Elucidating the Relationship between Japan and Silla in the 7th Century from Roof Tiles

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After the dispatch of Kentoshi (Japanese envoy to China) in the 8th year of the Tenchi Period (669), Kentoshi was not dispatched at all for a period of 30-plus years until the second year of the Taiho Period (702). The archaeology indicates that Japan (Wa) assimilated advanced cultures and various systems through active negotiations with Silla during this period. It seems necessary to study moves in the relationship between Japan and Silla in the 7th century from an archaeological point of view. For its elucidation, I analyze some roof tiles unearthed at temples in the Asuka-Fujiwara region and study their ancestries in order to clarify the Japan-Silla relationship at that time.

Eave-end roof tiles associated with No. 4 kiln of the Hayaagari kiln site in Uji City were supplied to Toyura-ji Temple in Asuka. So far, Type A has been considered to be the “Koguryu family,” and Type E, the “Pakche family.” According to a study on the differences and similarities in their manufacturing techniques and similar examples on the Korean Peninsula, there is a greater possibility that they were manufactured by two groups of craftsmen having different technical traditions coming from Silla.

Dosho, who went to Tang for study as a student priest in May of the fourth year of the Hakuchi Period (653), constructed a Zen-in temple at the southeastern corner of Asukadera Temple after returning to Japan. Each of the eave-end roof tiles (five types) has high originality. Study of the ancestry shows that they derive from Silla, Pakche, and the Southern Dynasties of China and present the relatively strong characteristics of Silla. The use of bamboo concave roof tiles from the Korean Peninsula family is also a feature.

In recent years, excavation research of Gyeongju Shitenno-ji Temple has been proceeding. When the result is compared with the research result of Motoyakushi-ji Temple, similarities are found not only in the arrangement of the twin-tower monastery but also in the pent roofs or eaves tiles for the pent roof.

Roof tile materials in the 7th century show that Japan (Wa) and Silla had many exchanges through the 7th century. Hence, it may be said that Silla had been occasionally searching for an affiliation with Wa in the conflicts among Three Kingdoms of Korea. It can be presumed that the exchange route with Silla was also one of key axes in the establishment and development of a state based on law and ordinance in Japan.
Key words: Japanese and Korean relationship history, 7th century, Silla and Wa (Japan), Korean-family roof tile, Kentoshi