
How Characterized the Transformation of Production During the Early Kofun Period with the Bronze and Iron Artifacts

UENO Yoshifumi

During the early Kofun period, products were created that were intricately crafted, of high quality, and highly standardized. Combined with the phenomenon of these products distributed primarily in the Kinki region, this is regarded as a transformation in production characterized by “concentration”, “advancement”, “expansion/large-scale production” and “controlled”.

This major transformation in production corresponds to changes in social relations reflected in tomb construction, and its assessment as a turning point is generally accepted. However, in the case of jade artifacts for which the production sites and systems are known, phenomena described as “concentration”, “advanced”, “expanded/large-scale” or “controlled” are not necessarily evident.

In this paper, it's aimed to examine the actual situations of production based on common contemporary cognition, focusing on artifacts produced during the Early Kofun period, such as bronze mirrors, bronze arrowheads, iron arrowheads, and iron swords. By comparing the production of several types of artifacts and analyzing the extent of royal authority's involvement in their production, I investigated the characteristics of production during the Early Kofun period.

As a result, the following points were noted: Although the early Kofun period saw the emergence of new forms of production through the combination of old and new technologies, the production system did not differ significantly from that of the preceding era. The expansion of production was not accompanied by qualitative changes such as concentration or increased management. Rather than technological or production innovations, this period was characterized more by the combination and integration of technologies and production methods. The turning point of the early Kofun period can be evaluated not as a vertical change that altered the very nature of production—such as through specialization or sophistication—but rather as a horizontal change involving the combination of different technological lineages. Since production was not exclusively controlled during the early Kofun period, a connection with the late and final phases of the Yayoi period is evident, and it is in the middle Kofun period that a true turning point in production can be identified.

Key words: the early Kofun period, bronze artifacts, jade artifacts, control of the distribution, system of production
