Typical Antagonism Revealed in Japanese Folktales

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The two main topics of Japanese folktales are marriage and fortune-making. This thesis analyzes the latter type of folktales in an attempt to reveal the spirit of people who lived in a typical Japanese village community to hand down these pieces of folktales.

Significant among the type of fortune-making folktales are stories characterized by antagonism between I-the main character who makes a fortune and II-another character who fails to make a fortune. The antagonism is expressed in various combinations of conflicting parties such as a man and his wife, a man and his neighbor, or a man and his real brother or stepbrother, among which the preferred one in Japan is that of a man and his neighbor.

In the Amami and Okinawa islands, however, a type of antagonism between ‘a man and his brother’ appears in a high ratio depending on some kinds of stories. Detailed analysis of folktales in the Amami and Okinawa islands is expected to identify the difference from folktales in the main land of Japan so that the nature of antagonism between characters in Japanese folktales may be better understood.

The Japanese features may also be more clearly understood by comparing her folktales with that of other nations to reveal their similarities and differences. For example, in Korea, a type of antagonism between ‘a man and his brother’ appears more frequently in their folktales. More careful comparison, however, requires a classified collection of materials from various countries, based on which international comparison should be made.

The fact that a type of antagonism between ‘a man and his neighbor’ is the preferred type in Japanese folktales indicates that the relationship with neighbors was of main concern to people in a typical Japanese village community. Folktales provide valuable resources for investigating their inner world.