Double Grave System and Village Space

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The problem of the double grave system has attracted the greatest attention in folklore studies on the Japanese grave system. The focus of studies on the double grave system has been placed on the question of whether it is old or new: of course, the majority of folklore researchers have supported the opinion that the grave system is old, and that this shows the traditional Japanese view of the Other World and the spirits. Many of these studies have paid attention to the names of the two burial facilities, the relationship between the rituals held there, the period during which both graves were visited, and the time when only one grave came to be visited. The opinion that the double grave system is old has generated a tendency to pursue the form before the erection of tombstones, and researchers came to study matters other than cemeteries or tombstones, such as Buddhist buildings, mortuary chapels, sacred mountains, or the mountain to which the dead go.

Conventional studies on the double grave system, as described above, have not always paid attention to the problem of spatial arrangement in villages. Even though some studies did give attention to the spatial arrangement, most of them picked out only the two graves and discussed the distance between them; few studies tried to locate them within the village space as a whole. In this paper, the author examines the double grave system from the point of view of village space, and attempts to demonstrate that the double grave system appeared closely related with the historical process of the formation of the village itself; and at the same time, that the arrangement of the two graves in the double grave system came about because of the difference in the styles of burial graveyards, at the stage where the folk custom of erecting tombstones became general in the village community.

In the grave systems of several villages in Omi province (present Shiga Prefecture), in which burial graveyards were without exception located in a mountainous area, graveyards with tombstones differed by village. This gave rise to the different patterns of the double grave system; which are, the remote-grave type and the close-grave type. In contrast, in the grave system of the Kantō District, bodies were buried in or next to the living premises; when the erection of tombstones became general, this resulted in the establishment of the single-grave system. Therefore, the author considers that different concepts of where burial graves showed be located in the period when the erection of tombstones was becoming general, led to the establishment of two grave system, namely, the double grave system and the single grave system, and that this difference produced a large regional disparity in Japan.