Yayoi Culture as a Complex of Multiple Farming Cultures

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With regard to the definition of the Yayoi period, there are two kinds of perspective. One standpoint, attaching importance to a turning point of economic history, regards the full-scale initiation of agriculture such as rice cultivation as the start of the period. Another standpoint, putting stress on social aspects, pays more attention to qualitative changes in ideology. Criteria of period division should reflect trends at each time. At the same time, they should be simple and clear. Although both standpoints adopt rice cultivation as criteria, the latter standpoint is unlikely to be objective and clear for everyone because it requires a subjective judgment such as purposes and aims of the phenomenon. The period division should be independent of historical assessment. Adopting the former standpoint, this article defines the former’s ambiguous criterion of the full-scale initiation as the formation of a complex of farming cultures, a significant difference from the Jomon farming culture. The present article also reviews the history of studies on the Yayoi culture in eastern Japan as well as recent research using the replica method, which is the analysis of modeling the holes on the surface of potteries and observing by microscope and deciding the species of plants, to give a picture of the initial farming culture. Regarding the Initial Yayoi culture in eastern Japan as a complex of farming cultures, this article observes differences from the former studies that refuse to accept as the Yayoi culture the farming culture of the Kanto region before the middle of the Middle Yayoi period or that of the northern Tohoku region. The article recognizes the Yayoi culture as a complex of farming cultures that inherited a wide variety of agricultural forms which had been slowly cultivated in China and then developed in each area according to its own land conditions, environmental aspects, and group organization. The formation of true farming societies and political societies is considered here to have progressed in a limited area in the latter half of the Yayoi period.

Key word: Yayoi period, Complexed farming cultures, Period division, Yayoi culture, Replica method