“Kokufu” and Names of Small Places

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(1) In the general framework of the investigations and studies performed on the “Kokufu” which became a central organ in local governments in the ancient state of Japan, it is indispensable to trace back to the origin and historical evolution of actual topography, land allotments and place names, if ever there elements are to be utilized for such studies and investigations. For example, the fact that the existence of “8-cho” square circumferential allotment around the kokufu does not directly prove that the kokufu at the time of its foundation was allotted into 8-cho square allotment. With regard to the place names relating to the kokufu, it is necessary to verify their respective antiquity.

(2) The kokufu in Suo province was established in the later half of the 7th century and existed thereafter under the control of Todai-ji temple from the 12th century on to the later half of the 19th century changing, from time to time, its organization and installations.

Let us note here that the actual allotments and place names are no other than the historical products of space utilization overdeterminedly repeated for more than 1200 years.

A question should be raised here: Is it possible that the actual place names and their respective positions never changed for this long period? Fortunately we have, as intermediary historical documents which connect ancient and modern ages, a drawing prepared in 1763 as well as the “Kenchi-cho” (land tax ledgers) established in 1586, 1599, 1610 and 1625 respectively. When comparing the actual place names and those mentioned in the above drawing, we find some differences therebetween, which must imply that at those times there already existed a general tendency of the place names to be divided into names of smaller allotments.

(3) Investigation of the kenchi-cho reveals the fact that the cultivated acreage and number of unitary cultivated lands within a same place name have substantially changed. It is recognized that the variation of place names is largely
prescribed by the fluidity and instability in utilization of such cultivated field.
When we trace further the historical evolution of the names of small place
during 400 years since the end of the 16th century, we can find out some names
continuously used from 1586 on, on the one hand, and some newly born names,
on the other. The most large-scaled definition work of place names was
conducted in 1763 and in earlier stage of Meiji era. Though it took over some
old names, it at the same time created new place names and tried even to fix
them permanently.

(4) Now turning to the relationship between the kokufu of Suo province
and the allotment of cultivated land extending in gridiron pattern around it, it
may be reasonable to consider that the construction plan of kokufu preceded
and thereafter the allotment of cultivated land was determined, because the width
of the central road north to south at kokufu measures 21 to 27 meters, it is
impossible to set kokufu on the basis of the allotment of cultivated land in 1-cho
unit (1-cho=approx. 119 yds). The place name with such numbers as 3, 4, 8
and 11 ("cho") can be explained within the framework of planned allotment
with the central road as demarcation line.