

Land Development in Ancient Times, on the Basis of the Place Name ‘Ōta’

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Plantations into Ihibo *Kōri*

There are stories recorded in *Harima Fudoki* about people being transplanted¹ from other regions. Such stories all appear in the entries for place names in Ihibo *Kōri* corresponding to the left bank of the lower reaches of the Hayashida River in the vicinity of the present-day Taishi-chō (see Fig. 1):

1. Hiramata *Sato*: ...continental immigrants from Hiramata *Sato* in Mamuta *Kōri*, Kawachi Province, came and settled here.
2. Saoka: ... the Tabe [paddy field workers] of Tsukushi [Kyūshū] were conscripted for reclaiming this land during the reign of the king who ruled from the Naniwazu Palace [King Nintoku?].
3. Ōta *Sato*: ... having migrated from the Korean Peninsula, the Kure no Suguri [family] arrived to begin with in Ōta *Mura* in Nagusa *Kōri*, Ki Province, and later they split up and [some of them] moved to Ōta *Mura* in Mishimanokami *Kōri* in Tsu Province. In due course they shifted here and called it after Ōta *Mura* in Ihibo *Kōri*.
4. Ōyake *Sato*: During the reign of King Homuda [Ōjin], he built a detached palace here, and the Queen who ruled from the Owarida Kawara Palace [either Suiko or Saimei] sent the Suguribe of Chishiro in Yamato to reclaim the land for rice farming (Mt. Ōnori and Suguribe Hill).
5. Iwami *Sato*: ... in the reign of the king who ruled from the Nagara Toyosaki Palace in Naniwa [King Kōtoku], Azumi no Muraji Tamu was dispatched to conscript male labourers from Iwami Province [i.e., Iwami in the western part of Shimane Prefecture] and set them to work on reclaiming this land for paddy fields.

As established by Hiroyuki SAGIMORI, most of the paddy land reclaimed here around this time comprised the 100 *chō*² of rice fields in Harima granted to the Hōryūji Temple in the year Suiko 14 (606 CE) (entry for that year in *Nihon Shoki*). *Hōryūji Garan Engi narabi ni Ruki Shizai Chō* [The History of Hōryūji Temple and the Inventory of its Property] (747) records that it held more than 218 *chō* of paddy land in Ihibo *Kōri*, and in the Heian Period that became Hōryūji Ikaruga Temple (see Fig. 1, centre).

Moreover, it is noteworthy that (4) and (5) above are on the banks of the lower reaches of the Hayashida River, and that these stories pertaining to the seventh century were relatively recent history at the time of *Harima Fudoki*. The dams, weirs and sluices constructed in order to draw water into the paddy fields were built in sequence from the highest point of the river where it flows out of the hills onto the plains, down to its lower reaches, and rights to the use of the water for irrigation weakened the further downstream one was from the top sluice gate. The highest sluice gate on the Hayashida River is at Akai, and water drawn from there irrigated Hiramata *Sato* and the Ikaruga Manor. Akai's original form is assumed to date from the Middle Ages, but the Arakawai Irrigation Channel further downstream can be confirmed as dating to the Nara Period (Fukuda Kataoka Archaeological Site), so actually it must date back further. Hiramata *Sato* was historically the first to be developed in this area, then in sequence Ōyake and Iwami *Sato*, so *Harima Fudoki* reflects that history.

Then when we compare the fertility of the land in this district as recorded in *Harima Fudoki*, it says that in Ihibo *Kōri* it was graded as ‘upper second’ from Hiroyama *Sato* downstream

¹ Translator's note: ‘Plantation’ is used here in the same sense as in the plantations of Ireland in the 16th and 17th centuries, i.e., a form of colonisation.

² Translator's note: 100 *chō* = approximately 99 ha.

as far as Ōta *Sato*, and Iwami *Sato* was more fertile than elsewhere, being ‘medium first grade’.³ When *Harima Fudoki* was compiled, this area was the most fertile land for cereal production in Ihibo *Kōri*.

Settlement by the Kure no Suguri family and Ōta *Mura*

So when did this reclamation for paddy land commence? Out of the five relevant entries listed above, (4) is the earliest, in the reign of King Homuda (Ōjin). (1) and (3) do not refer to any reign, and were probably transmitted from local people more or less unadulterated. I should like to elaborate on the places of settlement of the immigrants in (3).

To begin with, Ōta *Mura* in Ki Province corresponds with present-day Ōda, Wakayama-shi. In the Heian Period a family titled Musa no Suguri lived there in Nagusa *Kōri*. The Musa no Suguri were descendants of Sun Yuan, i.e., Chinese Emperor Da of Wu [r. 229–252], and were indeed the Kure no Suguri family seen in (3). Hinokuma and Kunikakasu Shrines (Nichizengū), the most important shrine complex in Ki, lie to the east of Ōda. These shrines were formerly known as ‘Nagusa no Mizokuchi no Kami’ (‘Deities of the sluice gates of Nagusa’): they are regarded as having been involved in the reclamation of the rice paddies that were managed by the Kuni no Miyatsuko Ki no Atai family, being all part of the Miyai irrigation system which distributed water all over the plains of Nagusa *Kōri*.

Secondly, Ōta *Mura* in Mishimanokami *Kōri*, Settsu Province, corresponds with the district around present-day Ōda, Ibaraki-shi, Ōsaka-fu. This is thought to be the location of the Mishima Takafu Miyake mentioned in the entry for the 12th intercalary month of Ankan 1 in *Nihon Shoki* (534 CE). This had 40 *chō* of rice fields, and in the Nara Period it was officially appointed as a *kanden*, a producer of rice for the Emperor’s table.

In both of these districts there is a concentration of settlement remains which have turned up items from continental Asia, and both are deduced to have been immigrant settlements. A vast quantity of Korean-style and early *sue* ware pottery dating from the Mid-Kofun Period was excavated from the Otoura and Narukami Archaeological Sites around Ōda in Wakayama-shi. Water courses that were the forerunners of the Miyai irrigation system were detected at both of these sites. In the latter part of the Early Kofun Period they started to be able to dig into the bedrock, and it is surmised that paddy fields stretched across the slightly higher ground⁴ there by the latter part of the Mid-Kofun Period, where previously they had been unable to construct them.

Next, there is the Ai Site on the western side of Ōda, Ibaraki-shi: Korean-style earthenware pottery and early *sue* ware has been excavated here too, dating from the first half of the Mid-Kofun Period. Irrigation channels were dug there, and paddy fields were reclaimed, dating from the Mid-Kofun Period. From the fact that there were only simple buildings there, it is deduced that this was a temporary settlement only for the purposes of developing the paddy land.

Since the Kure no Suguri had moved twice previously in *Harima Fudoki* before settling in Ōta *Sato* in Harima, their transplantation to Ōta *Sato* must have been later than the Mid-Kofun Period (fifth century). It might have occurred in or after the mid-sixth century, bearing in mind the date of the Yoro Kofun cluster, which is thought to have been the burial ground of continental immigrants. However, when it comes to their origins in Ōta *Mura* in Ki, we should probably place that in the fifth century. We also know of a link between Harima and Ki Provinces through the Ōtomo family (see Chapter 5: TAKAHASHI, ‘The Ōtomo Family of Ki and the Kakurinji Temple’.)

‘Ōta’ in ancient Japanese society

The place name ‘Ōta’ is seen elsewhere apart from in *Harima Fudoki*. There was Miyake *Sato* (里) in Naka *Sato* (郷) in Taka *Kōri* in Harima Province, and a large cluster of small burial mounds was constructed there from the late sixth to early seventh centuries at the foot of Mt Myōken in what is now Taka-chō. From the rapid increase in the size of its settlement as well, Tetsurō HISHIDA posits that there must have been transplantation of workers there accompanying

³ Translator’s note: *Harima Fudoki* records grades of soil for almost all *sato* according to a nine-grade Chinese system of three grades each divided into three. It is noteworthy that none is classified as upper first grade.

⁴ Translator’s note: 微高地 *bikōchi*, refers to the slightly higher ground of a river’s flood plain, including natural levées, and includes the gravels of very gentle sloping alluvial fans.

the establishment of a *miyake* rice estate. Earthenware pottery inscribed in ink with 'Ōta', along with the words 'Soga no Nishi' and 'Naka no Yake' (meaning 'the *yake* [office] of Naka *Sato*)— words associated with the families attached to the *miyake*— was excavated from the Sogai and Sawada Sites in Taka-chō where this settlement was located (see Fig. 2).

The Suguribe of Chishiro mentioned in (5) listed above is thought to refer to the area around Chishiro in present-day Tawaramoto-chō in Nara Prefecture. In the Nara Period there were rice paddies here called Oho Mita, which were likewise part of the official rice paddies producing rice for the Emperor's table. Although the orthography for Oho is 意保, it is treated as equivalent in meaning to 太 (=大) 'great', so narrative (5) is an example of the Suguribe in Harima having been dispatched from 'Ōta' in Yamato Province. Moreover, on the eastern side of that land in the Heian Period there was an Ōta Shōen (manor) belonging to the Kōfukuji Temple in Nara, and that is now Ōta in Sakurai-shi, the centre of the Makimuku Site that is regarded as the birthplace of the Yamato polity.

In Izumo Province in the eastern part of Shimane Prefecture, there was an Ōta *Sato* administered by Kizuki (Izumo) Grand Shrine in the Middle Ages. This *sato* comprised the villages (*mura*) of Senge, Kitajima and Gui (a name which remains in Hikawa-chō, Izumo-shi). Senge and Kitajima are territories named after the family names of the Izumo no Kuni no Miyatsuko Izumo no Omi in the Middle Ages. According to *Izumo no Kuni Fudoki* (733), this land was Izumo Kanbe *Sato*, established to serve the Grand Shrines of Kumano and Kizuki in Izumo Province, and it was an important base for the Izumo no Kuni no Miyatsuko family from the Nara period on, who also functioned as the priests of these shrines. A large number of the residents were incorporated into the Totori *be*. The Totori *be* were the people who raised swans (OJ: *kugui*) for the Yamato Court, which remains in the place name Gui: they originated as a service group called *yōchōjin* ('poultrymen') in the fifth century. In other words, the relationship between this district and the Yamato polity goes back to the fifth century.

These places called Ōta which go back to ancient times share distinctive characteristics. To start with, in most cases, we can confirm the transplantation of people from other districts, and we can infer the large-scale reclamation of paddy land accompanied by the digging of irrigation channels. Large areas of paddy land, the '*ōta*'— 'great fields'— first appeared at that time, which could not until then have been developed only by local people, and which later on evolved into *shōen* (manors) in the Middle Ages. They had such an enormous impact that the word remained in place names.

The background to this kind of large-scale agricultural reclamation of paddy land accompanied by the movement of people necessitated input from the Yamato Court, being beyond the powers of the provinces alone. There are many place names around Ōda in Yamato that have the prefix *ō* ('great'), such as Ōizumi ('Great Spring'), and there is a view that this was an honorific prefix attached to words associated with the Court, as in Ōmiwa Shrine in that district. And many of the places called Ōta or Ōda trace back to the fifth century.

We tend to think of Ōta or Ōda as a common place name, but it is actually an important one, which gives us a glimpse of the sense of reverence among the ancient Japanese towards large-scale reclamation of paddy land that involved mobilising people from other regions, and also a glimpse of the connections between local society and the Yamato Court.