

Abstract

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Abstract

Feudalism (*hōkensei*) was an extremely important interpretive concept in academic circles in Japan in the years following World War II, not only among specialists in Japanese history, but also among political historians and economic historians. In time, however, the notion of “feudalism” fell into disuse, and in its place terms such as “kingship” came to be widely employed. My sense is that the shift in discourse became particularly pronounced around 1989, as the Shōwa era ended and the new Heisei period began. Probably this is related to the fact that among Japanese scholars in general, there has come to be a widespread perception that the concept of the imperial family system (or imperial rule, *tennōsei*) is complex and difficult to interpret.

I launched this three-year team research project titled “Comparative Studies in the Interconnections between Kingship and City Culture” in 2005, a year after I joined the faculty of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies. The intention was to gather a group of researchers, mostly historians who live and work in Japan, many of them specialists in urban history, to investigate kingly authority and the forms of cities in various regions of the world. All too quickly, we have come to the end of our project term.

It is common practice at this Center to convene an international symposium in the final year of a team research project. In this instance, owing primarily to budgetary limitations, we have planned a small-scale event. Despite the small size, however, we anticipate that this symposium will feature presentations and discussions of an extremely high order, because we have been able to bring extraordinarily talented scholars to participate.

The history of cities begins with the rise of civilization, and we can distinguish Asian-type cities and European-type cities, but it is also possible in the case of European cities to distinguish between those that were under kingly authority and those (republican cities) that were not. In Japan, ancient cities took their original forms from continental models, that is, from typical Asian-type cities. Yet from the middle of the Heian period on, as Japanese urban centers developed into medieval cities, they took on some aspects that were quite similar to European cities.

It is thus apparent that it is extremely meaningful for our historical understanding to take account of the impact of forms of kingship on the differences among cities. If this international symposium can provide new impetus for thinking about the historical meanings of the development of cities, the organizers will be highly gratified. Finally, I wish to note that in the planning and execution of this event, I have benefited greatly from the efforts of Professor Uno Takao, Associate Professor Markus Rüttermann, and the members of the staff of this Center’s Research Cooperation Division. To all of them, I express special thanks.

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