Preconditions for the Formation of Graveyard Villages: around the Yuzaki Graveyard in Yamato

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It is often pointed out the local graveyards in the Nara basin can be traced back to graveyards from before the Early Modern period. The running of a local graveyard was carried out by the several villages that formed a graveyard village, and this framework is explained in relation to water villages, mountain villages and shrine village and also villages in the entire province (国人大). However, there are many instances in which this kind of regional and historical framework does not correspond with the actual facts. There are diverse circumstances at play in the process of the formation of an actual graveyard village, and it is these which cause its formation. When examining the individual preconditions and process of the formation of graveyard villages, the present challenge is to provide classifications for future use.

As one example, I turned my attention to the Yuzaki graveyard, in Kawanishi-machi, Shikigun situated more or less in the center of the Nara basin. The village around Yuzaki graveyard extends over a wide area on both sides of the Terakawa River and is also the largest size for a village even for Yamato. First, using historical materials I endeavored to restore Yuzaki's scope to what it had been in the second half of the Medieval period, which turned out to be virtually a replication of the scope of the village today. Namely, it indicated the possibility that the regional framework of the village group had existed before the second half of the 13th century. Next, I refer to the rerouting of the Terakawa River as an historical project that illustrates the actual conditions of this regional framework. Near Yuzaki, Terakawa River becomes a straight waterway that runs along an ancient road called the SUJICHIGAI-do (Taishi-do). Archeological investigations in recent years have detected a river course that can be concluded to be the former waterway, and the former waterway has been restored from observations of its present topography. Using historical materials as well, it is estimated that the rerouting of the waterway took place from the latter part of the 12th century through to the middle of the 13th century. It is suspected that the rerouting of the Terakawa River was for a deliberate reorganization of flood control, irrigation, arable land and transportation, though it is not difficult to imagine that it also brought change to basic facilities in the region. Of course, the groups that should be called the forerunners of the village were caught up in all this.

Next, I examined the geographical position of Yuzaki graveyard. 1) It was on the rim of a large area of land in Yamato that was systematically divided. 2) The emergence of a rim of the
large area of land that was systematically divided is related to rerouting of the Terakawa River.

3) Strategic religious and transport facilities can be found along an axis that runs in a north to south direction through the Yuzaki graveyard (equivalent to the border of the systematically divided land in Shiki-gun and Heguri-gun). In other words, when facing north one finds the strategically located sequence of the Yuzaki graveyard, Umedo bridge (formerly Yuzaki Temple and a crossing point over the Terakawa River), Itayagase bridge (a crossing point over the Yamato River, ADO graveyard and then Ryofuku-ji temple. 4) Historical materials reveal that these were bases for the activities of the Ritsu Sect.

In summation, we may conclude the following. The regional framework for the village around Yuzaki graveyard was formed in the 13th century, it is possible that the village was intentionally located around the graveyard, it is possible that this option was taken amid investigations into land use that looked at a large area that exceeded the bounds of the village, and that the activities of the Ritsu Sect contributed to the process of formation of the village around the Yuzaki graveyard.