Radiocarbon Dating of Townhouses in front of Itsukushima Shrine and the Impact of the Analysis

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Like in Chūbu and Hokuriku Regions, there are townhouses with open-ceiling rooms called “oue” in front of Itsukushima Shrine in Miyajima Island, Hiroshima Prefecture, Chūgoku Region. The dates of their construction were estimated by chronologically comparing their architectural styles and techniques in the Study for Historic Building Preservation from FY2005 to FY2006. Among them, the Tanaka family’s residence and the Iida family’s workshop were dated to the late 18th century; however, radiocarbon dating results indicated that they were more likely to have been built in the late 17th century. Therefore, in this study, the dates of the houses estimated by the Study for Historic Building Preservation are reviewed and re-estimated as necessary.

The above-mentioned two buildings can disprove the assumption that there was no one-story townhouse in the 17th century. In this regard, they are important buildings that may lead to new findings in the medieval-to-early-modern townhouse research, which has been mainly based on historical documents and pictures from late medieval to early modern times, such as Rakuchu-rakugai-zu screen paintings. Moreover, although the Study for Historic Building Preservation presumed, based on its analysis of similar cases across Japan, that townhouses with oue may have been one of the oldest models, because the dates estimated by the Study were found incorrect, this paper considers the prospect of further detailed analysis of transitions in the model of townhouses by examining a wider range of historical documents and cases.

With narrower frontages, townhouses in front of Itsukushima Shrine are presumed to preserve features characteristic of medieval townhouses. This seems because they are situated in a religious town that had preserved the medieval urban environment and residents until early modern times.

Key words: Itsukushima, townhouse, chronology dating, 17th century, oue, Rakuchu-rakugai-zu, open-ceiling room