Color Symbolism and Folk Culture in Cities

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Many studies have been carried out into the culture, and history of systems, and technology based on the Japanese sense of color. In this paper, the author focused mainly on color as it appears in Japanese folk culture, and attempts to approach the mental process of the folk society, and color awareness of the people.

Artificial colors, which are especially conspicuous in urban society, present various aspects in Japanese cities. Here, the author examines examples of folk color presentation in the traditional castle towns of Kumamoto, Matsue and Kanazawa, from the Modern Age onward, based on fieldwork and reference to literature, and attempts to draw out their characteristics.

As a result, it was found that urban elements had tended to be added to the representative function based on white, and to the color tones of the folk culture, that is, red, red and blue, indigo, purple, black, and variegated colors.

For Kanazawa and Kumamoto, folklore examples and tradition handed down from the period of feudal clan government were examined. For Matsue, “Nihon Bekkenki” (Brief View of Japan) written by Lafcadio Hearn (KOZUMI Yagumo) was used to examine examples of the early Meiji era and Hearn’s impressions.

The author thinks he has found an entrance to approach the subject, from the question of why cities assume the function of folk color presentation, through the study of such objects as buildings, dyeing, and folk toys.