Kenichi Mizusawa, a Modern Collector of Japanese Folk Tales

By

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An author of eleven volumes on folklore produced in as many years is noticed not only in his own country, but attracts attention in the world of scholarship abroad. Such a one is Kenichi Mizusawa of Nagaoka City, Niigata, Japan. Impressive as his accomplishment has been, his plans for future writing double that amount while still other research awaits his more definite attention.

Since Mizusawa is scarcely known abroad, a brief personal sketch and some explanation of his approach to the work of collecting will be offered as a setting for a more detailed discussion of his contributions to date to Japanese folklore. A man still in his mid-fifties, he carries on his research in spare time, his main occupation being that of principal of Arai Elementary School in Nagaoka, one which enrolls 1300 pupils. His first administrative assignment came when he was 38, an age considerably lower than usual for principals in Japan. He handles detail in his plant efficiently, keeping in personal touch with all its aspects. These attributes are apparent, too, in the way he handles the mass of data he acquires while collecting and recording folk tales.

In Japan there are no grants or fellowships available for projects like Mizusawa's. He writes his manuscripts by hand and without clerical assistance. Awards he has received range from words of encouragement and praise to annual stipends of ¥6000 to ¥50,000 (from less than $20.00 to almost $150.00). At present he has no more such prospects, so he will continue to carry on as in the past upon marginal time and personal resources. The writer noticed that many of the great trees she had seen on Mizusawa's farm when she visited eight years ago were missing when she was there recently. They had been cut and sold as

part of the sacrifice made by Mizusawa and his family to support his research.

This condition has not been mentioned to arouse sympathy but to add understanding of the devotion of this tall, lean, friendly man to his activities. Not one to go off to a distant place to win renown, he delves into the cultural basis of the environment in which he was reared. It is here that his father served as village head and in the house his father built, Mizusawa was born and now resides with his family. In this region, as elsewhere in Japan, traditions are being submerged in currents of modernization, the dialect of the folk is being replaced by standardized vocabulary, and old legends and tales fade from minds filled with mass education.

Mizusawa is not reactionary in his attitude but hopes to record the orally transmitted tales and folklore before it is forgotten because it is part of his own heritage. His enthusiasm for old cultural treasures has met with appreciative response from his city, prefecture, and even national educational circles. In 1954 the Ministry of Education cited him with praise for his study of rural and folk life in Echigo, the old geographical designation for Niigata prefecture. It did the same in 1957 for his study of the relationship of folklore to social studies and in 1958 for a study of the place of the folk tale in folklore. Two more citations followed for special reports on groups of tales concerning stepchildren. Nagaoka City and Board of Education, the Niigata Nipposha (the principal newspaper), and the Prefectural Board of Education gave Mizusawa a total of six awards from 1957 to 1966. He appears frequently on local, prefectural, and national radio and television networks. Being the only active collector of folk tales in the Folklore Society of Japan, his reports on the subject to that body seem to be a part of the annual meeting.

Mizusawa's approach to regional studies originates in his interest in history—local history. While he has not lost this perspective, for the time being he is giving the folk tale his attention, at the same time collecting material for a history of local poetry and folk songs. One practical step in the last named sphere is the project he instigated in his school to record children's songs with music notation and to teach them to the pupils. The writer had the pleasure of hearing his entire school sing one of these when she visited it. The text of that song, one to the God of New Year, was printed as a greeting on cards Mizu-

sawa sent at New Year of 1967.

Some of Mizusawa's collections have already been reviewed by the writer.[1] Without duplicating previous comments upon them, they will be included in this survey of his writings to show his development in handling his material. His first work, *Fusôki minzoku shi*,[2] was a general book on local folklore. The chapter headings in it are familiar to students of Japanese folklore: The almanac, Annual observances, Weather reports, Proverbs, Riddles, Children's songs, Folk tales, Clothing, Food, Dwellings, Births, Weddings, Burial, Labor, Place names, Folk faith related to agriculture, The Family system, Words used in names, A Glossary of children's words, Folk healing arts, and Exchange of gifts. Material for this study he gathered from 1950 to 1955. While compiling the book he recognized the importance of the folk tale and felt the urgency to record those remembered by local old people before they passed on. This feeling of urgency prompted collectors forty-five years earlier when Yanagita Kunio first called the orally transmitted tales to the attention of the public. It is reasonable to anticipate that the remarkable old folk who have kept in their memory the old tales will soon be gone, but despite the disasters of war and the great changes in Japan in the intervening years, Mizusawa has found even in this day a number who can narrate more than one hundred.

Mizusawa began collecting folk tales in earnest in 1954, but before publishing them, he took the advice of Mr. Yanagita and looked into local documents and scrolls which were available. The results of his research and the cooperation of local individuals and officials made possible his second book, *Fusōki no komonjo*.[3]

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1. *Folklore Studies* XVII (1958) and XVIII (1959); *Asian Folklore Studies* XXVI (1965).

2. *Fusôki minzoku shi* 富曽亀民俗誌 (Folklore of Fusôki). Nagaoka: Fusôki Kôminkan, 1955, pp. 442. Fusôki is comprised of eight towns and villages: Horigane 堀金, Inaba 稲葉, Kamegai, 亀貝, Kozone 小曽根, Miyashita 宮下, Nagata 永田, Niibo 新保 and Tomishima 富島 lying north and west of Nagaoka City but now for the most part within its limits. Characters from the eighth, fourth, and third names are combined to form the name.

3. *Fusôki no komonjo* 富曽亀の古文書 (Old records of Fusôki). Nagaoka: Fusôki Kôminkan, 1956, pp. 321. This is also designated as *Fusôki kyôdo shi, ge* 富曽亀郷土誌,下 (Local folklore of Fusôki, part two), which would seem to refer to the first book as part one, but it bears no such title.

The term *komonjo* is applied to any book of this sort, a copy of old local records. In Mizusawa's volume there are samplings which give glimpses into village life from the end of the sixteenth century to the Meiji Restoration in the mid-nineteenth.

Since this type of study may be unfamiliar to most readers of this article, some details found in it will be shared here. Of interest to folklorists would be part of the first chapter with its survey of six villages in 1873. Uniform topics include boundaries and dimensions of villages, the distance in four directions to other towns, topography and soil, followed by statistics on land tax, crop tax, the number of houses, population, the number of horses, carts, rivers, bridges, roads, and dikes, and along with these one designated village customs. Here a folklorist would surely pause in anticipation of something interesting. He will learn that in one village the folk are simple-hearted and inclined toward farming. In another occupations are listed, the men engaged in agriculture and the women making linen as well as helping in the fields. Two villages report the number of men and women doing farming. One village elaborates—farming is encouraged, folk do not quarrel, are not inclined toward luxury, are modest and speak quietly, are not much interested in education, and seventy per cent are poor. The remaining village makes no report on customs.

Information given under shrines and temples must be weighed beyond the bare facts of the number and dimensions of buildings and the statues enshrined therein for insights. One must also bear in mind that uniform topics do not insure uniform reporting. Shrines outnumber temples and one village reported no temple. There were six Suwa 諏訪 shrines, four Jûnishin 十二神, and three Inari 稲荷 shrines. Five others were each listed once, including Jizô 地蔵, a popular Buddhist deity. Only one of the shrines was designated as the tutelary deity of the village. This may have been because such matters were common knowledge, but a Buddhist deity, Yakushi 薬師, listed among the temples was called the *mamori botoke* 守り仏, a guardian Buddha, much as a tutelary deity. Each temple was identified by its Buddhist sect and the number of patrons was stated. Whereas the shrines might point toward any of the compass points, the temples faced east, except for two facing southwest. Dates were furnished for when the temples were built and even the makers of the main statues housed in them. The statues were made of wood. Lack of historical information about shrines may have been due

to the lack of an organized network for them at that time or their origin may have been prior to that of the Buddhist temples. The sites of the shrines were probably old and their deities could have replaced still earlier ones.

Other interesting items in this chapter are the one elementary school reported with its enrollment of 74 and two battlefields. These sites were not recorded in terms of generals or conflicting armies engaged but the position of the encounter and the resulting loss of dwellings by fire, a kind of reporting modern news service does not furnish. The castle at Nagaoka was one of the last to fall at the time of the Meiji Restoration. In fact, there is a story that the hot-headed young commander leading the attack pushed ahead and destroyed it after orders came for hostilities to cease.

Other chapters in the *komonjo* reveal the extent to which daily life was regulated under the Tokugawa regime. One gives rules or laws for a village in 1763. Five were considered fundamental and fourteen more covered such matters as what to do in case of a flood, rules against bandits, for lost and found, and care of those who were sick and could not work. Another chapter throws light upon the control of the 5-family organization of villages (1690), fifty regulations, the first of which prohibited Christianity. Responsibility for reporting Christians and punishment for withholding information on them was placed upon the whole unit along with the penalty of death meted out to the one discovered. Among other prohibitions were those against thieving, gambling, and making bullets or wine.

There is an 1869 report by temple of all the faithful, their sex, name, and age. Ages were from one-year olds to a 77-year old. Another chapter furnished an invoice for 1712 of village property under 41 headings, including such items as lengths of rope, the number of brooms in storehouses, population, bridges, firewood, boats for river transportation, the kinds and number of big trees, and the diminishing supply of water from the hills. Another chapter listed information prepared under 74 headings for an inspector's visit (1838), which gave the total of hawk nests, harlots (none), and castle ruins among other items.

To be sure, an enumeration here of selected items carries with it the danger of distorting the purpose of such records as Mizusawa found, but in reading his *komonjo*, one is overcome by the minutiae in the probing inspections of the common man's life under the Tokugawa rule, a period of over two hundred

years. That the native culture, including folk tales, survived such an ordeal is something worth pondering. The tales were surely loved and preserved in the hearts of the folk for the comfort they provided and the escape from the severity of life. What adventure they offered to young and old, a chance journey to the Dragon Palace, opportunity to outwit a fox, succor from a compassionate deity, and discovery of rich treasure.

One must conclude that Yanagita's advice to Mizusawa to probe local records was a wise one, for tales which were preserved in those former days take on new significance in view of life in those days. Mizusawa resolved to give the folk tale his serious attention and to push ahead with the task of recording them. He had heard and loved them as a child. Both his father and his father's mother had told many to him. He had placed a few folk tales in the chapter of *Fusôki minzoku shi* without numbering them or listing the titles in a table of contents or the narrators from whom he had collected them between 1950 and 1955.

Even this brief offering of tales, however, was accompanied by remarks which showed his serious approach to the folk tale. He discussed the formulas and their meanings found at the beginning of folk tales, at the close, and the listener's response. Tales in the past were not merely for entertainment of adults or bed-time stories for children. To begin with, they were told only at night and were a part of celebrations of certain festivals or vigils, such as Koshin 庚申. Many of the tales were concerned with occasions such as New Year, Bon, the May festival, or the autumn equinox. Particularly were they recited at the Little New Year, the *koshôgatsu* 小正月, a time when prayers and divinations were performed for a good harvest. The tales were for the entertainment of the Field Deity as well as the villagers. Without amplifying, Mizusawa stated that the folk tale furnishes light upon old customs, ways of folk life, and thought. Little suspecting the great number of tales he would one day have to offer, he ventured to estimate that if he searched longer, he might be able to record as many as one hundred instead of the 61 he offered in the chapter. One gifted narrator seemed likely to know that many herself, but she took ill and died before he could set down twenty or thirty of them. Thus a poignant note was added to his feeling of urgency in gathering the tales.

Late in 1956 Mizusawa published his first book-size collec-

tion of folk tales, *Mukashi atta ten gana.*[4] These tales he had gathered from 1954 to 1956 in towns near Miyauchi, the city where he was principal of the elementary school. Following his introduction he listed the narrator's name, age, and town where each lived. In the main part of the text the narrator's name again appeared after the title of each tale. The 189 tales were grouped into regular folk tales, humorous stories, animal stories, and stories without an end. Some of the tales were listed by number as variations of a standard example he set down first. In other instances he gave titles to the variations to indicate something of their content.

Here was established Mizusawa's handling of variations of a given tale. Some folklorists regard it as duplication, but he is making a careful comparative study of variations of tales, a significant problem. His presentation gives a more complete view of the tale which is provided even by a fragment. In the brief glossary of folkloristic terms preceding the main part of the book he established the fact that certain old people in the community were designated as narrators. These *katari jisa* (old men) or *katari basa* (old women) were the *kataribe,* the special narrators who recited tales upon certain occasions. Theirs was a role filled by only them and not by just anybody who knew tales. In the text of the tales sometimes a standard word was inserted in parenthesis, but dialect on the whole was modified. In later volumes Mizusawa a gave more attention to dialect.

The three books discussed so far represent Mizusawa's beginnings in collecting. Each was published privately in typed script by organizations and none went into commercial channels for the general public. They are out of print now and difficult to come by. If in the future the first two volumes could be published with indexes, their contents would prove to be valuable source material in folklore of Japan. That would require time and funds which Mizusawa does not have.

Within the next two years, five of his collections of tales were published by Miraisha, a Tokyo firm. This was a new departure with results which can be marked up to both gain and loss. It is not necessary to go into motives of either the author or his publisher. It was the first chance for Mizusawa's work to appear in the book market and that through a Tokyo

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4. *Mukashi atta ten gana* 昔あったてんがな. Nagaoka: Nagaoka Shiseki Hozonkai, 1956, pp. 435.

publishing house, both appealing prospects. The publisher was just launching upon a project to popularize folk tales and doubtless welcomed the fresh, authentic material. Its folk tale series was still in the planning stage so Mizusawa's first book with Miraisha, *Echigo no minwa*,[5] was channeled into its *minwa* 民話 series, one which had characteristics catering to sophisticated readers, tales often rewritten by writers without any scholarly intentions. The old school folklorists were quick to express their displeasure with what they considered a compromise by Mizusawa. Actually, the contents of his book stood up fairly well under editing, but the selections in it tended to be those carried by professional narrators, a bit coarse and embellished.

The contents of this book were divided according to the three geographical divisions of Niigata prefecture—Jôetsu, Chûetsu, and Kaetsu. A representative narrator from each division and twelve more brief contributors furnished the 79 tales. At the end of the book were words to 29 children's songs. Comical illustrations, even on the distribution map, emphasized the crude and grotesque. In his brief, sincere Introduction Mizusawa stated that the stories were essentially as he had heard them. For the first time he used dialect in the text with standard Japanese for obscure terms in a parallel column beside them when they first appeared. *Echigo no minwa* may have lost a little by the company it kept, but in it was Mizusawa's first serious attention to dialect and introduction to children's songs which he hopes later to treat more fully.

The next four books were published in the *mukashibanashi* 昔話 or folk tale series by Miraisha.[6] The amusing sketches no longer appeared. Instead there were plates picturing the narrators or life in the area where the tales were gathered and a sketch map in the front of each volume. Titles of the first three were opening formulas and one the closing formula to local folk tales. In each volume he added a glossary of dialect appearing, but without duplication, a welcome addition. Oddly enough, this contribution was the target of criticism from some directions.

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5. *Echigo no minwa* 越後の民話. Tokyo: Miraisha, 1957, pp. 299.

6. *Tonto mukashi ga atta gedo, Dai-isshû* とんと昔があったげど, 第一集, 1957, pp. 282; *Tonto mukashi ga atta gedo, Dai-nishû* とんと昔があったげど, 第二集, 1958, pp. 351; *Tonto hitotsu atta ten gana* とんと一つあったてんがな, 1958, pp. 299; *Iki ga pôn to saketa* いきがポーンとさけた, 1958, pp. 352.

The problem arose because a man whose life had been spent in the region where the dialect were found, one who conscientiously inquired into the use of words that happened not to be familiar to him, one who employed them in his text as they were used, came up with some definitions which did not correspond to previously published lists of dialect. That produced a hazardous circumstance, indeed, but one which did not deter Mizusawa from further contributions of the sort.

The first of the *mukashibanashi* collections, *Tonto mukashi atta gedo, Dai-isshû,* was entirely a repertoire of 105 tales told by Tsuru Nagashima, a 90-year old living in Nijû-mura, a mountainous area near Ojiya City. To reach her home, Mizusawa walked ten miles beyond the end of the nearest bus line. He gathered her tales between 1955 and 1957, recording many of them in the winter when Nijû-mura was only accessible on skis. Many of her tales were short, humorous anecdotes, perhaps heard when she was a child from visiting story tellers. Her early home seemed to have been one of considerable importance, the kind that frequently hired such talent.

The next collection, *Tonto mukashi atta gedo, Dai-nishû,* was recorded in the same area while completing the book of Tsuru's tales. In it Mizusawa placed 134 tales selected from 51 narrators in 19 different communities. The name, age, and village of the narrator follows each tale. The Introduction to this volume shows a new emphasis upon the relationship of the folk tale to folk faith, twenty-nine topics in all.

In contrast to the two collections made in the remote mountainous area, the next, *Tonto hitotsu atta ten gana,* was gathered on an open plain near Nagaoka City. This book is divided between the tales of two narrators, one a man in his forties and the other a woman 93 years old. The latter was another who knew more than one hundred tales. Mizusawa's Introduction shows further development in his approach. He was beginning to realize that the old narrators who carried a great number of tales in their memory also shed a clearer light upon their cultural role. He began to search for the line down which they had been conveyed, ascertaining where and from whom the narrator had heard tales, often being able to push his inquiry several generations into the past. A genuine narrator can always state the source of her tales. Thus the historical setting of the tale leant new significance to it.

With *Iki ga pôn to saketa,* the fourth of the *mukashibanashi* series, Mizusawa intended to discontinue publishing collections of tales, so he gave it the closing formula as a title. He intended to devote himself to the study of tales which he had gathered. The contents were divided according to four districts around Nagaoka, a total of 135 tales by 35 narrators. Among these was Kita Onozuka, a 95-year old woman who had welcomed the writer into her home and shared several of her store of tales with her. An account of this has already been reported.[7] In this volume he also included one story he had heard from his mother. Once more he gave the name, age, and village of each narrator, this time at the close of each tale.

Although Mizusawa had stopped publishing with Miraisha, his five volumes put out there shifted the work of gathering tales into the postwar period at a time when most collections available had either been published before the end of the war or had been based upon prewar notes. Soon students at Kokugakuin University in Tokyo would be launching upon their project of collecting and interest in a new approach was being evinced.

Five years elapsed before Mizusawa's next book, *Tochio-gô mukashibanashi shû,*[8] appeared. This does not mean that he had exhausted his supply of unpublished tales or that he had given up more collecting. He had turned away from the temptation to popularize them and was taking them up with certain of their elements in mind. Once more, however, the stories rather than their treatment are of central interest. They were gathered around Tochio, an old castle town, between 1958 and 1961. One hundred and one of them from 77 men and women are in this collection. Thirty-eight pictures of them establish an intimate encounter and plates in the front show glimpses of the city and life around it. In his Introduction Mizusawa calls attention to groups of tales reflecting religious elements such as those forecasting the fortune of new-born babies, trips to the Dragon Palace, the forbidden room, and the like. His references may seem too brief for the reader unfamiliar with folklore. He assumes that they can be weighed, but the average reader will find but little light upon the subject. Tochio dialect is employed

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7. Fanny Hagin Mayer, "Collecting Folk Tales in Niigata, Japan," *Midwest Folklore,* XX, No. 2, Indiana University, pp. 103-109.

8. *Tochio-gô mukashibanashi shû* 栃尾郷昔ばなし集. Tochio-shi, Niigata: Tochio Kyôiku Iinkai, 1963, pp. 320.

with no glossary or explanation.

In *Echigo no Shinderera* (Cinderella)[9] Mizusawa tackled two groups of stepchildren stories, the *"Nukabuku Komebuku"* and *"Uba kawa."* Six hundred and sixty pages of tales with illustrations are the basis for his summary. Carefully presented detail in outline gives themes and their variations, followed by tables. The abundance of fact rather obscures the conclusions. The fresh, authentic tales again are the greater contribution. This evaluation is offered to emphasize Mizusawa's gift as a collector.

It is no surprise, then, that *Obaba no mukashibanashi,*[10] his latest book, is also a collection of tales, 140 by Chise Ikeda, a 75-year old woman. Illustrations by Shôzô Mizuno, a young teacher on Mizusawa's staff, add rustic charm to its pages. Mizusawa added at the end of the book his report to the Folklore Society of Japan in 1963, *Hyaku kurasu mukashibanashi denshôsha no tokushoku* (characteristics of the 100-class narrator).

When the writer visited Mizusawa in February of this year, he placed in her hands a list of his plan for further writing and research. Such a mimeographed plan sheet is common procedure for him in administrating his school and it is the way he attacks his study—with long range, systematic planning. The outlines he gives to his listeners at annual meetings of the Folklore Society always are clear and concise and he covers each point to the letter. It is reasonable to anticipate that he will accomplish what he now has in mind. It includes eleven collections and a book describing his experiences in collecting the tales.

Eventually Mizusawa expects to make a treatment of the sociological aspects of the folk tale based upon material already gathered and additional stories. There is time enough for such a contribution. In the meantime his gift of being able to approach aged men and women who know tales and their precious hoards they share with him cannot be matched by any other folklorist at present. Others may give their attention to interpretive or comparative studies, but they are indebted to Mizusawa for the cultural heritage he has brought to their attention.

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9. *Echigo no Shinderera* 『越後のシンデレラ』. Sanjo-shi, Niigata: Nojima Shuppan, 1964, pp. 737.

10. *Obaba no mukashibanashi* おばばの昔ばなし. Sanjo-shi, Niigata: Nojima Shuppan, 1966, pp. 504.