A Note on “Ki” (城) in Ancient Japan

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It seems to be the general phenomenon at ancient times that cities were built in the form of a walled-town with a rampart surrounding them. Japanese capitals, however, only took the form of a rampart as the facility to contour town while inheriting the Chinese method of building the city. The reasons of such a peculiar way of adoption can only be found in the historical situation of the Japanese society at that time. Concerning this point, the natural conditions including the geographical feature, the ethnic condition with its homogenous nature, and the climatic condition have only been generally observed and theoretically discussed as their origins. Then, what can be pointed out as the specific circumstances during the period when Japan accepted the Chinese way of city building in the last half of 7th century? To clarify this, we need to make out the implication that border of the capital has to the farm village by means of specifying the structure of the interior of rampart in the Japanese capitals. Here, I have tried to analyse how rampart itself had been recognized as the contouring facility.

Discussing the examples of “ki” (城) as referred to in Nihonshoki Chronicles of Japan as the main source of document, an image, although obscure, and its genealogy come out. Generally speaking, “castle” gives us an impression of the Korean style mountain castle and water castle built during the Tenchi period. There are, however, such other examples as “inagi” (稲城) and “jōsaku” (城柵) observed before that period. The common trend indicated in these is that they had been more or less built essentially for the military purposes as a protective wall of the city. This has something to do with the fact that the castle could be pronounced “ki” and has often been seen in the articles regarding Korea. Possibly because “ki” was brought to Japan by the people from Korea or through their experience in the three provinces including Pak-je of the country. While in Japan, where the moat was the only substantial facility to divide areas since Yayoi period, few other methods of installation of the sort existed, to say nothing of mountain castles or villages with clay or stone walls surrounding them. It was out of this context that “castle” never fixed its ground as the facility of dividing areas in Japan but of its military oriented image always coming along with it. “Ki” was rather a newly brought forward knowledge and never thought of without relevance to military affairs.

Taking the above into consideration, the fact the rampart had not been brought to Japan on accepting the castle-town indicates that there was no strained
relationship existed between the capitals and farm villages from which to protect and isolate capitals at the latter half of 7th century. In this sense, it could be said that people in power at that time had little capacity to understand the real structure of the castle-town in China. This fact seems to be closely related to the historical characteristics of the city structure of ancient Japan.