

Ancient Land Divisions in the Kikuchi River Basin

Rice cultivation around the Kikuchi River started more than 2,000 years ago on small paddy fields scattered across the vast plains. This style of dispersed farming continued until the eighth century, when the centralized state imposed a new system of land division. Under this system, farmland was apportioned into regular squares to facilitate allocation to individual farmers, the management of usage rights, and land taxation. The even division was also intended to improve productivity through orderly irrigation. Using ridges and ditches, fields were split into approximately 1-hectare plots called *cho*, measuring 109 meters on each side.

The land divisions drawn up by eighth-century bureaucrats are still intact in many parts of the Kikuchi River Basin and are clearly visible from above. When seen through an airplane window or from places such as the lookout point at the site of Kikuchi Castle, the farmland reveals its orderly chessboard-like grid pattern.