Spatial Structure of “Ie” and “Mura”
— A Case Study of Minami-katake, Aikawa-machi Sado Island —

IWAMOTO Michiya

This paper is a monograph on Minami-katake, Aikawa Town, Sado District, Niigata Prefecture, a location which is one of the fixed research points, which is pursuant to the basic investigation items set by the Cooperative Research Group for special studies on “Regional Differences and Regionalism in Japanese Folk Culture”. As of 1985, Minamikatake was a ‘seaside village’ fronting on the Japan Sea, with a population of 148 in 39 households. In addition to a small amount of ‘Isonegi’ (collection of seaweed and shellfish, and harpoon fishing) that is carried out, people live on agriculture and forestry, based on paddy fields (about 6 tan fields for each family, 1 tan = 0.245 acre) and a large common forest.

This paper, while including items designated by the Research Group, describes them by refocusing on the spatial order of the “Ie (family and homestead)” and “Mura (village)”. Chapter 1, on the general situation of the research subject, gives a geographical and historical outline of Minami-katake, and describes the overall characteristics of its industries. Chapter 2, on the spatial structure of the “Ie” describes characteristics in the positioning and usage of houses and rooms, and also deals with the gods in the house and lot. Chapter 3, on various aspects of family life, describes, from the structural characteristics of family, the role and duties of each family member; the correlation between the wedding ceremony and the custom of the bride’s long stay at her parents’ home; and the relation between the generational hierarchy system and the position of each generation in the family. Chapter 4, on the spatial structure of the “Mura”, describes the various productive areas, such as arable land, forest, meadow, and beach, and also symbolically discusses the internal village space, including ritual ceremonies for Shintoist and Buddhist deities. Chapter 5, on various aspects of village life, describes the system of village administration, the arrangement of age groups which characterizes the social structure of Minami-katake, and various aspects of funeral ceremonies and memorial services.

Since this paper is simply a report based on field work, it does not give any special conclusions; but the author believes that it describes detailed actualities of social life in the village and its structural principle.

Based on this paper, further task will be needed to describe the emic folk concepts, consciousness, feelings and logic of the inhabitants of Minami-katake. The author points out that, as one focal point of this, attention should be paid to the concept of “I (land)” as seen in “jigami (the god of land)” or “jikawa-no-shinrui (relationship by exchange of land)".

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