

The Typology of Cosmology : A View from Folk Taxonomical Studies

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Studies in the cosmology of a relatively isolated population with a peculiar cultural tradition have been a suitable target of ethnographical researches. Varied methods for describing and analyzing the cosmology or the world view of a given people were exploited besides a simple way recording origin legends or creation myths which were regarded as the outer manifestation of their folk view of life and the world.

In this article, the author tried to define the cosmology of a population in cultural studies, from the folk taxonomical viewpoint, as an integrated whole of taxonomical systems elicited from diverse aspects of the world the people living therein. Following this new definition of the cosmology, he attempted to furnish the new key of a typology of the cosmology. Analyzing modes of integration of taxonomical systems into culturally meaningful order, three types of cosmological thought were distinguished.

The first type of the cosmology, with an organizing focus, concentrates culturally meaningful symbols into a limited aspect of the world, which plays an extraordinarily important role in their life. This type can be called 'concentration type.' The second contains a conspicuous feature that the homologous schema is found consistently in the taxonomical systems crosscutting multiple aspects of the world. This may be called 'correspondence type.' Thirdly, a category of the cosmology evidently residual, which lacks both the focal point of socio-cultural value and the correspondence as mentioned above can be recognized.

Descriptions of the cosmology cited from ethnographical and philological studies were surveyed extensively to appraise the effectiveness of this

typology to investigate culture-dependent, as well as universal, logical procedures ordering the world. Instances from East Africa (cattle complex of the East African herders and medicinal practices of the Bantu peoples) were contrasted to the concentration type of cosmology, and the West African case (the Dogon) to the correspondence type. Making reference to other illustrative cases from ancient Chinese divination and the Gnostic religion, theoretical meanings and further developments of the typology were briefly discussed.