Graves in Northern Honshu and Hokkaido in the Ancient Period
Fujisawa Atsushi

During the period when the ancient state was being formed in Japan, a separate history was unfolding in the region from northern Honshu to Hokkaido. Whereas kofun (mounded tombs) were built in southern Tohoku, in northern Tohoku and Hokkaido, Zoku-Jomon (continuing Jomon) type graves were built. There were three broad types of graves in the period starting in the 7th century: end stage kofun in southern Tohoku, “final stage kofun” in northern Tohoku, and Zoku-Jomon type graves in Hokkaido.

The author studied southern Tohoku kofun and Zoku-Jomon type graves in northern Tohoku on the Pacific Ocean side, for which there is an abundance of materials, and their relationship with “final stage kofun” in the period starting from the 7th century. With regard to cultural differences as seen from archaeological materials centering on graves, changes were consistently incremental and there were no clear boundaries. The boundary between one culture and another covered a large area with no definitive line of demarcation. From the time of the Yamato government to the establishment of the ritsuryo state, central government regarded people from north of the Sendai Plain in the center of Miyagi Prefecture as Emishi, who were ethnically different. The distribution of various archaeological materials reveals that the least clear differences are to be found within the boundaries between the Yamato and Emishi peoples.

In northern Honshu and Hokkaido, there is a marked difference between the “final stage kofun” of northern Tohoku and the Zoku-Jomon type graves of Hokkaido in the period starting from the 7th century. An important point to consider when studying the relationship between the two is that “final stage kofun” are also to be found in central Hokkaido. In central Hokkaido graves were built that had been partially modified while maintaining strong similarities with the “final stage kofun” of northern Tohoku. What is more, there are cases where graves resembling both Zoku-Jomon type graves and “final stage kofun” were built at the same site. There are also some Zoku-Jomon type graves that display hints of the influence of “final stage kofun”. In central Hokkaido there is a strong relationship between “final stage kofun” and Zoku-Jomon type graves, which makes it difficult to establish a clear boundary line between the two.

This study centering on these graves shows that it is not possible to draw a clear boundary line
delineating these different cultures. It shows that cultural differences don’t readily correspond to differences in human groups.

Key words: kofun, Zoku–Jomon type graves, final stage kofun, cultural changes, boundary