Mirrors of the Southern Korean Peninsula and Negotiations between Wa (Japan) and Korea

UENO Yoshifumi

Political relationships mediated by objects tend to be described from the perspective of the giver. These relationships develop from the sense that the value of an object is self-evident, and the distributor and the recipient should recognize the value of the objects and the process of acquiring the objects. The mirrors unearthed in the southern region of the Korean Peninsula are a suitable material to highlight the issue.

In this paper, I analyzed the acquisition of mirrors during the Three Kingdoms period, which occurred in parallel with the Tumulus (Kofun) period, based on evidence from the mirrors owned in the southern Korean Peninsula. I tried to describe the structure that the Wa (Japan) Kingdom attempted to establish through the distribution of mirrors and the actual conditions of the negotiations between Wa and Korea.

First, I outlined the description concerning the mirrors excavated in the southern Korean Peninsula. I also examined the process of the inflows of the Chinese mirrors and the Wa mirrors by comparing ownership statistics regarding the mirrors in China and the Japanese archipelago. I suggested that the inflow of Chinese mirrors should be understood as a result of negotiations by Wa and Korea with China, which were conducted independently despite their shared relationships with China. I examined whether Wa mirrors were distributed directly by the Kingdom or indirectly through a secondary distribution from the perspective of the recognition of the values. I showed that the order the Kingdom intended to establish would function even if the mirrors were distributed indirectly, and the order the Kingdom intended to establish was one that was flexible without limiting their direct distributions and had a potential to expand since their indirect distributions are found in the Japanese archipelago. I pointed out that it is possible to assume that the Wa mirrors found in the southern Korean Peninsula were a secondary distribution that arrived via northern Kyushu.

I explained in detail the negotiations between Wa and Korea, revealing that the order enforced through mirrors would overemphasize the significance of the mutual agreement between the distributors and the recipients. Additionally, I showed that it is necessary to consider the significance of a device that would enable a third party to have the recognition, and that such a function was expected for metal-strap armors and mirrors in the southern Korean Peninsula.
Key words: Southern Korean Peninsula, mirrors, Chinese mirrors, Wa mirrors, the recognition of the values, the circumstances of the inflows