Local Communities and Governance of Domains in the 7th Century: Kofun, Temples, and Establishment of Villages in Ibo County, Harima Province

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By analyzing the records of Ibo County in Harima Province, this paper explores the political evolution of the Japanese Islands, from the Kofun period (period of ancient burial mounds) through to a nation governed under ritsuryo codes. From the Harima no Kuni Fudoki (Local History of Harima Province), 18 villages recorded in the Ibo County section were accurately identified and compared with the local state of kofun and temples at that time. In Ibo County 11 late keyhole-shaped kofun (burial mounds) from the mid-6th century, and 1,255 kofun from the later Kofun period were counted. We assumed approximately 400 to 500 families (households) would be involved in the construction of a kofun; however, it was found that this estimate was not consistent with the conceptual domain of the village – one village consisting of only some 50 households. Concerning the prominent kofun in the later 7th century, we were able to consider the county head officials as the kofun owners. The number of temples built during the 7th to 9th centuries was 14, which indicates a distribution similar to the concept of one temple per village. Since temples are consistent with villages, it can be considered Buddhist temples promoted the integration of a village or local community. In addition, construction of temples along government roads was thoroughly ensured for each village, and it can be inferred that the nation under the ritsuryo codes aimed at the spread of Buddhism as a means to keep the country safe.

With regard to the principle of the establishment of 18 villages, the domain was divided according to the equitable development (production) area, not by the total area of a village. This finding shows that counties and villages were divided as basic units to comprehensively govern the land domain, and not simply controlled by a patriarchal system based around the kofun of chieftains. They are also the calculation unit for any levy on land and tax collection aimed at some degree of development. Governing by chieftains in the Kofun period with unstable domains was denied, and the nation under the ritsuryo codes gave governmental authority to the chieftain of a local area such as a county head official to exercise firm control of the land domain. This was a county-village system, and it can be considered that real completion of domain control in Ibo County and villages, Harima Province was made during the reign of Empress Jito at the end of the 7th century.

Key words: Late period kofun, old temple, Harima no Kuni Fudoki (Local History of Harima Province), domain control of villages, development area