Standardization of Farewell Ceremonies for the Deceased and the Books of Funeral Etiquette

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This paper presents a study of the standardization of folk rituals and their explanations. To be more specific, this paper analyzes how a farewell ceremony has been established as a central ritual in funeral rites and spread into the regions since the modern times by examining the books of funeral etiquette and other relevant documents. In the modern times, the funeral service consisted of a series of rituals, including making a funeral procession and holding rituals at home, the temple, and the cemetery, respectively. However, while the development of cities made it increasingly difficult to form a funeral procession, people were getting weary of it. In this context, the farewell ceremony emerged. Although it was offered as an alternative option for a funeral ceremony, later it cast off the religious rituals of funeral ceremonies (e.g. incense burning), as Chōmin Nakae, to whom the farewell ceremony was attributed, denied its religious implications. At that time, the farewell and funeral ceremonies were in principle separated, but according to a book of funeral etiquette in the Shōwa period, this was considered as a new style and interpreted in various ways.

After the Second World War, this separate style became accepted as a standard form, but an increasing number of people preferred to the integrated style. Later, the farewell ceremony including funeral rituals was defined as a central ritual. In the 1980s, books of funeral etiquette were compiled for individual prefectures. These books presented a similar description of farewell ceremonies and suggested the one prevailing in Tokyo as an orthodox style. While the integrated style was gaining increasing popularity there, people started to notice regional differences. In the end, a common style became predominant across the nation. Thus, it has been revealed that although there were some variations depending on the region, the books of funeral etiquette integrated different ritual styles into a single form.

Key words: Farewell ceremony, a book of funeral etiquette, modernization, funeral, ritual