Formation of Bronze-Age Culture in Liaohsi Province

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Conventional studies on bronze-age culture in the area north of the Great Wall of China have been conducted by putting this area with the vast steppe stretching from southern Siberia, and setting it against the nuclear area of China. Since the 1970's, thanks to the development of the study of the Karask culture in southern Siberia, it has been clarified that the date of bronze artifacts common to the northern area of China was later than the Chinese artifacts, and the focus of research has come to be put on the relationship between the nuclear area and the northern area. Consequently, opinions have been grouped to either 1) that the independent bronze-age culture of northern China changed in parallel with that of the nuclear area, or that 2) a proper bronze-age culture was formed under the strong influence of the Yin and Chou cultures of China.

Of bronzewares found in the north of the Yanshan Mountains, the deposited ritual bronzes made by Yan-related people centering around Zhan-gongmo date back the earliest, and their character is remarkable. They can be broadly found all over the Liaohsi area, and some of them extend even to the other side of the Liao River. Some of these deposited ritual bronzes are mainly composed of bronze vessels, and others are mainly composed of bronze arms. Both are related with the Zhan clan, which tells of the inroads of the Yan into the north of China in the 11th century B.C.

Two types of swords are included in the bronze arms related to the Yan. One is a dagger with a curved grip supposed to belong to the Yin period. Its prototype is thought to be a bronze knives of the Yin period. The other is a dagger developed from a bone dagger inserted with stone blades. The latter is the older, and was made when techniques for the manufacture of bronzeware spread into the north. On the other hand, the former is thought to have been produced through confrontation with a group having hafted daggers, when the Yan invaded the northern area of China.

As seen above, the unique bronze culture apparently fused with the Yin culture seems to have been generated from the fact that Zhan-gongmo held a large force of the Yin under his control, and it has been found that the bronze culture of the Liaohsi area was formed under the strong influence of the nuclear area of China.