The Folklore of People and Crows
——Time and Structure of Folkloric World——

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This thesis tries to consider the exchange between people and crows in the historical and folkloric light, and to show the mechanism that all Kami (the 'gods' of shintoism) emerge from the inversion of Kegare (In the present-day Japanese ethnology the pattern of daily life is called Ke and non-quotidian patterns such as festivals and special events are called Hare. Crises caused by an inability to sustain Ke is called Kegare). In the Japanese folkloric society, crows are thought to be illomened black birds and strongly hated, because, it is generally believed that if crows cry in disagreeable voices, it will soon cause the death of several people. Simultaneously, however, crows are revered as divine messengers. Tradition says that in certain rituals such as Otoguishinji rice-cakes and dumplings are served and eaten by them. Crows, thus, span both the world of death and that of life. I have tried to make clear the fundamental structure of the folkloric significance of crows beyond the technical term of “ambiguity”, which has generally been used.

1. Oshimamegurishiki of Itsukushima Shrine and its structure
   (1) The divine ritual of Oshimamegurishiki
   (2) Chinzadensho (Enshrinement tradition) and folkloric time
   (3) Itsukushima — the divine sphere

   I try to analyze the structure of the divine ritual of Oshimamegurishiki, which has been handed down since long ago in Itsukushima Shrine, Hiroshima Prefecture. I conclude as follows.

   Oshimamegurishiki of Itsukushima Shrine is a divine ritual embodied to re-experience the original ritual of Goddess Enshrinement of the very beginning. It is also the ritual for returning to the very beginning, which keeps on reproducing the worshipping vitality. Here lies recognition of time and space peculiar to the folkloric world where human consciousness objectivises time and space by devising this sort of divine ritual.
Oshinamegurishiki of Itsukushima Shrine means, at the same time, the exchange of rituals from the side of the people when they trespass on the divine sphere from the human sphere. More basically, however it used to be a ritual in which people exorcised their Kegare along with the food eaten by crows. This ritual has been called Shimameguri no misogi (Cleaning of the body through touring the island), and we can understand the reason why it has been called so only from this kind of viewpoint.

2. Examples of Otogui (Customs and rituals in which crows are served mochi (rice-cakes) and dumplings especially during the New Year by shrines or ordinary houses.

(1) Examples seen in many parts of Japan.

(2) Details in each example

Collecting and considering the examples of Otogui seen in many places of Japan, I conclude as follows.

Otogui has been adopted by divine rituals of various shrines or by special events of ordinary households in many places all over Japan, but in any and every case, the ways and rules of the Otogui have been contrived according to the fundamental purposes of the rituals and events. In people's minds originally, crows were in themselves tinged with certain mysterious colours, and not the divine messengers of any kind. Otogui was, fundamentally, exorcism of Kegare by sending it off along with the food given to and eaten by crows.

3. Symbolism of Black

(1) Properties of crows

(2) Basic structure of Gohosai

I here study the fact that crows are black birds, and analyze the structure of Gohosai, a festival handed down in mountainous areas of Okayama Prefecture. I conclude as follows.

Behind the mysterious nature of crows lies the symbolism of black which has been formed in people's minds facing the pitch-dark night.

From the doctrine of Shugendo, this festival at Ryosanji Temple is explained as a ritual in which a person is possessed by Gohozenshin spirit. However, more basically, there a person is selected through a series of procedures, sent into
raptures and ecstasies, and exorcised into the ethereal heaven from the dark top of a hill, entrusted with people's Kegare. Gohozane, a person entrusted with Kegare is symbolized by black bird, or crows.

4. Kegare, harae (exorcism), Kami
   
   (1) Kegare and death imagery
   
   (2) Kami of visaya born from Kegare
   
   (3) Marebito (wandering being, or "stranger") born from Kegare
   
   (4) ancestor spirit born from Kegare

   I have induced from the concrete examples in the Japanese folkloric society that Kegare inspires the death-imagery in terms of body, society, and nature such as illness, crimes, insect damages, and famines, and then tried to study the mechanism how various Kami are born in the Japanese society. I conclude as follows.

   If Kegare is continually reproduced as a result of living activities and is characterized by the filthy, dangerous, strong, infectious nature, something has to be done with Kegare. Kegare has to be exorcised, without fail through certain ritual procedures. When it has been exorcised, the power of Kegare, now away from human hands, in turn enlarges the ominous nature because people can no longer control it. The folkloric mechanism that the value of Kegare is reversed and re-read there begins to function. Kegare is transformed into the power of bliss and gives birth to many Kami, such as Kami of visaya, Marebito-Raihoshin (wandering being, or "stranger"), and ancestor spirit.