Ancient Public Offices and Neighborhoods/Rural Townships

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The province-district-neighborhood (later known as rural townships) system was established as an administrative structure for regional control of regional societies in ancient Japan. This article focuses on study using archeological excavation text documents from recent excavations in various places, aiming to clarify the reality of application of public offices and neighborhoods/rural townships.

In the “Wamyo Ruijusho” established in the first half of the tenth century, Hikami District in Tamba Province was split into two inner districts called “Higashiagata” and “Nishiagata” while Yamanashi District in Kai Province was likewise split into the two inner districts of “Yamanashi Higashigun” and “Yamanashi Nishigun”. However, this had already been implemented from the first half of the eighth century with public offices in Seibu (Nishiagata region) in the Hikami District and a partitioned rule system called gukebetsuin in Toubu (Higashiagata region). In Iwaki District, Mutsu Province, too, there was a system of north and south partitions centered around Iwaki-no-go, a rural township with a public office. In this way, there were two methods of partition and rule systems for districts: the administrative system of splitting into two inner districts centered around public offices, and the functional system of resolving differences by means of natural environment and historical chronology, etc.

Incidentally, there were three types of rural townships with public offices: the landlord (ooyake) rural townships, rural townships named after districts, and district home townships. Landlord (ooyake) rural townships were locations of influential landowners established from before the district system, and rural townships named after districts were mainly the location of district-leading families, with public offices bearing the name of the district. On the other hand, district home townships were newer than landlord rural townships and rural townships named after districts. For example, Irua District in Musashi Province, landlord rural townships and district home townships were side by side, in which case we can understand that the first public offices were located in landlord rural townships and were later newly established in district home townships, forming rural townships with public offices.

It can be confirmed from archeological excavation text documents that these rural townships with public offices had different responsibilities from other inner district rural townships, for example being imposed with compulsory maintenance and management of public office facilities, etc.

The persons in charge and neighborhood chiefs under the neighborhood (rural township) system bore administrative responsibilities such as distribution and control of assignments, etc., and they frequently attended public offices, while the wives of neighborhood chiefs, who were essentially the housekeepers of the neighborhood, had a precise understanding of the movements of members of every house in the neighborhood (rural township), exhibiting power behind the scenes of agricultural administration.

As is clear from the above, the application of administration through the ancient regional administrative structure of the district-neighborhood-rural township system was very logical and took into account the characteristics of the respective regions. The reality of this system is made brilliantly clear by archeological excavation text documents from various places.

Key words: the reality of application of public offices and neighborhoods/rural townships partition and rule systems for districts rural townships with public offices neighborhood chiefs wife of neighborhood chiefs