The Urban Design of Heijo-Kyo

Abe Gihei

Heijo-kyo, Japan's capital located at Nara from 710 to 784, is a typical example of an ancient Japanese capital. Built when the capital was shifted there from Fujiwara-kyo (694–710), it has been suggested that some aspects of the former capital were passed on, while other new aspects were introduced upon the capital's relocation. Even though the Jo-Bo system - the layout of the streets in a grid design - was adopted in both capitals, there were many points of difference. These included the outer appearance of the capital and the palace and the position of the palace. Most of these are thought to be the result of the haste in which the systems of Tang China's capital Chang'an were copied. However, in a 2003 paper entitled “The Structure of Fujiwara-kyo and Heijo-kyo”, I illustrated that there is an extremely close successive relationship between the two capitals, with the changes in the formation and design of Heijo-kyo fundamentally a continuation of Fujiwara-kyo. What is more, Heijo-kyo's formation and design illustrate important details that point to the nature of old capitals including those besides Fujiwara-kyo. In this paper, I provide further evidence of this and demonstrate that the relationship between the two capitals is one of a continuation of capitals in the Japanese archipelago and that within the course of the history of Japanese capitals theirs is an epoch-making and important integrated structure.