The Wuwan and Xianbei during the Stage of the Three Kingdoms: A Study from the Perspective of Interaction and Changes

KAWAMOTO Yoshiaki

One has the feeling that in terms of literature, we have complete explanations from the classical studies of Ginpu Uchida in Japan, Ma Changshou in China and others concerning the Wuwan and Xianbei. However, the discovery of Xianbei stone tombs by Mi Wenping has added new knowledge, and recently there have been substantial advances in research on the Xianbei from an archaeological perspective, as seen in studies of tombs like those in Weijian and Sunwei. For this reason, a re-examination of the Wuwan and Xianbei during this period that considers such findings has considerable significance.

As they moved south, the Xianbei tribes strengthened their relations with China and eventually established Xianbei empires of their own within China. Northern Wei, which was one of these, became a prototype for the later Sui and Tang empires which unified China under imperial rule. The expansion of the Huaxia tribes after the beginning of Yellow River civilization that came about as a result of the construction of the Great Wall in the Qin period, marked a huge shift in which the Great Wall became both a concrete and symbolic representation that marked the land to the south as China and the land to the north as belonging to the Hu tribes. As a result, the mixing of Chinese with outsiders that had occurred in Huabei during the period was reversed, and this saw the start of a new period that was marked by the existence of the “four barbarian peoples” on the periphery of China. This Chinese-barbarian order with the Great Wall acting as a boundary between the north and south was continued in successive periods. However, as mentioned previously, the southward migration of the northern tribes toward China continued, and as seen in the examples of the Mongol and Manchu peoples during much later times, a huge empire came to be built, which included the native lands of these peoples as well as China. When viewed from this perspective, there arises the question of the nature of the relationship that the Wuwan and Xianbei of the Three Kingdoms period, the topic of this paper, has with Chinese history and eastern Eurasian history in general.

While considering the above question, this paper discusses the migration and interaction of the Wuwan and Xianbei during the Three Kingdoms period and the historical significance of the accompanying changes.

Keywords: Wuwan (Wuhuan) Xianbei, Xiongnu, migration, Yi Di, China