Processes of Starting the Kofun Period and Building a Nation in the Wa State

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The development of the study on sankakubuchi shinjukyo (triangular-rimmed mirrors decorated with gods and animals) in the 1990s dated the Hashihaka burial mound to around the middle of the third century. This research results revealed a direct connection between the Wa State described in Gishiwajinden (Account of the Wa in History of the Wei Dynasty written by Chinese) and the Wa Sovereignty and enabled to understand them as consecutive development. This is because it can be considered that the proliferation of keyhole-shaped burial mounds and gamontai shinjukyo (mirrors with an image band decorated with gods and animals) throughout the area around the Seto Inland Sea, which can be regarded as the movements of the Wa State described in Gishiwajinden, started when Himiko was queen of the Wa State in the first half of the third century. Therefore, the establishment of the Wa Sovereignty with several coexisting Wa kings can be dated to the beginning of the third century. This starting point of the Wa State, which exceeded the regional boundaries of the Yayoi period, marked a turning point of the age. Defined as “the period of nation building in Wa,” the Kofun period can include the first half of the third century as its early stage.

Remaining challenges are to get a clear picture of the Yamato State in the Late Yayoi period, as a leading force in the Wa State, and understand why the Yamato State became the leader of the Wa State after the domestic warfare. On the other hand, since there were exceedingly few iron implements and large-scale burial mounds, some researchers consider that the Wa Sovereignty did not follow as an extension of the Yamato State in the Kinai region but was established by an emerging force in the eastern Setouchi region. There are significant differences of opinion on who established the Wa State.

With regard to the shift from the Yayoi period to the Kofun period, the carbon-14 dating method is suggesting a new framework. The method can reconfirm the date of the Hashihaka burial mound as around the middle of the third century. More importantly, the Shonai pottery is dated earlier to the second century. This means that the formation of the Makimuku site is also dated earlier to before the birth of the Wa State. Therefore, the site can be regarded as the independent establishment of the base of the Yamato State.

Defining the Kofun period as described above, the present article is aimed at giving the latest picture of how the Wa State was established, based on the new view of dating. To this end, the article
covers the establishment process of the Yamato State from the Late Yayoi period to the Kofun period and new perspectives on the Makimuku site, as well as examines the development of keyhole-shaped burial mounds including a comparison between the Tatetsuki mound tomb and Makimuku Ishizuka burial mound.

Key words: Yamato State, Makimuku site, Keyhole-shaped burial mounds, Wa State, Kofun period