A Study on the Early Stage of Heian-kyō

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This paper examines the characteristics of Heian-kyō (literally “Capital of Peace and Comfort”) during the 9th century. The analysis focuses on aspects of the basis of the economy, the way of life, and the administrative and military mechanism in Heian-kyō.

The economy, based mainly on a taxation system which were named chō and yō, similar to that of Heijō-kyō, showed a marked decline with the fall of the Ritsuryō system. However, the government tried to maintain this system. The economic decline caused by the default of chō and yō called for the issue of a great number of coins as a relief measure. But this government policy required a modification around the Showa years. During this process, the residents of Heian-kyō began to be involved in the marketing system to quite an extent and gradually became dependent upon that system. Thus, on the whole, life in the early stage of Heian-kyō was unstable. The government tried to find a way out of the situation through the strengthen of the administrative and military systems of the capital.

Thus, the government tried to maintain the bounds of early Heian-kyō as an ancient political city, but in the late 9th century it underwent changes, and life in Heian-kyō relied more on a marketing system based on commerce with remote places. This was possible in Heian-kyō not because the capital was built only as an ancient political city but because it absorbed the characteristics of Naniwa, which was already a center of commerce with remote places in the 8th century.