Historical Meaning of Ancient Tombs in Late Stage in Shimotsuke Area: A Case Example of the Rule of the Eastern Area in the 6th and 7th Centuries

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The regional policy of the central power, which was enforced in the last half of the 6th century, aimed to reorganize the eastern area, which represented the transition from the rule through the conventional major chieftains to the close control by minor chieftains who governed small areas. The circumstances are clearly evidenced by the sudden increase of burial mounds with a square front and a round back in the last half of the 6th century.

Such control of the eastern area presented various forms depending on the actual situation of each region, which was shown by the change of important ancient tombs in the 6th and 7th centuries. In the Shimotsuke area, it seems that there were screening of core chieftains and the grant of superiority to them. This article examines such circumstances through analysis of stone tombs on the side of a mountain, mounds, etc. which display strongly the <consciousness of we> of the Shimotsuke ancient tombs.

It seems that the progress of the new ruling method of the central power caused various reactions of local chieftains. The core chieftains, who were dispersed but not separated from each other around Shimotsuke ancient tombs, promoted their bonding further, and created an innovative sepulcher called a Shimotsuke-type stone-coffin-type stone chamber to express their sense of belonging. It is a small and refined sepulcher space that represents a very different idea of funeral from the gigantic orientation of the chieftains in the area near Kyoto, which shows activation of the strong will of the local chieftains. Meanwhile, many chieftains deployed in the neighborhood appear to have responded to the central power individually, but presented gradual ideological bonding by adopting a stone tomb on the side of a mountain of the side bulge shape perhaps to counter the core chieftains. However, while the side bulge shape was common, the stone tombs on the side of a mountain were various in the plane plans, the materials, and the structure design methods. Judging from this, it seems that such movement did not represent the same closeness as the core chieftains.

As the stone tombs on the side of a mountain that showcased ancient tombs in the late stage were built by piling up lump stones, river stones, and cut stones, a fixed shape could not be completed without a clear plan from the start. In other words, as it is very difficult to recognize the accidental nature in such buildings, it is possible to approach the clear will of the chieftains and the middle-class people