Stone-piled Tumuli in Tōgoku and the Persons Buried Therein

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Opinions differ concerning the area covered by the term "Tōgoku".
In this paper, however, the term "Tōgoku" is used for convenience' sake to mean the area east of the Kantō District. A stone-piled tumulus is a type of mound constructed by using mountain rocks and rubble. Some are constructed only with stones; others are mixture of earth and stones; and there are tumuli constructed only with earth. So it is difficult to define a stone piled tumulus. In this paper, the author would like to discuss some problems regarding the Ōmuro Tumuli Group in Matsushiro Town, Nagano City. In this tumuli group are concentrated about 500 stone-piled tumuli, forming one of the most typical examples of this tumulus type in Japan.

The Ōmuro Tumuli Group, which is a group of about 500 stone-piled tumuli, is distributed along the valley of the Chikuma River, on the slope from the 2.5km-wide base of the mountains to a height of 700m above sea level. The 500 stone-piled mounds can be divided into five groups. This paper discusses the structure of the group of 200 stone-piled mounds at Ōmuro-dani, and the character of the group of persons buried therein.

The author has been investigating three groups, or 30 tumuli, at Ōmuro-dani for eight years, since 1984. These tumuli groups are called Mura-higashi, Ōishi, and Mujinagōro.

In most of the pile-stoned mounds at Ōmuro, the tunnel-type stone rooms have been opened their gateways to the inside by grave robbers. Among the 500 pile-stoned mounds are 25 stone rooms with steep rafter roofs. 4 examples of stone rooms with steep rafter roofs have been discovered at Kongju (公州) in Korea.

Those in Ōmuro have been said to be the tombs of immigrants from Pakche, constructed in the 6th to 7th centuries.

Among the three groups in Ōmuro-dani, Mura-higashi Tumulus No. 248, Ōishi Tumuli No. 221, and 225, and Mujinagōro Tumulus No. 196 are all pile-stoned mounds with steep rafter-roofed rooms. Excavations have proved that these were constructed from the latter half of the 5th century to the beginning of the 6th century. In other words, the construction of pile-stoned mounds in the Ōmuro Tumuli Group started with the rafter-type stone room structure, then gradually shifted to the tunnel-type stone room, which is the usual tomb system.

There is a strong probability that the building of mounds with rafter-type stone rooms in the ancient Shinano district started with the influx of immigrants from Pakche, who were skillful horse-breeders.