Aspects of Tumuli in the Final Kofun Period in the Southern Musashi

IKEGAMI Satoru

Though some tumuli with triangular-rimmed mirrors with divinity and animal design from the early Tumuli Period and some with armor from the middle Tumuli Period are known to exist, the main feature of tumulus culture in the southern Musashi region is the existence of group tumuli from the later Tumuli Period, and particularly the intensive construction of cave-type graves.

At this later stage of the period, the construction of tumuli finally became possible throughout the area. From surveys on the remains of ancient communities, it can be understood that the construction of cave-type graves was not the result of stable development in the region. Rather, the group tumuli were a boom which expanded suddenly. In addition, individual cave-type graves did not construct randomly, but were constructed as part of a group with the mound grave, which has a stone burial chamber and is considered to be the grave of a regional chief. The group tumuli with stone burial chambers, which constructed in small numbers in a limited area, can be assumed to be the graves of an influential group which was in a leading position and directly supported the regional chief. These group tumuli are to be strictly distinguished from the cave-type graves.

In general, the group tumuli in the provinces are mostly taken to have a relation to the decline of the graves of regional chiefs. This interpretation, on its own, is too simple to lead to the solution of new problems. Group tumuli can be classified according to the factors leading to their construction; they can be divided largely into those arising from external factors, and those where the region’s internal factors should be considered. They can be further classified according to various features, including their location, burial facilities, and burial goods.

Group tumuli are generally considered to be the graves of armed groups. However, the state of excavation of weapons from cave-type graves, which are those mainly found in group tumuli not only in the southern Musashi area but also in the extensive areas of Tōgoku (eastern Japan), is very different from that of the group tumuli with stone burial chambers. Of course, iron arrowhead, a typical example of weapons, have not been excavated from all group tumuli with stone burial chambers; but they have not been excavated from many other cave-type graves in eastern Japan. The arrowheads excavated from such graves are very different from those of the mound grave, which expressly indicates a significant gap between the ruling positions of those buried.