

to bring to light their meanings, though in some cases the poems are so deeply personal, or rely so much on rather obscure imagery that the meaning of the poem all but defies interpretation. In these cases, a succinct note or two by the editor would be very helpful to better understand some of the more difficult allusions. Beyond this, at the end how modern writers look at fairy tales today.

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ŌBAYASHI TARYŌ 大林太良: *Shinwa no keifu. Nihon shinwa no genryu o saguru* 日本神話の系譜日本神話の源流をさぐる [The pedigree of myths. In search of the sources of Japanese myths]. Tokyo: Seidosha, 1986. xxx+343 pages. Bibliography, index. Hardcover ¥2,400; ISBN 1039-400254.3978. (In Japanese)

Ōbayashi Taryō, professor of ethnology at Tokyo University, presents herein his fundamental insights into the foundations of Japanese mythology. The book consists of twenty-four of his most important articles dating from a period of some twenty years of academic research.

The fact that Ōbayashi with this collection of major articles found his way back to his initial methodology may, in my opinion, be regarded as a kind of sensation in the field of mythological studies. Since the author's academic interests during the last ten years seemed to lie mainly with the study of functions and structures of Japanese mythology as a whole, Ōbayashi now claims again the legitimacy of comparative and cultural-historical analysis regarding the various and heterogeneous elements in the different mythological complexes of the Japanese tradition. Thus Ōbayashi carries on his way, which climbed to its first summit as early as his fundamental work *Nihon shinwa no kigen* (The Origins of Japanese Mythology), dating from 1961 (1973). While other authors, such as Alan Dundes in his recently published reader on the theory of myth,<sup>1</sup> still disdain the comparative and culture-historical methods as belonging to the days of the nineteenth century and as obsolete among present methods of analysis, Ōbayashi shows the way—not back again, but even ahead—to the allegedly old-fashioned methods of profound academic research. It is this way of study, using patterns and structures within the tales of mythical events merely as a means of comparison, instead of an ultimate goal in itself, that provides us with deeper insights into the complexity of Japanese myths as well as into historical and geographical connections that link the Japanese tradition with mythologies of other regions of the world, as well as into various ways and paths of diffusion of motifs and types. As Ōbayashi's collection clearly shows, this methodological basis provides the researcher with ways of analyzing the composition of Japanese mythology and to find out the original place of each single myth within the context of systematized mythical tradition.

One half of the twenty-four articles collected in this book date from the author's

research of recent times (1982 until 1986); another eleven were written in the period from 1971 to 1981, the remaining one finally in the year 1966.

The work is subdivided into five sections, each of them dealing with a distinct aspect of the relationship between Japanese mythology and the traditions of other related areas.

As Ōbayashi states several times (e.g. p. 266), it is not sufficient for a deeper understanding of the relations between Japanese and other mythologies to compare Japan and, e.g., Southeast-Asia exclusively. One always should have in mind the ancient traditions of China and Korea. In a detailed epilogue the author looks back on twenty-five years of study in this field. He points out that the various elements of Japanese mythology have their origin in culturally and geographically dissimilar backgrounds. There can be found relics from Jōmon times as well as myths and mythologems dating, as Ōbayashi is convinced, from a slash and burn farming stratum. These elements are said to have their origins in South China and came to Japan as early as Late Jōmon period.

Other myths, such as the myth of *umisachi* and *yamasachi* quoted often by Ōbayashi, is connected with the Yayoi period and is seen to have their origins in the South, especially in the geographical area of the Austronesian language complex. But in this instance, too, South China is said to be the original center of diffusion.

The myths of kingship do have their nearest parallels in the Korean traditions; they, as Ōbayashi points out several times, are connected with the culture of the Kofun period in Japan; the author regards the existence of this kind of myth as a convincing proof for a deep historical relationship between the ruling house of Japan and ancient Korean kingship.

For the worldwide spread and diffusion of mythical motifs and topics the Central Asia area is, as Ōbayashi states, of high importance. This region has the function of a "channel to the four points of the compass." Finally the author emphasizes, as a result of his research, that Japanese mythology is deeply connected with the mythologies of the antique Eurasian high civilizations.

With this argumentation Ōbayashi makes an important step toward liberating Japanese mythology from eliminations and isolation, a direct result of the orthodox and still surviving idea of the incomparable uniqueness of Japanese tradition.

As is apparent from the general structure of such a collection, we cannot deal in this context with details of the various problems discussed by Ōbayashi. The author provides us with the fruits of many years of research. There is just one request the reviewer would like to make: For an easier understanding it would be highly useful if the non-Japanese names and terms included in the text were given in their international reading too, instead of giving only katakana reading. This is especially true in the case of Korean and Chinese names. The identification of sometimes extremely scarce geographical names and ethnical terms too would be less problematic if handled this way.

With this collection of articles on the origins of Japanese mythology the author argues against some of the basic beliefs of orthodox Japanese self reflection. In an academically profound way Ōbayashi points out that Japanese culture is, in its very basis, a mixture of highly heterogeneous elements which can be traced back as far as the dawn of Japanese history. It becomes clear by his work, for example, that Japanese culture did not start from a point marked by the introduction of rice cultivation only, as declared by Yanagita Kunio and his followers, but has its roots earlier in the different strata of the Jōmon period. Very important too are Ōbayashi's insights into the mythological legitimation and history of Japanese kingship and its relation to continental, especially Ko-

rean, traditions. The most fruitful aspect of this collection therefore is found in the fact that Ōbayashi clearly shows the connection of Japanese myth—which always means culture as a whole too—and the traditions of the surrounding parts of the world. The author continues with his work the tradition of ethnological study of Japanese myth and provides the reader with deep insights into the complexity of the Japanese culture.

## NOTE:

1. Alan Dundes, 1985. See my review in *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. XLV-2, 1986: 299–301.

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ŌBAYASHI TARYŌ 大林太良, ARAKI HIROYUKI 荒木博之, et al. ed. *Minkan setsuwa no kenkyū—Nihon to sekai (Seki Keigo hakase beiju kinen ronbun shū)* 民間説話の研究——日本と世界 (関敬吾博士米寿記念論文集) [Studies on folk tales—Japan and the world (Studies in honor of Dr. Seki Keigo's eighty-eighth birthday)]. Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1987. iii+396 pages. Hardcover ¥8,000; ISBN 4-8104-0592-3.

The editorial column “*Tenbyō*” of the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* (evening, October 5, 1987), spoke of a party to celebrate Seki Keigo's *beiju* (eighty-eighth birthday) sponsored by the Japan Oral Literature Academic Society (Ozawa Toshio, President) and held at a hotel in Shinjuku, Tokyo. The column was entitled “Unfailing Enthusiasm for Studying Folktales.” The article introduces Seki as a scholar who “has endorsed from early on the necessity to study folktales on the basis of international comparative studies, and laid the foundations of contemporary studies on folktales by writing *Nippon mukashibanashi shūsei* (Collected Japanese folktales—afterwards re-edited and retitled as *Nippon mukashibanashi taisei*) utilizing his own classification system.” It also reported him saying that he wanted to test and see up to what age a human being can keep writing, and to add another book to his nine volumes of complete works. Therefore he spends eight hours a day writing.

The book I am reviewing was edited to celebrate Dr. Seki's *beiju*, as indicated in the subtitle. Seki is one of the two greatest authorities—the other is Yanagita Kunio—in the history of the study of Japanese folktales. His greatest work, *Nippon mukashibanashi taisei*, an index of Japanese folktale types, is the basis for determining the type of folktales, along with the *Nippon mukashibanashi meii* (Collection of Japanese Folktale Names) by Yanagita Kunio.

Yanagita's focus was not folktales themselves, but to discover the original mentality of the Japanese and the old folk beliefs revealed in folktales. On the other hand, the