

Overview

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At the beginning of the 21st century, Japan is in a period of large change. Social disparity and aging society due to a decreasing birthrate are being actualized amongst economic globalism. Movements of archaeological study are not unrelated with such social conditions. Such situations seem to lie in the background of a drastic decline of researchers supporting regional study, a serious shortage of personnel in municipalities, problems of educational environments and education of future generations of researchers.

Research movements of each period and region will be discussed in later articles, so the author would like to mention some issues.

Natural scientific methods of analysis account for a significant place in archaeological study mainly from the Paleolithic to Kofun period. Its themes are varied such as dating measurement, paleoenvironment/paleoclimate, quarries/materials, reconstruction of subsistence, anthropology including physical/DNA analysis, excavation methods, and so on. Specifically, these include paleoenvironmental/paleoclimatic reconstruction on the origin, diffusion, and adaptation of mankind in the Paleolithic, study on quarries of stone tool materials, fat and starch analysis of organic residue on Jomon pottery, subsistence reconstruction based on carbon/nitrogen isotope analysis of human bones and seed indentation analysis of Jomon/Yayoi period plant remains by replica methods, reconstruction of genetic varieties of rice in the Yayoi period using DNA analysis, and reconstruction of feeding by nitrogen/carbon isotope ratio analysis of horse tooth enamel excavated from Kofun period to medieval sites.

Three-dimensional presentation of features and artifacts using digital technology is also a large trend. Large progress is seen especially in airborne laser survey of Kofun period imperial mausoleums, and in constructing and planning study of keyhole-shaped mounded tombs using ground-penetrating laser and digital measurement technology. Thus, overlooking movements of Japanese archaeological research in fiscal 2016, Japanese archaeology in recent years is in a large tide of diversification of methodology and expansion of study subjects. In addition to ordinary analysis methods of archaeology, methods of natural scientific analysis were positively introduced, and outstanding

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progress was achieved in dating, reconstruction of paleoenvironment/paleoclimates, and so on. Also, for archaeological interpretation, movement is seen in taking in results and frameworks of thoughts of close academic fields like cultural anthropology and history. In addition to expansion of analyzed subjects due to diversification of methodology, research and study of modern and contemporary sites are being conducted, while they were hardly handled by archaeology in the past. How to handle such diversification of methodology and expansion of study subjects is a large issue in the future.

Also, as it was mentioned in the beginning, the society surrounding archaeology is having a period of big changes, and Japanese archaeology is facing serious problems such as a drastic decline of researchers supporting regional study, a serious shortage of human resources in municipalities, a deteriorating educational environment and development of future scholars in universities, and so on.

On the other hand, archaeology in Japan has been taking a consistent path in its long history of overlooking the whole archipelago based on steady research/study in each region. How to relate results of archaeological study in each region to archaeology of the whole country is, as mentioned above, leading to the problem of education of future generation of archaeologists.