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Folktale Research after Yanagita

Development and Related Issues

Abstract

This article intends to trace the development of folktale research and to examine the associated problems and results achieved, as well as present contemporary research issues. It examines research on the background of religious belief in folktales, research of folktales as a reflection of society, research on folktales from a psychological perspective, structural analysis of folktales, socio-historical research, comparative research, and the development of storytelling in that order. It is clear that due to the changes (or extinction) of the places of storytelling since the period of rapid economic growth, the gap between two types of research—that which focuses on the storytellers and the place of storytelling, and that which aims to analyze the structure of meaning of folktales—has grown wider. This has made it difficult to find common ground between them. In order to address this situation, I believe it is necessary to consider the meaning of storytelling within the life of storytellers.

Keywords: folktale—myth—structure—storyteller—comparative studies

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE is to trace the history of folktale research in Japan, and to examine its achievements and current issues surrounding it.* Firstly, I will examine historical research that focused on analyzing the structure and the meaning of folktales. Then, I will look into research that dealt with storytellers and storytelling places. Finally, rather than providing a comprehensive history of folktale research due to limitations of space, I will focus on research that I am particularly interested in.

CHARACTERISTICS OF YANAGITA KUNIO'S FOLKTALE RESEARCH—EXPLORING THE BELIEFS BEHIND FOLKTALES

Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 (1875–1962) established the foundation of folktale research in Japan. His research was characterized by his attempts to explore the uniquely Japanese aspects of folk beliefs through the study of folktales. Yanagita describes the characteristic features of Japanese folktales as reference material in the following manner:

> There are many foreign researchers who do not know that each ethnic group often had their own independent folk beliefs hidden within folktales, and that such beliefs had been preserved until quite recently. Since folktales do not have conditions like place, time and particular narrator, they must be clearly distinguished from pure myths. In any case, it was only until quite recently that folktales with strong religious elements were maintained and handed down from generation to generation. It appears to me that this is the reason why the distinction between myths and folktales is somewhat unclear in my country. Also, viewed from another perspective, this means that Japanese folktales have a higher value as sources of religious history compared to folktales found in other countries (YANAGITA 1990a, 86).

Yanagita's research based on the above theme is summarized in a book published in 1933 entitled *Momotarō no tanjō* 桃太郎の誕生 [The birth of

Momotarō, the peach boy]. Yanagita deals with a group of folktales which use the motif of "abnormal birth" (*ijō tanjō* 異常誕生). He chose the story of Momotarō, a well-known and popular tale, as the title of the book. In these tales Yanagita focused on folk beliefs centering on the "small child" *chiisago* 小さ子. He states:

> The "small child" which appears in these tales grows up suddenly under certain conditions at a particular time, and then accomplishes very difficult tasks that normal humans cannot achieve. In doing so, the child makes the grandparents, who have raised him with great care, very happy. These children are granted only to those who have strong faith and prayers—this is the same case in Issun Bōshi 一寸法師 [Little One-Inch] in *Otogizōshi* 御伽草子, and the story of Sunekotanpako from Ōshū.[1] The fact that Momotarō came out of a peach, Urikohime 瓜子姫 [the Melon Princess] from a melon, and Kaguyahime 赫奕姫 [Bamboo Princess] of *Taketori monogatari* 竹取物語 [The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter] from bamboo means that all the main characters in these folktales were born extremely small. Yet not many people take much notice of this (YANAGITA 1990a, 68).

As shown above, Yanagita tried to find traces of myths within folktales. He also explains this point in his book *Kōshō bungeishi kō* 口承文芸史考 [On the history of oral literature], in which he summarized the methodology in researching orally transmitted literature:

> It is possible to establish the study of mythology in Japan as an academic field. Apart from the materials that have already been recorded for other specific purposes, this country is filled with various folk-related resources that seem to have naturally developed into literature from myths. While myths themselves are different from literature, the way people cling to these tales even though the beliefs originally connected to them have disappeared is, although the metaphor is rather extreme, similar to their attachment to *sake* [liquor] or *mochi* [rice cakes]. Some who loved the beauty of narration in myths used the style for other storytelling, and others who enjoyed more mysterious aspects of myths kept them as folktales for a long time, even though they knew the story was not true (YANAGITA 1990b, 11–12).

In assuming the dwindling of belief in such folktales, Yanagita saw this as a stage through which they turned into fairy tales for children. He states:

During the process of folktales turning into fairy tales, folk beliefs that
were part of the tales also faded away, even though not many have
noticed this. People in modern society laugh and enjoy fairy tales
because unbelievable things come true in them. In former times, how-
ever, people actually believed such miracles occurred. In other words,
they believed in the notions that people who followed special methods
or those who complied with certain conditions could encounter mira-
cles. The development of folktales was partly caused by this way of
thinking. Although such beliefs have diminished nowadays, traces of
them still remain.... As is the case with the stories of Urikohime or
Momotarō, which contain unbelievable incidents that amaze children
of today, there remains a small element of "maybe such a thing *could*
happen" within the stories somewhere. The most crucial element in
these folktales is that the old men and women who appear must be good
people whose only real problem is that they are not able to have chil-
dren of their own (YANAGITA 1990a, 110–11).

Following from this idea, Yanagita positions folktales that are in the same
vein as the story of Momotarō as follows:

Based on newly-discovered evidence, it is now known that folktales
have been revised over and over. This evidence clarified what the
unchanging themes of the tales are. One of these themes is that only
those who are devout are blessed with a child. I guess that these stories
initially included virtually every conceivable way of a child coming into
the world. In the story of Momotarō, he comes to the couple in a rela-
tively natural way, that is, by floating down a river. Apart from the fact
that he is inside a peach, his passage down the river appears to be an old
idea. A second important theme is that the achievements of these spe-
cial children are so incredible that they accomplish nearly everything
the audiences wish to happen. The tales became greatly exaggerated
and were used as devices to amuse young boys. This is probably why the
tales changed so dramatically. In this sense, the story of Momotarō is
not particularly old at all. Rather, it closely follows the tradition that was
established with the story of Issun Bōshi. A third theme is that the child
grows up to have the best marriage and becomes the progenitor of a spe-
cial family line with a good name. Since this theme is not essential in
fairy tales, the story of Momotarō does not include it. Therefore the
story is different from other fairy tales of that type. We can easily find
more evidence, however, if we choose to do so (YANAGITA 1990a,
192–93).

As is clear from his statement, Yanagita insisted that there were classic folk-tales that were mythological in character. Many other stories that contained different episodes branched from the originals. Yanagita summarized his view on this in *Nihon mukashibanashi meii* 日本昔話名彙 [Classification of Japanese folktales] (YANAGITA 1948).

SEKI KEIGO'S RESEARCH—ORGANIZING CATEGORIES AND THE SOCIALITY OF FOLKTALES

Although he was influenced by Yanagita and understood his methods well, Seki Keigo 関敬吾 (1899–1990) raised Japanese folktale research to a new level. He compiled a book called *Nihon mukashibanashi shusei* 日本昔話集成 [Compilation of Japanese folktales] (SEKI 1950–1958), and summarized various categories of Japanese folktales. Seki describes his view on folktales in the conclusion of an article titled "Folktales" *Minwa* 民話, which is record-ed in the tenth volume of *Nihon minzokugaku taikei* 日本民俗学大系 [Compendium of Japanese folklore].

> When I first started to research folktales, I was very keen to see whether I could discover something unimaginable to people today, something that was hidden in the hearts of ancient peoples. As I have merely reached an extremely simple and ordinary hypothesis, however, I am deeply disappointed with folktales. As is clear from the history of folk-tale research, it is possible to develop different hypotheses from other perspectives and come up with reasons for these hypotheses. What I must do now is dismantle the folktales and examine them as a whole, based on the hypothesis that they are reflections of social customs, par-ticularly concerning the process of human life, including marriage and the acquisition of wealth (SEKI 1981: 265–66).

As shown above, although Seki started to discover aspects of folk beliefs hid-den in folktales while being influenced by Yanagita, as he looked through various categories of folktales, the conclusions he reached differed from Yanagita's. For instance, Yanagita suggested that the idea of abnormal birth is a key to exploring folk beliefs that are unique to Japanese. For Seki, this motif was only one element that made folktales more colorful: he did not consider it as a major theme that is universal to folktales. Seki states as fol-lows on the concept of abnormal birth:

> By viewing the tales as a whole and focusing on the actions of the main characters, I came to the conclusion that the fact that Momotarō came out of a peach and Urikohime out of a melon was a reflection of the

coming-of-age ceremony. Of course, the belief that humans can be born
out of plants has also existed for a long time. I do not intend to deny this
idea completely. I suggest, however, that these tales have been told to
show the process of human life, rather than to show that humans can
be born out of plants (SEKI 1981, 266).

Since Seki viewed folktales in this manner, he was not able to discover
"unique folk beliefs" in them as Yanagita had. Rather, he insisted that the
focus should be on the common elements found in folktales which go
beyond ethnic differences:

> I believe that folktales have not been established based on a distinctive
> culture or character which is unique to each different ethnic group.
> Rather, I assume that they have been established based on more gener-
> al and universal facts. Is this not the reason why folktales have been
> loved and passed down from generation to generation regardless of time
> and ethnic background? Surely it is impossible to deny the fact that
> folktales contain various particular folk beliefs or customs…. It is very
> difficult, however, to discover fundamental cultural elements in the
> folktales that are told today. Almost every element which makes today's
> folktales interesting is secondary (SEKI 1981, 265).

With this in mind, Seki sought "the primary condition for the establishment
of folktales in ordinary life; in other words the social customs that are con-
tinually repeated in daily life." He goes on to say, "folk beliefs are secondary
elements in folktales. Rather, it seems like magical elements are told to help
people in their daily lives" (SEKI 1981, 265).

   Let me give you an example to show the clear difference between the
interpretation of Yanagita and Seki, through a story type represented in the
story of the Dragon Palace Child (*Ryūgū dōji* 竜宮童子).

> There was an old man who made his living selling firewood. He was
> having trouble selling the wood one day, so he put the firewood under
> water while praying to the dragon god. As he did so, a beautiful woman
> holding a small child appeared from water. She said, "The dragon god
> is happy that you gave him firewood. As a token of appreciation, he
> wants to give this child to you. So take the child home. This child will
> give you anything when you call him Little Master Snotty Nose
> *Hanatare kozōsama* 鼻たれ小僧様 and ask for something. You must,
> however, offer him *ebi namasu* 海老膾 [shrimp marinated in vinegar]
> three times every day." Then the woman disappeared. The old man

took the boy home, placed him by the household Shinto altar, made an offering of *ebi namasu*, and proceeded to raise him with great care. When the old man asked for something, Little Master Snotty Nose snorted and gave him what he wanted. The old man built a great house and storehouses and became very rich. Eventually he became so well-off that his only task was to buy shrimp to make *ebi namasu* as an offering to Little Master Snotty Nose. Yet even that had become too much trouble for him. So the old man took Little Master Snotty Nose away from the household altar and asked him to go back to the Dragon Palace because there was nothing more that he wanted. Little Master Snotty Nose left the house and the old man heard him snort. At that moment, the great house and storehouses suddenly disappeared; the only thing left standing was the original shack the old man once lived in. The old man was very surprised and went outside, but Little Master Snotty Nose was nowhere to be found (SEKI 1978, 13; collected in Tamana county, Kumamoto prefecture).

Yanagita insisted that this old story was based on "an old belief." He explains as follows:

Even now when we hear the name of the Dragon Palace, we immediately think of Otohime-sama 乙姫様, the princess of the Dragon Palace. Some may say that similar stories exist in other countries and offer examples, yet the manner and style are both very unique to Japan. The Japanese version of the Dragon Palace is different from the Dragon Palace of other countries. Apart from the fact that the messenger from the sea is almost always a young woman, it is also a young woman who holds up the mysterious little boy and tries to make a connection to the human world. This shows that the ocean is an eternal mother to the Japanese people (YANAGITA 1990a, 64).

In contrast, Seki tries to interpret this story in terms of daily life. Yanagita tried to discuss the relationship between the sea god and the people. Seki, on the other hand, insists that "the fundamental idea that is common to this type of folktale can be traced back to two moral principles: The honest are blessed with eternal happiness and the greedy who want everything end up losing everything." (SEKI 1982, 87). He also states:

When we look at this type of story as a whole, the main theme does not center on the abnormal birth of a small child. Rather, it focuses on the expression of a kind of ethic. Therefore the motif of the small child is

not of primary concern to this story but more of a secondary issue. Although folktales do transform quite freely, they develop around an ideal, a nucleus. This ideal does not seem to express a particular incident or a belief but a fundamental universal ideal for humanity (SEKI 1982, 96–97).

As opposed to Yanagita's interpretation, which was arbitrary in one sense, Seki's interpretation has more universal significance, which is quite significant. By emphasizing, however, that folktales reflect society in terms of daily life, he does not address how the content of folktales could be explored on a deeper level. This area was pursued by Kawai Hayao 河合隼雄 in later years through psychological analysis.

RESEARCH USING PSYCHOANALYSIS—EXPLORING THE WORLD OF THE UNCONSCIOUS THROUGH FOLKTALES

Kawai explains why he decided to research folktales by saying, "In my mind, the contents of folktales and the collective mentality of people of the modern age are strongly connected. This is why I am intrigued by folktales, even though my main field is psychotherapy" (KAWAI 1977, 15).

Using Jungian theory, Kawai interprets folktales as the "expression of the mental process in unconsciousness." In other words, he "tries to see folktales as description of stages that humans go through in their internal process of maturation" (KAWAI 1977, 24). According to Kawai, folktales have the following function:

> When viewed from the totality of human existence, the changes which occur at turning points in human life should be considered as phenomena that differ from rational understanding. For example, take the phenomenon of, when put in rational terms, a child growing into an adult: When we consider the tremendous inner changes that occur, it is more appropriate for this phenomenon to be described as the cycle of birth and death. Although folktales seem totally absurd from a rational perspective, they are also filled with wisdom, as I described previously, and work to recapture the totality of human existence. I believe that is why folktales have been passed down from generation to generation and enjoyed irrespective of the time (KAWAI 1979, 151).

This is similar to the idea of Seki Keigo, who believed that folktales reflected the coming-of-age ceremonies that were conducted in real life. In contrast, the characteristic of Kawai's idea is that he thought about the function of folktales in terms of "the description of the internal world" *naiteki sekai no*

kijutsu 内的世界の記述 of humans. It can be said that Kawai pursued the meaning of folktales not only in a different way to Yanagita, but on a deeper level which Seki himself did not pursue.

Kawai, like Yanagita and Seki, examined folktales of similar type to the Dragon Palace Child. According to Kawai's interpretation, "the Dragon Palace, which appears in Japanese folktales, is an expression of a deeper layer of the Japanese consciousness." This is, in some ways, similar to Yanagita's idea. Kawai, however, focused on the "deep layer of consciousness" that is common to modern Japanese, whereas Yanagita focused on folk beliefs that Japanese held in ancient times. Kawai's interpretation of Dragon Palace-type children is as follows:

> Not only do these children have "unsophisticated names," they also looked "very scruffy and unworthy."[2] These children, however, bring great wealth to the main characters in this type of story—their existence is very paradoxical. While this shows that what appears from the unconscious mind looks ugly and mundane [that is, the children] when viewed from the perspective of the conscious mind, so long as they are treated in an appropriate manner, they can turn into something valuable, something that is beyond conscious judgment (KAWAI 1982, 237).

Kawai compares this with a similar story, "The Three Feathers", in the Grimm Brother's collection of fairy tales and states as follows:

> In folktales that fall into the category of the Dragon Palace Child, small children who come from various other worlds usually keep their other worldly character regardless of how long they stay in the human world. When these children encounter human desires and judgments, they immediately go back to the "other world." In other words, they have strong attributes of the unconscious. Although they bring benefits to the world of consciousness, there is a point up to which they can not bear the change into this world, and thus they disappear into the world of the unconscious. In the story of "The Three Feathers", the hero of the conscious world who leaves it for the unconscious world obtains something there and achieves unification with the world of consciousness. In the story of the "Dragon Palace Child", however, the hero (although he does not appear to be as such) who went to the unconscious world was given something there and was able to bring benefits to the conscious world for a while. But in the end, he goes back to the unconscious

world. In our country, the force of the vacuum that comes from the unconscious world is extremely powerful (KAWAI 1982, 239–40).

Regarding this point, Kawai states, "folktales in our country show how weak the Japanese ego=conscious mind is. However,… it is possible to understand the whole story as a kind of vague consciousness without understanding the underwater kingdom as simply the world of the unconscious" (KAWAI 1982, 240–41).

Kawai suggests that modern Japanese should tackle the issue from the perspective of modern psychotherapy in the following manner:

> In the story of the Dragon Palace Child, the main character presents a gift to the underwater world and by doing so, receives an invitation to visit there. Does this not indicate that he felt something was missing in this world and wished to bring something new to it?…. The existence of these types of folktales seems to show that the triad of the underwater world[3] appears to support a kind of structuralization in the world of "nothingness" above ground. The unification of these two worlds is desirable, although it is different to the unification of Western countries (KAWAI, 1982, 274).

As shown above, Kawai developed research into Japanese folktales from the perspective of depth psychology. This research culminated in a book called *Mukashibanashi to Nihonjin no kokoro* 昔話と日本人の心 [Folktales and the Japanese mind] (KAWAI 1982).

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS AND SOCIOHISTORICAL RESEARCH
Komatsu Kazuhiko 小松和彦 conducted structural research on folktales from the point of view of cultural anthropology. In an essay published in English (KOMATSU 1987), he presents a different interpretation on the "Dragon Palace Child"-type of story. Komatsu explains the framework of his research as follows:

> Beings from outside that visit the village can be divided into two categories: mythical outsiders, spirits from the Other World that appear in myths and folktales and are impersonated in rituals, and social outsiders such as religious travelers, pedlars, and tramps (KOMATSU 1987, 32).

In accord with what PITT-RIVERS (1963) points out, Komatsu studied folktales with the presumption that "these two analytical categories of 'outsiders'

have often merged in people's minds." Komatsu's interpretation of the "Dragon Palace Child" is described as follows:

> I consider it neither as derived from the myth of the infant water god nor as a remnant of the ancient cult of the sacred Mother and Child nor as the conveyer of a universal moral but strictly within the cultural context of the folk society in which it has been transmitted. From this perspective, the Dragon Palace child must be (1) considered as an instance of the "visitors from the Other World" discussed earlier, (2) compared folkloristically or synchronically to the concept of the fortune child (*fuku-go*), (3) compared sociohistorically or diachronically to the riverbank people (*kawaramono*), and (4) explained in relation to these concepts (KOMATSU 1987, 34).

Komatsu bases his conclusion on the results of research on the medieval social history of Japan, which developed between the 1970s and 1980s. He states:

> In the Middle Ages, the Dragon Palace child as a mythical outsider corresponded to and overlapped with the riverbank people as social outsiders, and when the legend was brought into folk society it underwent a process of transformation whereby its corresponding social outsider became the abnormal child (KOMATSU 1987, 37).

Komatsu's research is characterized by his perception of feelings, such as fear, contempt, or exclusion toward a social group in the story—a situation that actually occurred in real life—which he developed through connecting the structural analysis of the story with research on social history.

DEVELOPMENTS IN COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Ozawa Toshio 小澤俊夫, who specializes in the literary research of folktales, has actively explored the uniqueness of Japanese folktales by comparing them to stories found in foreign countries. The culmination of his research is summarized in OZAWA 1994. This book mainly deals with folktales in which the main motif centers on marriage between humans and animals. Ozawa states as follows regarding the problems he tackles:

> The reason why I decided to research marriage between humans and animals is that I believe that each ethnic group's idea toward folktales is summarized in them. In other words, I wish to find out how humans think about an animal spouse, and how the narrator accepts this idea

and narrates the tale. I believe that the answers to these questions show
how the world of folktales has been created.... In the case of either folk-
tales or legends, the fact that these stories have been transmitted over
generations show that there must be a particular ideology that has been
accepted by the particular group of people. The stories must have sur-
vived only because they were acceptable to the people. So these stories
must contain a basic ideology of which the group itself is not conscious,
relating to the way they perceive animals or nature. Through the study
of stories on marriage between animal and human, I believe that it is
possible to explore such a fundamental ideology (OZAWA 1994, 22–23).

Ozawa states as follows regarding the position of his research:

Research after Yanagita Kunio in Japan has mainly been about explor-
ing the origins of folk belief and the relation between literature and
folktales. However, there needs to be research conducted on the narra-
tion of folktales.... What I have attempted is one way of analyzing the
narration in detail. Through this, I have explored the consciousness
found in the actions of main characters, or the consciousness which
made those actions occur. Analysis of narration means analysis of the
narrator's consciousness at the same time. From this, we can see how
the narrator is talking about the relationship between the main charac-
ters and their spouses (OZAWA 1994, 184).

From this perspective, Ozawa tries to examine the "comparison of the nar-
rator's consciousness as it appears in the text." After comparing the folktales
from various parts of the world with those of Japan, Ozawa states the fol-
lowing regarding the unique character of Japanese folktales:

The world of Japanese folktales is close to those found in Indonesia,
Punjab, and among Eskimo tribes, in terms of the understanding of the
transformation between human and animal as magic or as nature tak-
ing its course. Therefore, the perception of spouses of different species
within Japanese folktales is similar to that within folktales from the
above mentioned countries. Yet, once the main characters discover their
spouse's real identity, that is, of a different species, the marriage can no
longer continue. This is similar to European legends about human and
fairies (OZAWA 1994, 201).

Ozawa summarizes the characteristic of Japanese folktales on marriage
between human and animal as follows:

In the beginning of Japanese folktales on marriage between different species, an animal visits the human world from somewhere in the wild. At times it appears in human form, and although such appearances are more like attacks to us, when we consider what happens later they can generally be described as visitations. Then it reveals its true identity in the human world. There are mainly three types of endings: evacuation, banishment, and murder.... It is clear that humans never allow the animal partner to stay forever in their world. Not only that, when they realize that the animal could be dangerous they kill it. In cases where the animal is not killed in spite of the danger it poses, humans guard themselves by putting up obstacles to prevent a further attack. This shows how Japanese were cautious against the mysterious forces from the surrounding nature. They drew solid borders between their world and the nature that surrounded them (OZAWA 1994, 245).

Ozawa understood that this type of narration shows part of the "world view of Japanese farmers" who passed on these stories. Ozawa also states the following regarding the differences in the literary consciousness toward folktales:

Another characteristic of Japanese folktales is that when the real identity of an animal spouse is discovered by the human husband, the animal wife leaves immediately.... The fact that folktales, which are orally-transmitted literature, end in such a beautiful yet sad manner reveals that the hope for such an ending remained part of the literary consciousness of the rural people who kept the tales alive. It can be said that a variety of sentimental separations satisfy the literary consciousness of Japanese people. In contrast, generally in European folktales once the husband and the wife are separated, one goes in search of the other, they end up finding each other, get married, and live happily ever after. In folktales that are categorized as literature, the reunion and happiness that occur at the end of these stories is an essential element. Therefore, Europeans feel that the Japanese folktale "Tsuru nyōbō" つる女房 [The Crane Wife] does not have an ending. Comparative research on folktales shows the differences between the literary consciousness of peoples (OZAWA 1994, 201–202).

As shown above, Ozawa's research tried to position the characteristic of Japanese folktales objectively through reading materials from an extremely open perspective. His research is valuable because it is based on solid comparative research.

Development of Research on Storytellers

After the pioneering and foundational period of folktale research by Yanagita Kunio and Seki Keigo, many books compiling folktales were published in the 1960s and general interest in folktales rose. Not many were interested, however, in the storytellers. Under those circumstances, Nomura Jun'ichi 野村純一 placed importance on storytellers in his research. In an article written in 1969, Nomura describes the situation at the time as follows:

> When Japanese folktales were almost completely categorized and organized, I looked once again through the books on folktales that had been already published. What I noticed is that most books, in fact, focused only upon the collection of stories themselves. It occurred to me that researchers had been too busy collecting and classifying them. Certainly you can find folktales in these books, but virtually nothing else. When books on folktales are compiled in this manner, there is no room to include the humans who told the stories. There is no room for unique conditions under which stories were being told. The stories were collected but were listed separate from the people and the land to which they originally belonged.... I believe that what is now needed in the field of folktale research is the inclusion of the organic connection of regional groups and recovering the humanistic element of the stories (NOMURA 1969, 3).

From this perspective, Nomura recovered through interviews the place and the time of storytelling and focused on revealing its organic relation to other folkloristic phenomena. Behind his approach was the functionalist research method that had become popular in the field of Japanese folklore studies (see UENO *et al*. 1974).

Nomura saw importance in the role that the fireplace (*irori* 囲炉裏) played as the place of storytelling and states: "There were many rules that had to be followed when telling a story around the fireplace." Nomura reveals "the old way of folktale transmission" customs, such as "lighting fire using firewood (*takigi* 焚木), passing it around to the people surrounding the fireplace first, and then starting the story after the fire dies," and "lighting a fire on a piece of paper and then telling the story when the fire dies." Nomura also points out that the characteristic of Japanese folktale transmission is that "the person who inherits the family name supervises the storytelling." He states as follows regarding the conditions of storytelling:

> Folktales are told on particular days of the year—times which mark something important in each group.... It has been recently discovered

that folktales had been preserved and transmitted during agricultural rites, such as Spring festivals celebrating the coming of the harvest and Autumn harvest festivals. So, the importance and necessity of the purpose and role of storytelling becomes clearer the further back we trace folktales (NOMURA 1978, 59–60).

As shown above, Nomura tried to recover the role of folktales in old Japanese village society, and by doing so, made a great contribution to the research on the process of folktale transmission. His academic achievements are compiled in NOMURA ed. 1983 and NOMURA 1984. On the other hand, the foundation of Japanese village society changed from the 1960s to 1970s due to rapid economic growth. Although Nomura insisted on trying to put the telling of folktales back "around the fireplace, as it was in the past," in a way he avoided reality because societal changes occur whether one likes them or not.

CHANGES IN STORYTELLING PLACES

When I look back at Nomura's research on storytellers, I feel there is a need to approach the subject from a different angle. In other words, it is necessary to develop research which accepts the reality of change in the community due to the rapid economic growth and, on the basis of that, examines the place of storytelling and the storytellers themselves. Japanese folklore researchers of the past were inclined to view the changing situation as the loss of real folktale transmission that was replaced by false transmission. They tended to gripe about the loss of research subjects and did not actively come to terms with the changes, either in a positive or negative manner. However, the situation did change. Mizusawa Ken'ichi 水沢謙一, who can be described as the pioneer in the field of research into folktale storytellers, leaves an important record regarding the situation of folktale transmission in Japanese village society after the period of rapid economic growth in the late 1950s and ealy 1960s. Mizusawa started to collect folktales from around 1952. He states as follows:

> When I decided to collect folktales in the field of folklore studies, it was already too late—the lifestyle which had supported the passing down of folktales had been changed dramatically. Apart from a small number of tiny mountain villages, the custom of nighttime storytelling had disappeared and the line of folktale transmission had been cut. Fortunately though, there were still some elderly women who remembered folktales (MIZUSAWA 1969, 126).

Under these conditions, Mizusawa focused on a small number of storytellers who remembered numerous folktales, and he started to collect their stories. In the following, Mizusawa describes how he met a storyteller named Miyaji Hiro:

> Every time I visit Grandma Hiro, she always has a memo on which she recorded numerous stories in her own way. By dipping into her treasure trove of folktales, she notes down the stories she is able to remember in pencil with an unsteady hand, even though she has not had the opportunity to tell them for a long time (MIZUSAWA 1969, 128).

Also, Mizusawa states the following regarding his relationship to a storyteller named Ikeda Chise:

> Grandma Chise used to say, "Oh, I have to study—Mr. Mizusawa is going to come and visit me," and then takes notes on the stories she remembered. When these notes accumulated, her eldest daughter gave me a call. Although Chise had not been well, after she began to record the folktales, her condition improved.... The way Chise told stories was very strict—she was not satisfied if the story was not exactly the same way she heard it. Even when she was in front of the tape recorder, she practiced once before we started recording (MIZUSAWA 1969, 129).

As shown above, the action of storytelling is shown as something that gave meaning to these elderly women in their twilight years. When trying to view folktales from the viewpoint of storytellers, it is necessary to focus on the meaning of the experience of telling stories to the collectors, rather than how the story had been told in the past. This is not a major research area in the field, so I would like to introduce some of my own work here (KAWAMORI 1996, 1999).

OBSERVING A STORYTELLER IN ACTION

The city of Tōno in Iwate prefecture has developed the image of the "home of folktales" as a result of the publication of Yanagita's *Tōno monogatari* 遠野物語 [Stories of Tōno] in 1910. The demand for folktales that corresponded with this image of Japan's spiritual home dramatically increased, particularly after Japan Railway's "Discover Japan" campaign of 1970. Suzuki Satsu 鈴木サツ (1911–1996) was a storyteller who became popular after this.

Although Suzuki had heard many folktales from her father, between the ages of twelve and sixty she totally forgot about them because of the hard

life she lived. In 1971, when she was sixty, however, she appeared on an
NHK radio program instead of her father, who had caught a cold, and told
a story. As a result she became well-known as a folktale storyteller. Later on,
she not only told folktales in Tōno to tourists, she was also invited to tell
tales at exhibitions of Iwate prefectural products at department stores, and at
educational events such as "cultural seminars for children."

Suzuki liked to tell the story of Oshira-sama[4] to tourists who visit Tōno.
The story of Oshira-sama is famous as the definitive folktale of the region in
Yanagita's *Tōno monogatari*. Although she learned most of her stories from
her father, she actually never heard the story of Oshira-sama directly from
him. However, on the occasion of the opening of the Tōno Civic Centre in
1971, Suzuki was asked to tell the story of Oshira-sama and present it as a
story representative of Tōno folktales. She asked a school principle at the
time who knew a lot about Tōno folktales to teach her the outline of the
story. Based on his outline, she launched into the story impromptu in front
of the audience.

Suzuki used to say that there were a number of stories she reconstruct-
ed in her own manner, just as she did with the story of Oshira-sama. Even
if she had heard stories from her father before, she was not always clear on
the details of some of them. Suzuki stated as follows in a verbatim record:

> Well, folktales are like that. Even if people say they remember the story,
> most of them remember only parts. If a child who is listening to you gets
> bored, you just finish it up by making some kind of ending (SUZUKI
> 1993, 318).

However, Suzuki was put in a situation where she had to tell stories from
start to finish for tourists. So she sometimes asked others about the details of
the story or consulted books to remember the story and check her memory.
Through this, she constructed the stories and made them her own. It seems
that there were some principles that Suzuki followed in her construction of
stories. Suzuki stated as follows:

> Yeah, I have many stories that I remember hearing, but am not sure
> where I heard them from, maybe from my father. In these cases I first
> consult books and then tell them…but I can't tell a story I've never
> heard with my own ears, even if I've read it in a book. That's quite
> strange, isn't it? When I tell a story over and over, like the times when
> I told the story of Oshira-sama, somehow it becomes part of me
> (SUZUKI 1993, 331).

When I spoke to Suzuki in 1994, she said "I hear my father's voice, my father speaking the tale when I am telling a story." She was required to tell folktales in various places, such as halls and department stores, not around a fireplace at home as it used to be in the old days. Suzuki was, at times, required to tell a story that went along with the content of what was written in *Tōno monagatari*. Under these circumstances, she constructed her own way of speaking, using Tōno's traditional dialect based on her father's voice, which she still heard in her mind.

Suzuki resisted the dominant images that came from the outside world by connecting herself to the root of transmission, her father's voice. By recovering her connection to something which had become the root of her life, she succeeded in actively presenting a narration that challenged the framework of tourism, which required her to present a stereotypically nostalgic image within the tales. And this was supported by Suzuki's conscious effort to reconstruct the narration by using traditional dialect based on her father's voice.

In addition, these practices became something which supported her in her final years. Suzuki described storytelling, which she started at the age of sixty, in the following way: "If I just kept on going without doing anything like this, I think I would have quickly passed away. I think I have lived up until now because of storytelling" (excerpt from author's interview with Suzuki in 1994).

I believe that what needs to be examined in the future are questions about how storytelling relates to the meaning of life in storytellers' latter years and what kind of meaning the content of stories gives to their lives.

THEMES FOR FUTURE EXAMINATION

As we have seen, folktale research in Japan had been conducted from a variety of perspectives. Due to the changes (or disappearance) in the place of storytelling after the period of rapid economic growth, the gap between two approaches—one seeking to understand the structure and meaning of folktales and the other focusing on storytellers and the place of storytelling—has grown wider, thus making it difficult to find a common ground between them. Many modern Japanese wish to reestablish a new form of storytelling in contemporary society to make up for the disappearing folktale transmission in village societies. However, it is becoming difficult to find ways to effectively make use of folktale materials and the achievements in the past folktale research in responding to this desire.

To overcome this, I believe it is necessary to reconsider the meaning of storytelling within the life of storytellers, bearing in mind the modern situation. Although I revealed a small part of my own research in the previous

section, what is needed in the future is an examination of the kinds of meanings the content of stories gives to both storytellers and the audience alike in the modern age. When this is achieved, detailed examinations of texts, such as an analysis of the structure of storytelling that uses dialects, will be required. At the same time, it will also be necessary to consider contextual problems, such as changes in the social roles of elderly people and predicting the role of folktale transmission in the future.

NOTES

* This article was translated by Tomoko Dorman.

1. Ōshū is another name for Mutsukuni 陸奥国. It is located in the northern part of mainland Japan and covers the current Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate, and Aomori prefectures, as well as a part of Akita prefecture .

2. The quoted sections are taken from Yanagita's interpretation.

3. The triad consists of an elderly man with a white beard, a beautiful woman, and an ugly child.

4. Oshira-sama is a household kami which is the origin of Kaikogami 蚕神, a kami that protects the sericulture industry in northeastern Japan.

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