The Systematization of Japanese Folk Culture

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The paper discusses the methodology of classifying Japanese folk culture and presents principal types of classification as well as criteria.

A mono-cultural perspective has been adopted in Japanese Folklore research on the assumption that it developed from paddy rice cultivation.

Two principal types of culture are presented; (1) the “dry field” type which is a combination of hunting, gathering, shifting cultivation and permanent field cultivation, and (2) the “paddy field” type in which paddy field cultivation is central.

It is demonstrated that the two types are different cultural systems by comparing and examining aspects such as the concepts of myth, god, space and rebirth.

A hypothesis is built up about some aspects of the process when the two cultural types came into contact; these are assimilation, predominance, equality, exclusion, taboo and mixing. The hypothesis is suggested by analysing: (1) how “paddy field” culture, which was predominant, contracted “dry field” culture at the period of contact, (2) how the people of the two cultures came into contact.

Important key concepts of Japanese Folklore such as (hare=abnormal — sacred, ritual) and (ke=secular — profane, labour) do not follow one another in succession; it is shown that hare is a concept of rebirth and ritual corresponding to “paddy field” culture and that ke is a concept of space and time corresponding to “dry field” culture.

Through the assimilation of hare, which reflects the concept of rebirth and ritual, to the ke, which reflects concepts of space and time, the Japanese could conceive of hare and ke as a succession and due to this association, it is assumed that the mono-cultural perspective developed.

In the future, it is urged that the mono-cultural perspective will be abandoned. Moreover, a reexamination of the methodology and key concepts of Japanese Folklore should be conducted.