Burial Mounds in the Tama River Basin in the Late or End Kofun Period: Dynamics of the Togoku Region in the 7th Century

HIROSE Kazuo

There are two epochs marking changes in the chiefs’ tombs in the Tama River basin, the first of which is the period from the end of the 6th century to the beginning of the 7th century. During this time, the construction of ancient burial mounds, square at the front and rounded at the rear, ended in the mid- and lower reaches of the river. At the same time, several ashlarizing horizontal stone chambers were constructed for the first time, but as circular burial mounds with diameters of less than 20m and in various inconsistent styles. No strong links with chiefs can be seen from those stone chambers. The second epoch goes from around midway through the 7th century. In the upper reach of the river, where no chief’s tomb had yet been installed, a number of ashlarizing horizontal stone chambers, including multiple rooms and womb-like structures, appeared in the North Musashi region. During the subsequent period from the latter half to the end of the 7th century, such stone chambers spread in the right bank area in the mid- and lower reaches of the river. They have commonality based on a certain condition, and reflect the ideological integration of chiefs, <we-consciousness> and class consciousness.

In the mid-7th century, the chiefs moved from the North Musashi region to the reach of the Tama River; namely, the political center moved from North Musashi to South Musashi. This move was intended to ensure systematic improvement of “Tosando-musashimichi”, which connected the Tama River water transportation and the Musashi and Sagami regions and the development of abundant materials in Tama Hills. It is difficult, however, to consider that such political and economical activities were produced by dynamism solely in the Tama River basin. For such regional development, benefiting both the North and South Musashi regions and the Sagami region, significant adjustment of competing interests was required. This would have been difficult to realize without exercising power higher than that of local chiefs or central power.

Meanwhile, the chiefs of the North Musashi region, who exercised control over the new political center, adopted specific mound shapes such as a burial mound with a square flat base and round top and an octagonal burial mound as well as temple construction techniques, including making a podium core and digging ground work while constructing traditional burial chambers. This seems to reflect the new dynamics of the local chiefs, who strove to innovate the period in connection with the center
of the state, retaining togetherness in existing regions.

Key words: ashlar ing stone chamber, stone chamber of a womb-like structure, changed concept of burial mound, Tama River water transportation, political center