Transitions of Royal Palace Construction in Ancient Japan: Focusing on the Former Naniwa Palace and Asuka Palace

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The Former Naniwa Palace has been defined as Emperor Kotoku's Naniwa Nagara Toyosaki no Miya Palace (from 651), the Asuka Palace III-A period as Emperor Saimin and Tenji's Later Asuka Okamoto no Miya Palace (from 656), and the Asuka Palace III-B period as Emperors Temmu and Jito's Asuka Kiyomihara no Miya Palace (from 672). In other words, from the remains clarified by means of excavations, we can analyze transitions from the Former Naniwa Palace to the Asuka Palace by comparing transitions in periods III-A and III-B. In this paper, we have identified specifically what changed and what remained the same during the process of these transitions, and considered the significance of these factors.

The Former Naniwa Palace comprised the Imperial Palace together with the enormous Imperial Court to the south of the Palace. Although the scale of the Imperial Palace was reduced at Asuka Palace, its form was retained. However, the structural form of the Imperial Court was altered. At the subsequent Fujiwara Palace, the Royal Palace of Japan under the ritsuryo codes, the Imperial Court adopted the same form as that of the Former Naniwa Palace, which means that the advanced and groundbreaking nature of the Former Naniwa Palace can be evaluated. On the other hand, from the fact that no such enormous Imperial Court was constructed at Asuka Palace, we have concluded that the Former Naniwa Palace marked a return to the original palace of the great king after a backlash against radical political reform.

By the time of the Asuka Palace III-B period, the central palace of the Imperial Palace was left untouched, while a newly titled “Daikokuden” (council hall in the Imperial Palace) was constructed. The “Daikokuden” was used as the central palace of the Royal Palace at Fujiwara Palace, and this has been perceived as a new factor connected to the Royal Palace of Japan under the ritsuryo codes.

At the Former Naniwa Palace and Asuka Palace, spaces that could be described as outer walls were established around the middle of the Royal Palace. However, the middle of the Royal Palace was not aligned with its central axis, and the outer wall of the Royal Palace itself was also irregular in form. Compared with the Royal Palace of Japan under the ritsuryo codes, maintenance remains inadequate even though the new outer wall element is established. In addition, government offices that supported practical work at the Royal Palace were arranged along the outer walls. However, both in the Former Naniwa Palace and Asuka Palace III-A period, things were not regulated to such an extent. By the time of the Asuka Palace III-B period, government offices had come to be maintained, and this was continued at Fujiwara Palace, where the offices were integrated within the Royal Palace. The aspect of the government offices that supported the Royal Palace are also thought to have been introduced as a new element, although there remained parts that were still incomplete.

Based on such comparative analysis of Royal Palaces, this paper evaluates the Former Naniwa Palace and Asuka Palaces having blended new elements with old elements from the formative period of Japan under the ritsuryo codes, and as clearly being Royal Palaces of transition periods positioned within the Royal Palace transitions of ancient Japan.

Key words: Former Naniwa Palace, Asuka Palace, Fujiwara Palace, Japan under the ritsuryo codes, Royal Palace construction