Ancient Dwellings in Kinai

HIROSE KAZUO

The social collective structure in the 7 to 9th centuries in Japan was stratified at the three levels of: building groups, settlements and interrelations among the settlements. The basic units were ancient families who dwelled in these building groups. The ancient families that were composed of two to four households are much different in their size or scale, existence of granary or storage, development degree of patriarchal rights and so forth. It seems that there was then widely progressing, in the ancient rural community, a division into several social
classes having families as their respective nuclea.

In that period two to four families built up a settlement. The settlement is assumed to be an intermediate between the family which was a body of agricultural operation and the union of village which is no other than a unit of social reproduction. In other words the village is considered to be a local group of plural families related to each other. In this period the number of villages lasting long was relatively many when compared with those in 6th centuries and before. But the relations between families were rather mobile, not fixed.

The villages in this period are characterized by a two-facedness, seeming like contradictory at a first glance, that is long-termedness and internal plastic constitution.

A chief ruled several settlements or dwelling clusters. The chief, being at the top of a union as village, is assumed to have closed his grip on one to two villages. His side face as a chief of community still remained in such activities as irrigation, distribution of non-self supplying goods or else as an organizer of religious festivals and trials. The Regime of Codified Penal and Administrative Laws (the "Ritsuryo-Seido") that advocated local rule by laws and state system was realized through intermediary of moral dominance of local chiefs. This situation is clearly seen in that their dwellings in the beginning of the 8th century up to the first half of the 10th century adopt a government-office ("Kanga") like disposition which is no other than an imitation of "Kokuga" (provincial government office). That is, the chiefs of Kinai in 7th to 9th centuries had two faces as state officer and as chief of collectivity.

Two epochs are recognized in the ancient settlements in Kinai. The first one is at the beginning of the 7th century when were concentrated abolishments and starts of dwelling clusters, which might be stemming from the restructuring of collectivities based on development of arable land promoted mainly by the "state". The second one is at the start of the 8th century, when the Ritsuryo regime incorporated the class of chiefs into their own officers with their dwellings established as a strategic point for ruling the villages.