The Frame of the Yayoi Culture: Is Wet Rice Cultivation with Irrigation System an Indicator of the Yayoi Culture?

FUJIO Shin’ichiro

This paper has defined the Yayoi culture as “the culture of performing Yayoi rituals for progress towards formation of agricultural society as a production base, placing wet rice cultivation with irrigation-system within a selective occupational structure, and preservation thereof” and has given consideration to the frame of the Yayoi culture, namely the regions and timing to which this culture applies.

To begin with, we established a lateral frame extending from wet rice cultivation with irrigation system and the existence of moat settlements and square tombs surrounded by moats, through to the Miyazaki-Tone River regions where the existence of Yayoi rituals can clearly be recognized. We then established a vertical frame starting from the wet rice cultivation with irrigation-system placed within the selective occupational structures in each region, and extending to the establishment of ancient tombs. As a result, it has been understood that the preceding definition applies to the northern part of Kyushu from the late 10th century BC, western Japan (excluding the northern part of Kyushu) from the 8th to 6th century BC, and the Chubu and southern Kanto regions from the middle of the 3rd century BC.

Therefore, it is clear that the Yayoi culture was extremely restricted in terms of regions and time periods, and that the Yayoi culture cannot be regulated by wet rice cultivation with irrigation-system alone. Although up until now ancient tomb culture had been perceived as a continuation of the Yayoi culture, this definition establishes that ancient tomb culture is separate from the Yayoi culture. This is because we now know that keyhole-shaped tumuli were produced in western Japan at roughly the same time as production in the northern part of Kanto to the central Tohoku region and in Kagoshima.

Therefore, while the previous understanding that society and rituals became the Yayoi in nature as a straight line extension of growth in productivity can be applied in the region westward of the Tone River, it cannot be applied in Kagoshima and the region northward from the Tone River. Ancient tombs were established at roughly the same time in regions where the Yayoi culture was politically socialized after agricultural socialization, and in regions where political socialization did not occur but wet rice cultivation with irrigation system was conducted within a comprehensive occupational structure. Contained herein a clue that enables understanding of the establishment of ancient tombs.

Key words: Yayoi long-term chronology, bokashi (shading) culture, comprehensive/selective occupational subsistence structure, expanded reproduction