Collective Burial of Skeleton Parts in the Jomon Period
Study of the Collective Burial Custom Which Involved Some Bone Parts from Other Skeletons during the Jomon Period

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A careful examination of archaeological excavations of the burial of human bones during the Jomon Period has revealed skeletons buried together with bone parts from other skeletons, including large parts such as skulls, mandibles and limbs, which make it difficult to accept any notion that these parts from other skeletons may have been mixed in accidentally. While many of these cases have up until now been treated as single or individual burials, the idea that the people of the time intentionally mixed in parts of other skeletons to form collective burials sets these apart from single or individual burials and surely demands acknowledgment as another type of burial.

In this paper, I refer to such examples as cases of collective burial of skeleton parts, recognizing these as a particular type of burial method, and conducted an investigation into how these burials were performed as well as their significance.

As a result, it has been established that 21 examples such as these have been found across 8 sites mainly in the southern part of the Kanto region; the burial of a single male included female skeleton parts; combined burial of adults and children was performed; and that these were composed together in small single burial groups.

Previous examples of collective burial as well as views on life and death were taken in order to study the significance of these findings, and based on the notion that those who were buried in collective burials seem to have been grouped with blood relatives, the fact that in the Jomon Period there was a genealogical view of life and death, and the fact that this view of life and death ties in with the genealogical relationships which formed the foundation of the social structure of the time, this paper surmises that the significance of collective burial of skeleton parts was connected to the confirmation and continuation of the genealogical relationships through the collective burial of people who were socially related, including blood relatives.

Key words: Jomon Period, burial custom, collective burial, parts of skeleton, view of life and death