Folktales Dealing with Visitors

From the Comparative Viewpoint of Japan and Korea——

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Stories in which the host brings happiness or unhappiness on himself by treating a guest warmly or coldly are widely told all over the world. This paper aims to examine comparatively some examples from Japan and Korea. The “Millionaire’s Pond Legend” is widely told from generation to generation in Korea. The gist of the story is that the house of a millionaire, who treated a visiting priest badly, sank and turned into a pond. In Japan, there are many old tales of the type called the “Visitor on New Year’s Eve”. The principal characters of this type of story are “the visitor”, “the person who welcomes the visitor”, and “the person who treats the visitor coldly”. In this paper, first of all, the human relationship between the person who welcomes the visitor and the person who treats the visitor coldly is examined. In the “Millionaire’s Pond Legend”, the confrontational relationship between <father-in-law and daughter-in-law> is remarkable. In the “Visitor on New Year’s Eve” tales of Japan, the confrontational relationship between neighbors is remarkable. It is considered that these reflect the concern of people in each culture regarding the human relationship. Then, if we examine the different kinds of visitor in Korea, the visitor is mostly a Buddhist priest, but often with the image of a Taoist overlapped onto the character. In Japan, a travelling religionist or blind religionist often appears in these tales. This reflects the difference in religious background and transmitters of the stories of each country. Thirdly, when we examine the variations that happen after the visitor is treated badly in the “Millionaire’s Pond Legend”, we find that the visitor often destroys the millionaire using his knowledge of “geomancy”. This type of visitor-related story connected with the concept of geomancy is not seen in Japan. This constitutes an important characteristic of Korean stories. In the field of folktales where there exist many internationally-common types, it is necessary to examine the points of similarity and difference, by comparing Japanese folktales with similar foreign folktales, to give meaning to the Japanese folktales.