

Comment

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In this session, the subjects of folk implements and folk techniques were taken up as examples of nonwritten materials.

Needless to say, folk implements and techniques are inextricably linked, as folk implements are both created (where the techniques to create them are needed) and used (where the techniques to use them are needed) with folk techniques that have been retained over time. This is a familiar relationship that becomes all the more evident through the study of what people are capable of creating and using.

The title of this session refers to the ability to sustain oneself, as folk techniques are skills acquired through learning, for example, that diversity in the forms of plows is important in studying the routes of their dissemination. On this matter, Professor Yin's report clearly demonstrates that folk implements are supported by folk techniques.

Plow farming is different from human-powered farming — such as that using digging poles and spades, or stomp farming, in which cattle and horses are used — in that it is suitable for farming wide areas of flat land. Plow use is believed to have spread quickly throughout the Eurasian continent (including the Nile basin). Which, then, should we deem the origin of plow farming — wheat farming or rice farming? The innovation of farming skills in ancient times is surely synonymous with the development and modification of farming tools, but to pursue this issue through the study of folk implements requires research into complex areas such as distribution of handstuffs and the two modes of sickle-use — the reaping of ears and the reaping of roots.

Though Mr. Koh's report may seem at first to be unrelated to folk implements or techniques, this is not the case. Just as the act of eating is performed using chopsticks, knives and forks, bowls and plates, and trays and tables, and is different for each group of people, the acts of sleeping or discharge are performed using household equipment or property. It is often said that it is difficult to sleep with an unfamiliar pillow while traveling, implying that sleep is not merely a physiological phenomenon but also a learned habit. One habitually performs a variety of actions before going to sleep — brushing teeth, urinating, praying, etc. Though they may seem to be quite personal habits, they are not without meaning; actions such as fluffing and repositioning the pillow may well be the remains of some ancient rituals, and are called hypnagogic ceremonies. Acts of discharge also have various folk implications. Mr. Koh's report on the distribution of pigpens used to process human waste in east Asia and the economic effects related to the processing of human waste may be expanded into comparative studies on the ceremonial habits of discharge through detailed case studies. There is unending fascination as to whether toilet spaces are open or enclosed, how notions of the alien world, derived from psychological or physiological sensations obtained from the sound of making wind or the smell of excrement are made into representations, and so on.

Professor Zhou's report by different from the other two in that it did not refer to any specific folk implement. Rather, the report questions the attitude of conventional folk and ethnic studies in their selection

of targets for research on material culture. The fact that the collected targets were limited to items that induce visually pleasing emotions was pointed out. On this matter, it was mentioned in the beginning of the presentation summary that folk studies in Japan have two traditions, those of Yanagita Kunio and Shibusawa Keizo, but this report clarifies the contrast between Shibusawa and Yanagi Soetsu, who promoted the folk craft movement in the same period. Yanagi, who also attempted to master ethnic (folk) culture, instead discovered the concept of folk handicrafts and folk art, and recognized the representation of aesthetic value. He then went on to unfurl a new artistic movement, positioning folk art as a field within aesthetics. Shibusawa, on the other hand, was more strongly oriented towards the construction of the study of material culture to define ethnic (folk) culture. He studied the society and culture of man in retrospect, and discovered the concept of folk implements as nonwritten cultural materials, valid for use in recapturing the studied culture through a myriad of familiar events.