The End of the Kofun Period in Southern Mutsu

FUKUSHIMA Masayoshi

Southern Mutsu as used here refers to an area which mainly covers what in the present administration system is called Fukushima Prefecture. This area, corresponding to the southern part of the Tōhoku District, used to be one of the marginal regions. This paper deals with the 7th century, together with the years preceding and following it. It was a time of transition from the Tumulus Period to the Statute Period, and one of the most revolutionary periods in the history of Japan.

This paper aims to make clear some of the social and political aspects of this area which was then a marginal region. This will be developed by means of an analysis of the final process of the construction of tumuli, and the method by which a statutory government was established. In line with this theme, this paper will examine the following points:

1. Criteria of chronological positioning
2. Tumuli of influential families
3. Development and decline of group tumuli
4. Establishment of temples and statutory government offices

Furthermore, to bring the above points together, the author will summarize the process by which the Tumulus Period came to an end in the Southern Mutsu region. The process is conceived as having been completed in the following three principal stages: firstly, the first half of the 7th century, when group tumuli were set up after the suppression of influential families in the 6th century; secondly, the latter half of the 7th century, when the flourishing of group tumuli was followed by the establishment of statutory government offices. The typical, Kinai-style Miyanome and Yachikubo Tumuli were constructed in this period. Finally, the first half of the 8th century, when the establishment of government offices brought an end to construction of tumuli.

As can be seen from the foregoing, local politics in the Southern Mutsu region at the end of the Tumulus Period was characterized by aspects that were greatly different from those of the Northern Mutsu region or the Kanto District which are located nearby. This region had been socially based on a traditional Tumulus Culture carried over from the Early Tumulus Period. Since local power had lost influence in the 6th century as a result of suppression, however, a reform of the ruling system was typically carried out by the central government in the 7th century.