

Myth education from new perspective in Japan

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In contemporary Japan, quite a few young people are familiar with myth. Elements taken from mythology frequently feature in cartoons, animations and video games. Some works are formed using elements borrowed from different mythological or religious traditions. In this way, the number of younger Japanese who have become interested in mythology through such media has increased in recent years.

However, elementary and secondary education provides few opportunities for young Japanese to learn about mythology in any form, and even Japanese mythology is not generally taught in school. Part of the reason is that in pre-World War II Japan, Japanese myth was taught to justify Japanese colonialism and to arouse nationalism. After the war, mythology was seen as a tool that had been used to support the war regime. Thus, after World War II, mythology was eliminated from Japanese elementary and secondary education, and teaching mythology became taboo in Japanese education.

This situation is currently changing. A law was enacted in 2006 as a revision of the Basic Act on Education 教育基本法. With this revision of the law, the need for religious education is set forth in the first article as follows:

(Religious Education)

Article 15

The attitude of religious tolerance, general knowledge regarding religion, and the position of religion in social life shall be valued in education.

Without a doubt, "general knowledge regarding religion" includes general knowledge of mythology.

Moreover, a new course of study for national language 学習指導要領 went into effect in April 2009. The new course of study stipulates that first and second grade students must learn about Japanese mythology. Thus, myth education, which had become taboo, finally reappeared this year.

For education at the university level, we have formulated a system for teaching religious and cultural education. These examples seem to suggest that myth education in Japan is coming to a turning point. Still, how we should teach, or what we should teach about mythology has yet to be discussed.

In my presentation, I will explore perspectives for teaching mythology in the context of religious and cultural education for college students.