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Tumulus Boom Before and After World Heritage Registration: Under the Influence of Covid-19

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Abstract: The Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group has many mounded tombs of kings and their clans constructed from the late fourth century to the late fifth century in Osaka Plain, Japan. In July 2019, UNESCO designated it as a World Cultural Heritage site because of the forty-nine Kofun, tumuli representing the socio-political structure at the time. Through promotion movement by local governments and domestic media, Kofun became popular among the public through songs, costumes, stationery, and food related to Kofun's shape and archaeological artifacts. However, the boom, defined as the Kofun Boom, seemed to stagnate after the World Heritage designation event and furthermore, negatively influenced by Covid-19 since the spring of 2020. While the Kofun Boom had played an essential role in gathering public attention and participation in heritage management in the previous few years, the current period of stagnation may imply that protecting its historical value is problematic. This article reports the survey results of the Kofun Boom before and after the World Heritage designation and under the Covid-19 pandemic, conducted throughout 2020 with a collaborator, Rei Ishizuka, and suggests a possible future vision to connect more people with Kofun heritage.

Introduction

How has the general public's interest in kofun, tumuli changed over the last few years? Recent media coverage and local PR have led to a growing awareness of historical sites in Osaka, Japan. The social phenomenon is called "Tumulus Boom" (Kofun Boom) that ordinary people get interested in through many foods, stationery, costumes, songs and goods related to kofun's shapes and artifacts. The Archeology Department of Osaka University released "Regional Revitalization by the Kofun Boom" in 2017 (Hasui et al., 2017). This research clarified that the popularity of tumuli in the masses increased from various aspects and emphasized the necessity to activate the movement further to utilize the tumulus boom to inherit tumulus as

a historical heritage in the future. Therefore, the study is highly regarded because it captured the tumulus boom quickly.



fig.1 Nintoku-tenno-ryo Kofun (UNESCO)

However, since 2017, when the researchers examined it, there was a big event in which the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group was added to the list of World Heritage site in 2019. In addition, society changed due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and even now when writing this article (March 2022), the virus is still rampant on a global scale. During this period, people and society have changed dramatically. So has the situation of the Kofun boom and the method of utilizing cultural properties.

In other words, The Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group, located in Osaka Prefecture and deeply involving in the Kofun Boom, experienced two significant social changes: designation as a World Heritage site in July 2019 and the pandemic that has continued since the beginning of 2020 to the present. These events would influence the utilization method and the tumulus succession of Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group's historical value to the future. In considering these questions, this article introduces what are kofun, tumuli with the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group, and briefly presents the latest research, "Tumulus Boom before and after the World Heritage registration and under the influence of Covid-19, and the future utilization of cultural properties", conducted throughout 2020 by the author with co-researcher, Rei Ishizuka (Matsuoka, S. & Ishizuka, R., 2021).



fig.2 "Regional Revitalization by the Kofun Boom" (Hasui, H. et al., 2017)

Discussion

First, what are kofun? A few of the famous monuments around the world are the Great Pyramids at Giza and Stonehenge. Kofun belongs to this category. Kofun are

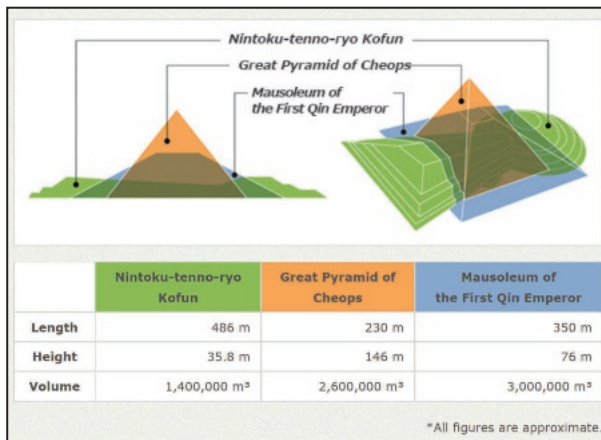


fig.3 Comparing the World's largest tombs (Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group website)

Pyramids at Giza in Egypt, which are at 230 m, and Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor in China, which is at 350 m (fig.3). Including the three moats, the length of a kofun can reach 840 m. The total number of kofun in the Japanese archipelago is approximately 160,000, which is more than three times the number of convenience stores in Japan.

The visual characteristic that may arouse interest is the variation of shapes. A typical shape that combines a square and a circle is called a Zenpou-kouen-fun, which looks like a key hole. In addition, sizes vary from 10 m to nearly 400 m.

Many of the large keyhole-shaped kofun are decorated by haniwa, which are earthenware funerary sculptures and lined up on the flat terraces of their mounds or banks. Haniwa was modeled on birds, soldiers, houses, and any kind of figure to protect the buried person in the afterlife. Unless the burial chamber has been disturbed, the mound contains grave goods, such as bronze mirrors, stone accessories, and weapons. Scholars argue that the socio-political structure at the time was demonstrated by the shape and size of the kofun built as a collective entity. From these elements of kofun, archaeologists estimate the wealth, power, and other characteristics of the buried person and their territories.

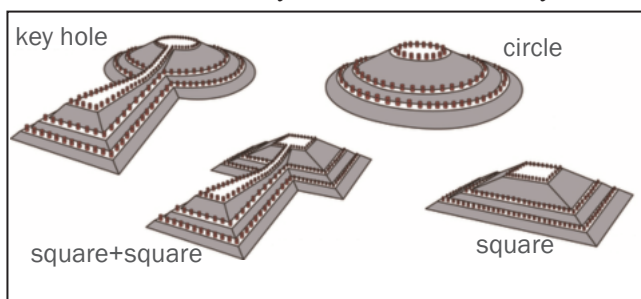


fig.4 Kofun's shapes (Takahashi, T., 2018)



fig.5,6 Kofun's artifacts

left: replicas of Haniwa, right: grave goods armor (Takahashi, T., 2018)



fig.7 Mozu Kofun Group, left: ancient, right: present (Walkerplus, 2019)

Second, how Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group is. This Kofun Group is a World Heritage site in Osaka, whose forty-nine kofun were constructed between the late fourth century and the late fifth century. It is located on a plateau overlooking the bay which was the maritime gateway to the continent and one of

the important political cultural centers in those days. Similar to other kofun, the shapes and sizes of kofun within the two areas vary, whereas the diversity and concentration indicate the complex socio-political structure of this period. In addition, with the construction of these kofun, the Japanese society entered into a new phase of history with an established centralized state, which was a phenomenon that occurred as a response to the political turmoil in East Asia. In other words, the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group can give a clue of the origin of Japan. Moreover, scholars recently proposed that the high levels of engineering technology at the time led to the development of agriculture in terms of irrigation.

The next topic will consider the Kofun Boom in Japan. In July 6, 2019, the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group was finally registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The event was reported frequently by mass media by many types of TV programs, such as news and quiz shows, for a whole month at its peak. As such, many citizens became familiar with kofun and their visual features. Food and sweets shaped similar to kofun were sold among young women because they were Instagram-able. In addition, songs about kofun and kofun costumes appeared on TV programs and newspapers. Thanks to the registration, many people became familiar with kofun from various perspectives as well as academic ones. Thus far, a study has aimed to examine this boom in 2018. For the first time, it identified the Kofun Boom by introducing kofun items, food, and festivals. However, these events were conducted before the registration as a World Heritage site. Thus, we ask what changes in the boom transpired before and after the registration. We expected that the boom was temporal and examined it after the registration.



fig.8 Haniwa manager and Haniwa-chan (PR characters) responding to the designation interview (Sawano, 2019)



fig.9 Kofun-singer, Marikofun (Sankei newspaper, 2015)



fig.10 Kofun lunch



fig.11 "Kofun goods" on Instagram

At this point, This paper briefly introduces the latest research on the Tumulus Boom. Based on the collected data from newspapers and TV programs, changes in the popularity from the perspective of mass media became obvious. The graph below (fig.12) shows the number of newspaper articles relevant to “kofun” and “World Heritage.” Clearly, this figure rose sharply when the Kofun Group was expected to become registered to the list in May 2019. In July of the same year, the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group was officially added to the World Heritage List, which was reported by many articles in the news. However, a gradual decrease can be observed from August to November. Then, at the end of the year, a slight upward trend was noted after writers featured the registration as one of the biggest events of the year. Afterward, the graph indicated downward trends, which were less than that before the registration.

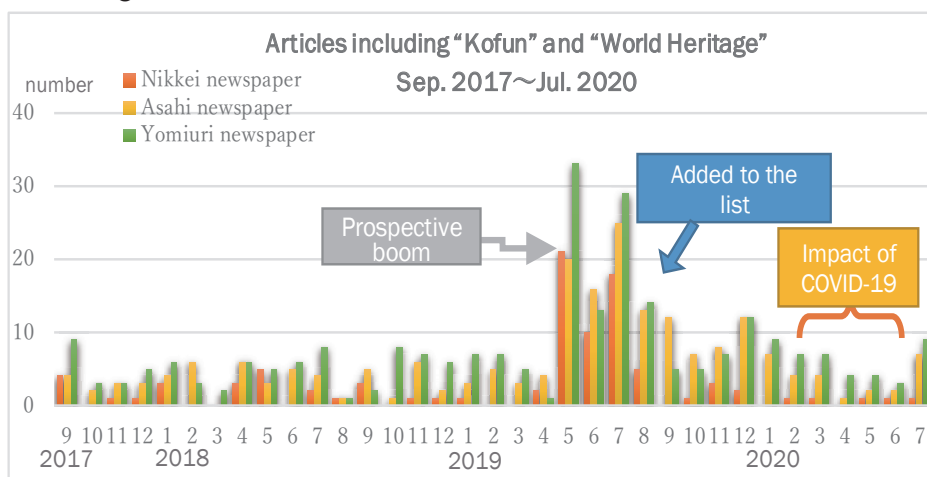


fig.12 Newspaper articles including “Kofun” and “World Heritage” from Sep. 2017 to Jul. 2020

Except for the declining boom, another reason that can be considered is the impact of COVID-19. The period between February and June 2020 was a tough time for the Japanese society as it tackled the serious issue. Therefore, the situation may have accelerated the disappearance of the Kofun Boom. In July 2020, the trend slightly increased at the first-year anniversary of the registration. In the following months, however, these trends are expected to decrease again.

Through the research, the curators of the local museum near the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group, namely, the Sakai-City Museum were interviewed, regarding the number of visitors before and after the registration. The same tendency was observed; however, the situation of the museum in terms of COVID-19 was more serious. The museum was required to close temporarily in the beginning of 2020 because of the emergency declaration by the Japanese government. Moreover, the number of foreign as well as Japanese visitors decreased dramatically. Notably, the local museum around the kofun group witnessed that the boom was disappearing.

As mentioned above, the Kofun Boom was instrumental to the expansion of the scope of people that became interested in archaeological sites as well as ancient Japanese history by promoting unique items that focused on the visual features of kofun. Thus, the Kofun Boom experienced an upward trend and reached its highest point after the registration of the kofun group but became a temporal boom afterward.

The time is right for considering how to appeal not only to the Japanese people but also to others abroad regarding the recognition of the Kofun as a World Heritage site. One may say that the kofun group is not only a local heritage but of significance to all people. The sad thing is that, once the trend is over, the site may no longer be discussed in retrospect.

Holding an international kofun marathon competition around Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group is a considerable solution for this problem. As the name suggests, the route of the runners should go around the kofun. There are three main reasons for this proposal. First, this event will contribute to the reorganization of the local area around the kofun. Historians say that more than a hundred kofun were once built in the area; however, the majority were destroyed by residential development. These sites have been converted into houses and fields. Through the development of running paths, the boundary can become clearer and may help prevent further industrial development.

Another positive impact of this suggestion is that the runners can feel the real size of the kofun as they follow their routes around the kofun area. In fact, kofun in the group are extremely large that they cannot be viewed entirely at eye level. Therefore, people will visualize the scale more vividly with runners running the routes. Moreover, the interaction between the locals and local tourists may be encouraged when they run together.

In addition to these two merits, aerial images reported by helicopters will be more impactful for advertisements directed toward the kofun as well as the competition. Actually, in the Olympic Games, the regions of venues for various sports, such as triathlon and marathon, are broadcasted frequently. Thus, this event may lead to the chance to re-appeal the kofun group to the world. An international marathon competition will become a means through which to invite foreign guests to Osaka and give Osakans a chance to demonstrate their hospitality.

Conclusion

The latest research revealed that the Kofun Boom declined after the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group's designation as a World Heritage site. Moreover, the study found that the traditional ways to announce information, hold events, sell goods and go sightseeing related to kofun has not been sufficient during the pandemic. Therefore, new approaches are required now. In order to continue the Kofun Boom, for example, gaining government cooperation and utilization of local people would be necessary. The Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group should be appealed locally, domestically, and overseas by various methods, such as holding marathons, stamp orientating, activity by young volunteers, and sending information via SNS and the Internet. Definitely, being registered as a World Heritage site was the first step

toward the continuous development of the Kofun Boom among the general public in the latest few years. The tumulus boom has contributed to handing down the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group, which was recognized as a heritage of all humankind, to future generations as a cultural property that should be permanently preserved and utilized.

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