Outline of Acceptance of Textual Culture and Immigrants in Omi

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Ancient wooden tablets excavated from Nishigawara and other parts of the Omi region are important historical materials, though small in number, to investigate the movement of central and local powers in the process of building a ritsuryo nation from the late seventh to the early eighth century. In addition, because there were many Chinese and Korean immigrants and their descendants in Omi at that time, their role in the acceptance of textual culture cannot be dismissed.

One of the influential migrant clans in Omi was the Shigano-Ayahito clan, belonging to the Ayahitono-Suguri serving under the Yamatono-Ayauji clan. The Shigano-Ayahito clan came from Kawachi and Yamato around the end of fifth century to the beginning of sixth century and were collectively settled in Omi, where they worked diligently, engaging in the management of distribution along water transportation routes around Lake Biwa. It is considered that they were dispatched to local bases interspersed throughout Omi by the then government led by the Soga clan to establish distribution networks by using lake transport and that they were mainly in charge of producing documents (wooden tablets). The textual materials, including wooden tablets, unearthed throughout Omi indicate that the Shigano-Ayahito clan quickly accepted and shared textual culture derived from the Korean Peninsula, their homeland, as other immigrants and descendants of immigrants working at the central government did.

The ongi wooden tablets (documents regarding the pronunciation and meaning of characters) unearthed from the Northern Otsu Site in Otsu City are the oldest ancient wooden tablets discovered in Omi. They describe the trials and errors in ancient times to establish the Japanese reading of Chinese characters, which means that while settling and working in the area after the end of the fifth century, an immigrant clan of the Shigano-Ayahito not only adopted the administrative document-writing techniques established by the central government but also devised a variety of their own methods. The wooden tablets excavated at the Nishigawara Site in Yasu City specifically indicate the involvement of the Shigano-Ayahito clan who were dispatched to manage the local facility in the area. They controlled distribution and trade based on water transportation around Lake Biwa, as well as land transportation (primitive principal roads called ekiro). They also had workshops including fabric, blacksmithing, and wooden tool production workshops. Moreover, they engaged in taxation and loan
Suiko management in relation to rice. The concrete procedures of receipt and issue of storehouse materials can be seen in wooden tablets excavated from storehouse ruins. It is assumed that their facility was the initial Yasuno-Korinomiyake (Yasu district government), which also had the function of umaya (station). Furthermore, Miyanouchi Wooden Tablet VI contains the phrase “bunsakunin” Iwaki-no-suguri-humimiti” to indicate the name of the writer of the wooden tablet (kura-fuda), which provides evidence that the Shigano-Ayahito clan who resided in the area were involved in document production.

Key words: Ayahitono-Suguri, Distribution of materials around Lake Biwa, Korinomiyake/Guke/Gunke (district government office) and Umaya/Ekika (station), Document administration