese family organization (*ie* 家) and inheritance. Based on the case of the Kujo 九条 Family, which was one of the Fujiwara Regent (*sekkon* 摂関) families, the author examines the process of changes that occurred in the function and form of *shobunjo* as the form of inheritance itself changed from property divided among several heirs to that based on primogeniture.

Kujo Kanezane 九条兼実 drew up *shobunjo* so that the inheritance of his lands, which formed his financial base, to his descendants would be assured. In the background to this action lay the unstable financial state of the Kujo Family immediately after its separation from the Konoe 近衛 Family. Kanezane's successor, Kujo Michiie 九条道家 then devised a method of dividing the land for inheritance so as to increase the possibility that his descendants would become *sekkon*. As a result, the Kujo and the Ichijo 一条 Families separated at that time and Michiie's *shobunjo* acted to reconfirm and restructure the family lands ownership. In addition, both Kanezane's and Michiie's *shobunjo* included testamentary admonitions to their heirs.

It was three generations later that Kujo Tadanori 九条忠教, the great-grandson of Michiie, decided to leave his property to a primary heir instead of multiple heirs, a change that greatly reduced the differences between *shobunjo* and another document dealing with inheritance, *yuzurijo* 譲状, in terms of both function and form. Consequently, these two documents, which had been theretofore classified as completely different and separate forms, began to become confused with one another. At the same time, testamentary

admonitions, which used to be included in *shobunjo* were written as a separate document, which came to be known as *okibumi* 置文. In this way, with the change in the form of inheritance transitioning from multiple heirs to a single successor, the function of *shobunjo* in transferring property gave way to *yuzurijo*, the function of making testamentary admonitions to one's descendants was left to *okibumi*, and *shobunjo*, declined in use and finally disappeared.