
A Study on the Ring-stacked Sutra Case

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As Pure Land Buddhism spread, sutra mounds were built all over the country, mainly in the 12th century. Northern Kyushu in particular is a notable region where sutra mounds were built the most intensively. Among the many bronze sutra cases that have been excavated, the most representative is the ring-stacked sutra case, which have been excavated throughout Kyushu. It is a complex sutra case made up of multiple parts, and is shaped like a stupa by combining a lid, a tube body, and a pedestal. The tube body is stacked in rings, and there are two, three, and four tiers, with the four-tiers type being by far the most common.

The main types of sutra cases in Kyushu are the Shioji-type sutra case and the ring-stacked sutra case, which are widespread across the region, with the former changing over to the latter. The conventional view was that during the transitional period of the 1120s, two- or three-tiered sutra cases with large individual differences appeared, and then converged into the very uniform four-tiered sutra case. However, the discovery of a new inscription dated 1102 on the Hakusan Shrine sutra case forced a reconsideration of this view.

In this paper, the two- or three-tiered sutra case is considered a temporary type, a subspecies of the four-tiered sutra case, and the Hakusan Shrine sutra case is repositioned by revising the conventional view. By examining the caliber of the four-tiered sutra case and the burial method of the ring-stacked sutra case, it was found that the full-scale development of the four-tiered sutra case occurred in the second quarter of the 12th century, and that the method of burying the Shioji-type sutra case in an outer container changed to a method of placing the four-tiered sutra case directly in the stone chamber, reaffirming the major trend in Kyushu sutra mound.

In addition, in order to enrich the data, new materials are introduced and their positioning is explained.

Key words: sutra mound, ring-stacked sutra case, Hakusan Shrine sutra case, Murakami sutra case, Shioji-type sutra case