Jōmon to Yayoi as Seen through Subsistence

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This paper deals with how the method of plant food obtaining changed from the Late-to-Final stage in Jōmon period to the Early stage in Yayoi period in Western Japan. Although it has been continued that the cultivation of minor grains and cereals existed in this period, no decisive evidence has been found in either archaeology or natural science. This is because archaeological changes in this period were not so conspicuous as those which occurred when wet rice cultivation began. Therefore, it is necessary to look into the question of whether or not the archaeological changes in the Late and Final stage in Jōmon Period can be explained solely within the framework of the Jōmon culture.

Thus, I took a fresh look at the archaeological changes, focussing mainly on pottery and stone tools, and examined the social background that caused the changes; and I found that there existed something that could not be explained simply by domestic development caused by the transfer of the Eastern Japanese Jōmon culture complex, as has been so far maintained. Studies showed that this could be considered to be a change caused by the influence of Korean field farming culture. Since cultural transfers from Eastern Japan might have occurred together with the collective and organizational movement of people, archaeological changes can be recognized in tools, technology, and rite. However, such latter changes were not seen. The reason for this may be considered as follows: Since Korean field farming culture was transferred through exchanges of information between the Continent and Jōmon society continuing from the previous period, things like tools, technology, and ideas were omitted. Since the parent Korean field farming culture was a comprehensive mixed agricultural culture, it fit well with the comprehensive food acquisition system of the Jōmon period, which did not lean to any specific means of subsistence. Existing tools changed a very little, but the change did not appear in the form of new tools or changes in the composition of stone tools. In contrast to this, the transfer of wet rice agricultural culture, which centered around paddy-rice cultivation, was accompanied by an organizational and collective movement of people, and was thus recognized as a great archaeological change in several aspects, including tools, the composition of stone tools, and spiritual culture.

Consequently, if cereal cultivation did exist in the Jōmon period, it cannot be ranked as the central basis of production, while wet-rice cultivation was selected as a specific means of subsistence in the Yayoi period, and must be considered the central basis of production. The shift from the Jōmon period to the Yayoi period is characterized by the shift from a comprehensive system of subsistence, including cultivation, to a selective system of subsistence.