Korean Peninsula Artifacts in the Late Kofun Period in Eastern Japan and Contact between Chieftains

OTA Hiroyuki

Korean Peninsula artifacts excavated from the kofun (ancient burial mounds) in Eastern Japan and found in the Collections of Keyhole-Shaped Kofun: Kinai Region Chronicle 10th Period, include many special items that cannot be considered to have been made within the Japanese Islands. These types of artifacts are rarely found in the Kinki region, and many of them have been found in such regions as Kyushu and Tokai; from this fact, one can consider that the chieftains of each region had opportunities to obtain these artifacts through direct contact with the chieftains of the Korean Peninsula and not through the central Japanese administration.

It is also a fact that these Korean Peninsula artifacts were grave goods like those often found in the same time period in prominent kofun throughout the Japanese Islands; and it has been confirmed that in one kofun Korean Peninsula artifacts were found alongside the same types of goods made in the Japanese Islands. Based on these findings it is hard to assume that direct contact between the chieftains throughout the Japanese Islands including Eastern Japan, and the chieftains in the Korean Peninsula was made without the knowledge of the central administration.

In particular, it can be considered that the flow into Eastern Japan of artifacts made in the Korean Peninsula is strongly related to the increasing reorganization of the regional chieftains by the central administration, which is inferred from the construction of kofun, and evidence of changing communications between chieftains in some parts of Eastern Japan. It can also be considered to be a phenomenon related to the very tense situation with the Korean Peninsula confronted by the central administration of that time. There is a strong likelihood that during the period, led by the central administration, prominent chieftains in various parts of the Japanese Islands were broadly involved in negotiations with the Korean Peninsula, and taking into account the inflow of artifacts made in the Korean Peninsula, it can be assumed that the chieftains in Eastern Japan also had opportunities of participating in the negotiations with the Korean Peninsula, and they took on being responsible for the logistics function of supporting the constant stationing of military forces in northern Kyushu, and were involved in military operations accompanying the organization and mobilization of the chieftains of medium and small-sized groups.

Concerning the circumstances under which chieftains in Eastern Japan came to possess Korean Peninsula artifacts, the following possibilities can be considered: they were acquired through opportunities for direct contact with Korean Peninsula chieftains upon the occasion of negotiations with
a foreign country directed by the central administration; and in the course of negotiations with the Korean Peninsula, chieftains and those of high social rank from the Korean Peninsula had upon occasion visited Japan, or stayed in Eastern Japan, and these goods were brought in by this group.

Key words: Korean Peninsula artifacts, late Kofun period, Eastern Japan, international environment