

Significance of Infield-outfield System for the Studies of European Rural Communities

Koichiro Fujita

Abstract

It is a common belief that the rural communities in the European Middle Ages were based on the three-field system. The open-field system with three-course rotation no doubt predominated in medieval England, France, and Germany, but there were other types of field system. We can find infield-outfield systems in various European areas, such as sandy regions of north-western Germany. The cropping fields there consisted of infield (Esch) and outfield (Kamp). The infield was a common open-field where rye was cropped every year without fallow, while the outfield was an enclosure reclaimed in the common land, which alternated between arable and grassland every several years. The infield-outfield system is found in other part of Europe as well. In Scotland, the infield was a permanent open-field based on three-field system for cropping oats, while the outfield was enclosed for extensive convertible husbandry in the waste common land. We can also find similar field systems in East Anglia of England, Brittany of France, Campine and Ardennes of Belgium. In general, infield-outfield systems dominated in infertile areas of Europe, but sometimes they played not an insignificant role in the development of modern farming such as Norfolk four-course rotation in East Anglia.