Folk Naming Methods of Paddy and Dry Field Plots: A Case of Two Japanese Villages

IMAZATO Satoshi

Although some Japanese folklorists, geographers, and social linguists have studied minor place names within Japanese rural settlements, few studies have focused on plot names that circulate within a single household and that are the smallest units of folk spatial classification within a village. This paper examines the naming methods used by residents themselves for plot names of rice paddies and dry fields within the villages of Hagikura in Nagano Prefecture and Nii in Kyoto Prefecture during the 1960s.

In both of the villages, people often named plots according to relative location and plot size. In Hagikura, where a set of plots owned by a single household were generally concentrated in the same zone, such a relative location name was mainly based on the main street and farm paths. Hagikura people also considered various features such as physical geographical elements like vegetation, landform, the nature of soil, and water quality to call each plot. In Nii, where each household usually possessed only one plot within a zone of steep terraced paddies labeled with minor place names, people adapted minor place names commonly used within the village community to households' plot names, often suffixed with modifiers such as "above" and "below."

Generally, one plot name corresponded to one plot surrounded by a ridge, while two or three plot names often constituted one parcel assigned an official cadaster number. In the Nii case, a plot name sometimes included two or three parcels that were each assigned an official cadaster number, while another plot name covered only a half of a plot. Therefore, we need to systematically investigate such folk plot names, which are never registered in official documents, to clarify the spatial perceptions of village people in detail.

Key words: folk classification, minor place name, folk plot name, Suwa Basin, Tango Peninsula