Powerful Regional Clans Forming the Mainstay of the Yamato Polity: Expansion of Influence of the Ōyamato Tumulus Clan

BAN Yasushi

This article examines the dynamics of and relationships among tumulus, settlement, production, and ritual sites in the Nara Basin and other areas in the central Kinki region to elucidate the regional structure (the relational structure of archaeological sites) and thereby explains the production base and regional government hubs of the Yamato polity and the process of expanding its influence.

In the Yayoi period, the Ōyamato area had the highest productivity in the Nara Basin. Its upper river basin is home to the Makimuku archaeological site, which dates back to the Shōnai-style Pottery phase. In the following Furu-style Pottery phase, the clan based at this site expanded, with the construction of large keyhole tombs at the Hashihaka Tumulus site and the Ōyamato Tumulus cluster. It was the origin of the Yamato polity. The powerful regional clan (known as "Ōyamato Tumulus clan") that had established a production base in Ōyamato gained power in the region in the Furu-style Pottery phase and built tombs across the region, including tumulus clusters in Yamanobe and Shiki. The Yamato polity, originated from the Ōyamato Tumulus clan, gradually strengthened its position and expanded its influence by advancing into new areas.

The relational structure of archaeological sites indicates the coexistence of dominant local clans across the Kinki region, the rise of the Saki Tumulus clan based in the northern Nara Basin, and the emergence of local clans serving as mediators between the Ōyamato and Saki Tumulus clans in the Furu-style pottery phase. Among these clans, the Ōyamato and Saki Tumulus clans seem to have played a leading part.

In the fifth century, the Ōyamato Tumulus clan won over local clans in Kawachi, further expanded its influence, and acquired diplomatic authority to represent the Yamato state. The Yamato state expanded its production base across the extensive Yamato River Basin and interspersed regional government hubs around the area. It is, however, presumed that the domination of the Yamato polity was based on an unstable balance of power among the influential regional clans thriving in the Kinki region.

This situation changed drastically under the reign of Emperor Keitai, a descendant of the Ōda Chausuyama Tumulus clan. This powerful regional clan originated in the northern bank of the Yodo River further expanded the production base of the Yamato Polity across the extensive Kinai region by
establishing alliances with other influential regional and local clans in the Kinki, Hokuriku, and Tōkai regions. The merger of these clans and the Ōyamato Tumulus clan in the late six century established an absolute monarchy that governed the Yamato state while exercising its strong influence over the clans in the Nara Basin.

Key words: Yamato polity, the relational structure of archaeological sites, the Ōyamato Tumulus clan, the Saki Tumulus clan, local clan, powerful regional clan, reign of Emperor Keitai