Distribution and Possession of Mirrors in the Kofun Period

UENO Yoshifumi

Mirrors buried as grave goods in the Kofun period are one of the most important pieces of evidence that elucidates the political structure of the Kofun society.

There was often a large time gap between the production/acquisition and burial of mirrors. Depending on the interpretation, such mirrors possessed over a long period of time may have a large impact on discussions on political relationships and social structures. The influence is even more significant in the case of Chinese mirrors as the time gap between their production and burial was very large. This article aims to establish a process to determine when mirrors were distributed and develop a simulation model applicable to both Chinese and Japanese mirrors and consistent with the time of production and burial.

First, Chinese and Japanese mirrors buried in mounds are divided into four periods of time according to the mirror-based chronology. Then, the processes of determining the time of distribution are compared to one another. This analysis reconfirms the significance of dating the burial of grave goods and suggests a simulation model in which the time of distribution is determined mainly based on the time of production/acquisition but also based on the assumption that some mirrors were distributed over a long period of time.

This simulation model is examined from two points of view: (1) the analysis of relationships between the emergence of Japanese mirrors and the possession of Chinese mirrors and (2) the comparison of transitions in Chinese and Japanese mirrors of the same style buried as grave goods. The results show that we can determine the time of acquisition and distribution of Chinese mirrors by analyzing which types of Chinese mirrors were imitated. The relationships between Chinese and Japanese mirrors of the same style are compared to one another. The analysis of curved dragon mirrors indicates that Chinese and Japanese mirrors complemented each other and were used as grave goods over a long period of time.

This study examines the simulation model based on the assumption that most mirrors were distributed just after production/acquisition but some were distributed long after production/acquisition. This article also highlights that distributors kept mirrors over a long period of time, not only because they wanted to continue distributing mirrors but also essentially because distribution
was transformed into shared possession (i.e. distributors kept some mirrors while distributing the rest to others). Because it is presumed that mirrors were distributed over a long period of time, this article examines the dynamics of political order based on the distribution theory from the viewpoint of continuity.

Key words: Mirror, possession over a long period of time, distribution, shared possession, Chinese mirror, Japanese mirror