Iron Culture in the Yayoi Period from the Viewpoint of the History of Related Studies: Giving a True Picture of the Role of Iron

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In the 1930s, overcoming ethnicism while the government was tightening control on free speech, a new theory emerged. According to the theory, in the chalcolithic period, iron farming implements played a decisive role in agricultural production to create surplus resources leading to social stratification. After the World War II, the Yayoi period became recognized as a process where community leaders had promoted trade and labor division by using surplus working resources and enhanced their control over communities. It was considered certain that ground stone tools such as stone knives had disappeared in the Late Yayoi period, which was interpreted as a result of the proliferation of iron farming implements. However, archaeological excavations during the Japanese high economic growth period revealed that the proliferation had been limited to the northern Kyushu Island in the latter half of the Late Yayoi period. More and more researchers casted a doubt on the established theory that forged iron implements had appeared at the same time as starting rice cultivation. Their claim gradually undermined the deductive argument that the production and use of iron farming implements to increase agricultural production had created hierarchical societies. Around 2000, large scale excavations were conducted one after another along the coast of the Japan Sea, which revealed how iron tools had been used for the production of beads and luxury wooden containers. In other words, those archaeological investigations gave a clearer picture of community leaders who had put surplus labor into the production of elaborate craftworks to conduct long distance trade. Moreover, while the globalization of archaeology was progressing, the Western anthropology such as neo-evolutionism anthropology helped the development of the (early) state-formation theory as a new framework of historical recognition. Many researchers laid more stress on the distribution management of iron materials and implements as necessary goods than the agricultural production increased with the use of iron farm implements. On the other hand, some archaeologists voiced criticism from the viewpoints of inductive argument, which developed another assumption. Therefore, it became considered that imbalanced dependence between community leaders had been created by giving and receiving prestige goods. Furthermore, the distribution of iron materials and implements became considered to have had a close connection with the establishment of an economic base to activate the flow of goods. In summary, the above-mentioned history of studies can also be regarded as a process where the deductive argument of the role of iron culture in the formation
theory of a hierarchical society and an early state was verified by the iron culture theory based on the inductive argument.

Key words: Iron culture, Historical materialism, Neo-evolutionism anthropology, Prestige goods