A Comparative Study of Ancient Grid-Pattern Land Allotments—Mainly of Centuria Land Allotments and the Jōri (Japanese Grid Pattern Land Division)—

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Though geographical environments, historical bases and ethnic habits are different between them, both the types of allotment of land resemble each other. The above-mentioned two types are not the only ones, and other types of “grid-pattern allotments of land” are distributed in various districts of the world.

What do grid-patterns land allotments depend on? Generally speaking grid-pattern land allotments have been established, in many cases, from the organized period until the establishment of the ancient states. Those are foundations for the establishment and augmentation of ancient state government finances. Some benefits from the introduction of grid-pattern allotments of land are given below. Land division was fair and impartial for the people, and land surveys were completed with ease. Furthermore, the taxation, the levy business of land tax and tax administration and the management of land ownership were conducted along the line of rationality and convenience.

Now, my chief purpose of this study is the following two discussions. First, what stagnant habitual factors were invited by the base of the geographical environment, i.e. “grid-pattern allotments of land”? Second, what factors enabled land allotment landscapes to exist continuously in the form of ancient grid-pattern?

As a fundamental activity for the investigation I surveyed the outline of the worldwide distributions of the centuria allotments, gave a concrete illustration of the distribution of the chief regions on the topographical maps, and covered the extensive literature in regard of the centuria and the Jōri land divisions. I want to include one more factor in the stages of this study. The progress of centuria allotments studies in Japan and the prospect of the Jōri land division studies outside the country lead me to attempt to grasp the structure, the function and the significance of the enforcement of each of the land divisions. In addition,
I want to consider the meaning of the differences and similarities of them and disclose the essence of the matter in both the land allotments.

I propose the following conclusion. It seems to me that the continuation of the centuria and the Jori land allotments landscapes was caused by the traditional divisions of cultivated land, the ancient land survey of land compartment and the systems of agricultural management. And now it is not without significance to observe here that public roads and agricultural paths played the role of the boundary of the land compartment and that people strived to maintain the land allotments which were regarded as a kind of sacred religious institution.

We are aware of the differences of the state forms, the circumstances of the time, the geographical bases and historic, ethnic, cultural structures, and yet both the land allotments have something in common in the forms and the functions. This may lead the students easily into a belief that both the allotments have been co-related with each other, but I suppose that is far from the truth. Though the forms and appearances have much in common, it does not necessarily mean that the character is on the same foundation.

In short, this paper is intended to clarify what have made up the differences and similarities between the centuria and the Jori land divisions, which, I hope, may give us an insight into the human nature represented in the forms and functions of the political and economic land systems.