The Changes and Historical Background of the Metal Weapon in East Asia

WANG, Wei

We may say the following about the process of the transmission of weapons made from metal in East Asia. During the 2nd century BC, weapons made from bronze from northeastern China spread to the Korean Peninsula and then to the Japanese Archipelago. Later, iron weapons that came from central China (中原) appeared in northeastern China and gradually spread to the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago. This was related to the expansion of the authority of the Yan State (燕国). After the end of the 2nd century BC, the strong influence of Han culture reached the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago via the Le Lang (樂浪) district that had been established on the Korean Peninsula by the Western Han dynasty. One important manifestation of this was the introduction of metal weapons and metal production technology from Han China. This introduction is evident from the similarities between Han weapons and weapons that date from the Three Ham period (三韓時代) and the Yayoi Period, and also from similarities in their form and structure. When, after the end of the 3rd century AD, the Murong Xianbei (慕容鮮卑) based in the northwestern part of China's Liaoning Province (辽宁省) came to flaunt their authority, Xianbei weapons, armor and horse gear (Trappings) became the main type of iron weapons and accessories in East Asia from the 3rd century onwards. Thus, they came to occupy an extremely important position with respect to the development of iron implements in the East Asian. The iron weapons etc. of the Xianbei first exerted a strong influence over Koguryo (高句麗), after which they were transmitted to the Three Kingdoms in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula and to Wa (倭).

Two major historical trends can be detected from the process of the transformation of metal weapons in East Asia. First, there was the development of manufacturing techniques for iron articles from the China's Warring States Period through to the period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, and the huge changes that these techniques brought to the Korean Peninsula and to Japan. Second, there were the huge changes that the introduction of the practice of fighting on horseback and the accompanying intensification of war brought to fighting methods and offensive and defensive equipment and the changes that these brought to the political, economic and cultural aspects of East Asian states. These major developments inter-
acted with and complemented each other, and in prompting the formation of ancient royal authorities and states on the Korean Peninsula and Japan they stimulated historical developments in East Asia.