Mutual Interchange Between Epi-Jomon Culture and Yayoi Culture

SHITARA, Hiromi

Up until today, mainstream research has held that the Yayoi culture of eastern Japan was formed under influences introduced from western Japan. However, the formation of Yayoi culture in eastern Japan cannot be explained by unilateral influences from western Japan alone, and today the viewpoint that a unique regional culture evolved from a mutual intertwining between these regions is gaining greater currency. This paper examines mutual interchanges chiefly between Hokkaido, an area outside the sphere of influence of Yayoi culture where Esan culture, an epi-Jomon culture, and cultures from an earlier period existed, and the Yayoi culture of central Japan. This study also takes into account economic aspects focusing on cultural elements in the form of entombment systems.

The economic and cultural periods in eastern Japan spanning the Jomon and Yayoi periods can be broadly classified into the following three separate periods: 1) the Obora A period in the second half of the Late Jomon period when information on a new culture in western Japan, including rice cultivation, was obtained; 2) the Sunazawa period following Obora A at the end of the Late Jomon period, that is, Yayoi I, when wet rice cultivation was introduced and was the subject of trial and error; and 3) Yayoi III when large-scale operation of wet rice fields was achieved. It has been acknowledged that there were mutual interchanges between distant places in Hokkaido and central Japan during the time of Yayoi culture, and these are connected to these different stages.

For the first and second of these periods, elements attached to reburial in central Japan have been found in tombs from the time of Esan culture and the previous period, while funerary fragments and small pieces of pottery that evolved from Esan culture have been found in central Japan. This kind of interchange was followed in the third period with the acceptance into Esan culture of pottery with engraved faces that are peculiar to reburial practices. Yayoi III was an important period in eastern Japan as that was the period when sizeable agricultural settlements were formed. Contact from Hokkaido as far south as Suruga Bay along the Pacific Ocean coast throughout Yayoi IV can be traced through the movement of pottery and the spread south and north of rotary harpoon heads. It is
important to note that culture in the north was influenced by the fishing activities of agricultural communities in southern Kanto and that it is possible that the organization of agricultural settlements evolved amid contact with fishing communities. The establishment of mutual interchanges between southern parts of Hokkaido and central Japan involving aspects other than rice cultivation not only aids our understanding of the nature of Esan culture, but should also not be overlooked in terms of our understanding of the nature of Yayoi culture in eastern Japan.