Vicissitudes of the Yanagino-gosho Archaeological Site

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The Yanagino-gosho archaeological site is the remains of part of the Hiraizumi base of the Fujiwara clan in Mutsu Province during the twelfth century. Changes in the Yanagino-gosho site can be divided into six periods. The 1st and 2nd periods correspond to the time of the first generation, Fujiwara-no-Kiyohira, the 3rd and 4th periods to the second generation Fujiwara-no-Motohira, and the 5th and 6th periods to the 3rd generation Fujiwara-no-Hidehira.

During the 1st and 2nd periods the natural topography was used to surround the facility with moats. This facility made use of the stockades and mansions that the Abe and Kiyohara clans had built starting in the eleventh century.

During the 3rd period, although the moats did function the compound inside the moats disappeared. It would seem that compared to the 1st and 2nd periods, the importance of Yanagino-gosho had decreased in relative terms.

During the 4th period, a road was built within the moats. Since the road continued from outside the moat it disregarded the blocking and defensive functions of a moat, which suggests that by this time the moat had lost its function.

During the 5th period, the central area which had been developed during the previous periods expanded. It was enclosed by blocks measuring a standard 400 shaku (1 shaku=30.3 cm) in length and the structure of the facility is consistent with the Shinden-zukuri style having a main house with a pond.

During the 6th period, the central area that had been continually used during the previous five periods was destroyed, and a new central area was built approximately 90 meters away on the northern side. This re-location of the central area brought about a fundamental change in the character of Yanagino-gosho.

We may conclude that over these six periods Yanagino-gosho assumed the following different characters: during the 1st and 2nd periods it was a facility that combined government offices with a residence and possessed a defensive quality. During the 3rd and 4th periods it was the residence for members of the Fujiwara clan. During the 5th period it was the residence of Hidehira, who was the head of the clan at that time, and was a place where banquets were frequently held. During the 6th period its function was that of a government office.

The Yanagino-gosho site was one of the major sites in Hiraizumi throughout the twelfth century, though its structure and use changed during each of its stages.