Folkloric Meaning of Village Landscape
——Introduction to Study on Eastern and Western Japan——

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Conventional Japanese folklore studies have not made full use of the outward appearance of villages as data material. Attention has been concentrated only on the folklore phenomena handed down in the villages. This being the case, it can be said that the meaning of landscape, expressed as the outward appearance, has been neglected, and left unexamined. However, in the central part of Japan, village landscape is very different in the Kanto and Chubu Districts, and the Kinki District; for example, green in the east and black in the west. Furthermore, there are also differences in the various customs generated by the villages. In this paper, the author gives his opinion that these differences are an important subject of study in folklore.

A comparative arrangement of the differences between village landscape in the east and west shows that the different impression of village landscape, that is, green in the east and black in the west, is caused by the way the houses are gathered together (whether they are organized into concentrated villages or small villages); and by the existence or otherwise of hedges, fences, walls, etc. enclosing the houses. On this basis, there is a corresponding difference in the aspects of individual homesteads and the location of small shrines and cemeteries. What the village landscape shows is a reflection of the internal order of the society; this is shown in the east where the “ie” (family) is stressed, and the west where the “mura” (village) is stressed. The village views of eastern Japan show the individual houses as closed spaces, where facilities necessary for daily life have tended to be set up in or near the house. These facilities are not limited to the tools of this world, which are used for production and living; facilities related to the other world, for example, facilities for the worship of gods and Buddha, as well as cemeteries, are set up in or adjacent to the homestead. This may be regarded as a view generated by a society that attaches importance to the independence, individuality, and completeness of the ie (family). Village landscape in the west, on the other hand, do not show individual houses clearly. The village as a whole is one entity, and concentration as a mura (village) is shown by the density of the village and the openness of individual houses. Individual homesteads are merely places to live in, and facilities necessary for other living and production activities are set up by and for the whole village. The village organization that represents eastern Japan as a family-oriented society is the “ban”, or “turn”, type of organization, and that representing western Japan as a village-oriented society, is the “shu”, or “multitude”, type of organization.

By the above discussion, the author has described how landscape can become important data material for folklore study.