The Regional Characteristics of the Sutra Mounds of Eastern Japan

MURAKI, Jiro

Sutra mounds were built in all areas of Japan during the 12th and 13th centuries. Because the Kinki district around Heian-kyo and northern Kyushu around Dazaifu are the two main areas where these mounds are found, research to date has tended to concentrate on the sutra mounds of western Japan. However, there has been an increase in cases of excavations of sutra mounds in eastern Japan over the past several years. This paper examines regional trends among sutra mounds in eastern Japan by focusing on sutra mounds from which bronze sutra cases, specially-made ceramic and stone sutra cases and outer cases have been excavated. The propensity of sutra mounds to be ruins with strong regional flavors means that when making a detailed examination of individual materials their specificity will inevitably come to the fore. Consequently, by taking a broad overview in order to draw a general outline of the sutra mounds of eastern Japan, the aim of this paper is to undertake a fundamental examination that will lead to future research.

This will be achieved by firstly classifying bronze sutra cases into those which are of the Kinki style and those made using a different manufacturing technique where the body and the bottom of the sutra case are cast together, and pinning down areas of distribution for these two types. Next, the outer cases are classified according to whether they are Suzu, Tokai or stone cases, etc. and their distribution will be similarly investigated. When sutra cases are buried they can be buried either using outer cases or by making stone chambers. Since there has been an increase in instances where details of excavation have been made known, classification will also be made on the basis of burying methods that have come to light through this kind of information. Differences between the Japan Sea side and the Pacific Ocean side and features unique to the Kantō region, clearly emerge in the course of these investigations. These have made it possible to classify the sutra mounds of eastern Japan into seven different regions: Mutsu, Dewa, Kanto, Chubu highlands and eastern Shizuoka, western Tokai, Kaetsu and Reinan.