A Few Problems Surrounding the Yamashiro/Hebizuka Kofun

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Keyhole-shaped tumulus, large circular (rectangular) tombs and collective burial sites from the latter Kofun Period are distributed around the Sagano region in the northwest of Kyoto in a so-called three-layer construction. Among these, the Hebizuka Kofun is one of the most famous megalith tombs in the Japanese islands, with horizontal stone chambers rivaling those of Misemaruyama Kofun and Ishibutai Kofun, etc. However, since their historical placement was not necessarily adequate, we made a trial run of Kofun chronology in the region based on horizontal stone chambers, etc., and attempted to trace the rise and fall of the Sagano Kofun group.

Herein, we were able to sample five generations of keyhole-shaped tumulus and two generations of large circular tombs from around the end of the fifth century to around the first half of the seventh century, covering a total of seven generations. In addition, from around the latter half of the sixth century, large circular (rectangular) tombs that can be deemed as elite burial mounds were constructed independently or as parts of collective burial sites, while around this time several elite groups began constructing kofun for collective burials in this region. Furthermore, collective burial sites were also constructed in the vicinity from around the same time.

As well as concentrating on the Sagano Kofun collective burial group, there was use of the so-called kinai-type (capital region) of shared horizontal stone chambers, from which there was an ideological sense of unity through shared burial ideas, or in other words a class-based structure, and it is easier to understand related large political groups having the same sense of belonging. That is to say, the kinai-type horizontal stone chambers functioned as an important ideological connection between the elite classes that built keyhole-shaped tumulus and large circular (rectangular) tombs, and the middle class majority that built collective burial sites. Accordingly, together with the elite and middle class hierarchy, the group sense of belonging was also strongly expressed.

In the historical background of such related keyhole-shaped tumulus and circular (rectangular) tombs having been constructed in the Sagano region, the area is thought to have been a location for river transport as far as the Yamato region, going from the Sea of Japan and via Yura River and Katsura River. In other words, the areas has been seen as a location for the political force of elite classes with a stronghold on the transport of things and people from around the end of the fifth century to around the first half of the seventh century. Such roles were sufficiently exhibited by the keyhole-shaped tumulus and large circular tombs.

Key words: megalith tombs, kinai-type (capital region) horizontal stone chambers, river transport, Yamato region, Hata clan