

The Japanese partiality towards boundaries

100

Tsuyoshi Kigawa

Kyoto Institute of Technology, Japan

Abstract

Worldviews of people are constituted through complicated structures granting that they are not uncivilised. Levi-Strauss demonstrated a possibility to indicate similarities among cultures of primitive societies by means of investigating their potential structures. In the process of his arguing, he employed “the game” and “the ritual” in order to account for structures in human behaviours. The game, in his text, conditions symmetry in advance. A match played according to rules of the game, for example, would be symmetrical owing to a rule of probability. Before the match, there is no hierarchy among players; however, the consequence of play re-composes players in a hierarchy and turns the relationship between them into asymmetry. By contrast, a match played according to the rules of a ritual has determined which side should win before the ritual is played. Therefore, it is an established asymmetry as if it were a drama or scenario. Additionally, this asymmetry allows for both a winner and a loser to be winners as actors. Then, it turns into symmetry. In short, in his text, a game of can be interpreted as a conversion from symmetry to asymmetry; on the other hand, the ritual would be as a conversion from asymmetry to symmetry.

By means of introducing Levi-Strauss’s terms, this work sets out to investigate the structure of urban houses in Kyoto as a case study. Recent investigations on urban houses of Kyoto have demonstrated characteristics that can be summarised in four words: Touri [street], Omote [face], Ura [Back] and Oku [Depth]. These concepts can have tight links with boundaries. This interpretation may appear oversimplified. However, examination of the words in the light of a structuralist approach is a prerequisite for interpreting Japanese worldviews. In this study, the main stress falls on decoding the structure of Japanese culture with a view to the sense of boundaries.

For the purpose, three types of urban houses in Kyoto have been analysed in terms of spatial layouts. A Space Syntax approach reveals the spatial configurations of these houses and the results are of use in setting them in order. Based on the results collected from the analyses, it may be presumed that the established senses of “face” and “back” in Japanese houses provide a dual system in space. The introduction of hierarchy of visitors and the complexity of ceremonies supply more rules in spatial configurations. The concept of “Face” is the side for guests, and “Back” is for the ‘host’ side. In the houses, there are more than two systems of social configuration. From viewpoint of “Back”, the most influential configuration is of daily life. This has a tight connection with the results of spatial analysis, and it

Keywords

games, rituals,
domestic space,
worldviews,
boundaries

100.1

TsKigawa@aol.com

means this has a very economical layout. In contrast, from standpoint of “face”, roots of ceremony show a relatively uneconomical layout. In ceremony, the most important room is located in the most segregated area. In daily life, the most useful room has the most integrated value.

By way of conclusion, the Japanese partiality towards boundaries can be seen in the dual system. This results from interpreting data of spatial analyses and literary works on Japanese cultures. Neither a geographic centre nor a centre of integration calculated by spatial analysis synchronizes with the centre of the ritual. In other words, the system allows a centre in space to be pluralistic. The daily life as the game and the ceremony as the ritual are contained in urban houses of Kyoto. This gives the space of Japan the sense of Oku [depth]. With these concepts, cultural motions of Japan could be seen as a structure.

100.2