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## SPECIAL ISSUE: FOLKLORE, POLITICS, AND NATIONALISM

### Foreword

In 1942 when the journal *Folklore Studies*, the predecessor of *Asian Folklore Studies*, was founded, the world was already in the first throes of World War II. Japan and Germany in particular were not only adamantly promoting nationalistic attitudes in their countries, both were also deeply involved in the assembling and dissemination of their traditions in forms that had been manipulated or distorted, and for specific political purposes. Both countries wanted very much to assert a long pedigree for their traditions, virtually into the primeval past, so that the new propaganda, whether German or Japanese, would establish a strong sense of legitimacy.

Generalizations such as this are common in historical treatments of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Historiographies of folklore are also frequently little more than generalized accounts of the period. Occasionally the topic of folklore and politics has drawn the critical interest of good scholars, for example in the special issue of the *Journal of the Folklore Institute* (1975) or William Wilson's excellent study of the *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland* (1976), but too often studies have tended to be rather broad and sweeping. All of us who deal with folklore in our studies, our teaching, and our research, are aware that we deal with a discipline that not only can be manipulated for political purposes, but also frequently has been. What is still lacking are in-depth studies of individuals, institutions, and methodologies. The studies included here will perhaps offer some samples of the kind

of research needed on this topic.

The theme itself is not new, as we can see in the first article in this issue. James S. Ruebel looks at the usurpation of myths and folktales for political purposes during classical antiquity, making distinctions between the Greek tendency to generalize and relate their myths to their religion, and the Roman insistence upon historicity in their folktales. The last article in the collection, by Sue Tuohy, documents for us how, in the case of the People's Republic of China, one government is still deeply concerned about its traditions as a reflection of national characteristics, but specifically as a means of clarifying regional folklore and social diversity while attempting to create a unified culture and people.

Between these two articles there are five others that will, we the authors and the editor hope, add substantial detail to our understanding of just how a political system goes about manipulating and perhaps perverting its traditions, often for very questionable nationalistic purposes. Kōichi Inoue's discovery of S. M. Shirokogoroff's study on the Tungus of Siberia is an incredible piece of detailed information on the Sovietization (perhaps Stalinization?) of a small ethnic tribe. Shirokogoroff, who had carried out extensive fieldwork among these people, including gathering their folktales and other traditions, shows us just how deceptively this cycle of educational Sovietization was being carried out. His work could equally well be published in journals devoted to linguistics, history, or ethnology, but we are fortunate to be able to include it here. Wolfgang Jacobeit, Professor Emeritus of Folklore at the Humboldt Universität in East Berlin, takes a long view of Germany's understanding of the concept of "folk culture," and then describes in his retrospective just how the former German Democratic Republic was attempting to use the study of *Volkskunde* for the betterment of its people. The ideal was, however, very different from the reality. Hannjost Lixfeld's study of the folklore umbrella organizations of the Third Reich, the only work included here that has previously been published (in German), reveals the intricate web of supporting organizations which were instituted by National Socialism and designed to implement the new mythology, that of the German master race. My article, written together with Lixfeld, with whom I have been working now for nearly fourteen years, continues the theme of German nationalistic *Volkskunde*, but it deals most specifically with the terribly difficult task of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [overcoming the past] in the German-speaking world. Finally, the German Japanologist Klaus Antoni elaborates for us the details of Japan's manipulation of perhaps its best known fairy tale, Momotarō, for promoting a spirit

of nationalism during the prewar and the war years of the 1930s and 1940s. It is a magnificently detailed layout of just how a country can utilize its traditions for promoting its own nationalism.

Here then is our volume, a special jubilee edition of *Asian Folklore Studies*, in which we treat various aspects of and approaches to the theme of "Folklore, Politics, and Nationalism." My own work, which for the last decade or more has been an attempt to make sure that important theoretical ideas and historical facts in the discipline of *Volkskunde* in Germany and folklore in the United States flow more freely across international and linguistic boundaries, has now taken another large step, this time toward Asia. By reaching out and including here both Asian and European studies on the same theme in our discipline, it is my hope that scholars on three continents will now share in this recent work.

*Asian Folklore Studies* has always had an international scope, as we can easily see from the articles, the book reviews, and the announcements that appear in its pages. This present issue will certainly continue the long-standing tradition. Much of what appears here is indeed not pleasant to read, but it has never been more necessary. As guest editor it is my sincere wish that this volume will be used by students of our discipline to see just how powerful folklore can be, even how dangerous it becomes when it is employed for nationalistic purposes.

In conclusion, a few expressions of gratitude are also necessary, first of all to Peter Knecht for inviting me to assemble the studies for this jubilee edition and then giving me the leeway to put the issue together as I saw fit. Warm thanks are also appropriate to the individual contributors for their excellent studies.