Settlement Site and Pottery with Inscription in Black Ink

— A Case of the Murakami-Komenouchi Site

Yachiyo City, Chiba Prefecture—

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In Japan, inscription of characters in pottery began in the ancient government offices, where many people were working in a much complicated organization. We assume that they had the need to inscribe their posts or places in the pottery used there in order to differentiate them.

For almost all the cases, only one character has been inscribed in the pottery unearthed from the sites of ancient settlement or dwelling clusters. It is difficult to identify what such characters meant in reality. Under actual circumstances of the studies, the possible meanings of such characters have been drawing particular attention of many researchers, who have been too in haste to presume the meanings rather in an easy-going and arbitrary way. We should however try to verify in one site after another what is the probable relationship between the evolution of the village concerned and the pottery with such inscriptions.

In this paper we took an example of the Murakami-Komenouchi site, Yachiyo City, Chiba Prefecture. This site, which is on the Shimofusa plateau, lasted from the first half of the 8th century up until the end of the 9th. Its evolution can roughly be divided into five periods. With an open space at the center, the dwelling cluster surrounding it has been divided into five groups.

The pottery with inscription in black ink which have so far been unearthed amount to over 250 in number. Initially there hardly existed such pottery; instead there remarkably were the pottery in which some symbols were inscribed by means of nails and similar means. Thereafter starting from the last half of the 9th century there came other pottery in which individual unique characters
were inscribed in black ink; unique to each group. We can read out the behavior of each group in one settlement only when we trace minutely the points of pottery where are the inscriptions and how the writing brushes had been used. But we cannot limit the use of the pottery with such inscriptions into clarification of possessors. There should have existed such pottery which had been inscribed on the occasion of some religious rites and discarded upon their termination.

If we accumulate henceforth our case studies in due consideration of such multilateral factors of the pottery with inscription in black ink, then they will be powerful data for analyses of the settlements at that time.