

SANO KENJI 佐野賢治, TANIGUCHI MITSUGI 谷口 貢, NAKAGOME MUTSUOKO 中込睦子, and FURUIE SHINPEI 古家信平, Editors. *Gendai minzokugaku nyūmon* 現代民俗学入門 [An introduction to modern folklore]. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1996. viii + 303 pages. Figures, illustrations, references, index. Paper ¥2,575; ISBN 4-642-07482-1. (In Japanese)

Japanese folklorists lament the present situation in which they must work. Traditional village culture has all but disappeared under the onslaught of modernization, large-scale economics, rural depopulation, and pell-mell urbanization and land development. Even the most conservative rural villages surviving today are greatly changed over what they were when Yanagita Kunio wandered through rural Japan in the early decades of the twentieth century. Ultimately, the village no longer serves as a major infrastructure for production and other human activities.

Such developments ostensibly have deprived Japanese folklore studies of material at its accustomed traditional-rural focus. Consequently, researchers have turned to studying cultural change in the villages. Yet the push to modern urban life has made a large percentage of the nation's population into urban and suburban folk, subjects just as amenable to treatment by the discipline of folklore studies as rural folk. The discipline must adapt to the present conditions or perish, and the authors of *Gendai minzokugaku nyūmon* think that the discipline ought to do more to develop the determination and the tools to work in the urbs. This advocacy makes the book interesting (and challenging) to professional folklorists and useful to discussions of current social issues.

However, as the title of the book suggests, its primary thrust and its greatest triumph are pedagogic. It introduces beginning students to a well-rounded assortment of topics on the discipline itself and on the discipline's objects of study. In the process it inculcates a sound appreciation of historical context and comparative concerns (by "comparative," I mean to imply all intracultural, intercultural, and diachronic comparison).

The book is organized according to seven general topics: the objectives and concerns of Japanese folklore studies; Japanese folkways and their "settings"; folk-religious matters; interpersonal relationships; matters of life and death; modern society and folkways; and the interaction of polity and folklife. These general topics are elucidated by four well-chosen and representative articles, each written by a different author.

The authors, for the most part, are young scholars with a good grasp of modern folkloristics and who are well read in the social sciences. They are among those who would banish the cross-cultural myopia that has long dogged Japanese folklore studies, and they certainly show their ability to lead the discipline to new departures.

Select bibliographies at the ends of the articles are brief, well selected, and perfectly suitable for an introductory text. I see familiar names here, such as Yanagita Kunio, Fukuda Ajiō, Hori Ichirō, Ōbayashi Taryō, as well as others less familiar. It was a pleasant surprise to find a number of Western scholars listed, and not only the traditional greats like James Frazer, Edward B. Tylor, and Otto Rank, but also more recent writers like Robert J. Smith, Walter Ong, and Metcalf and Huntington. The Western works listed are all available in Japanese translation, with the exception of those from the chapter on émigrés, who have been studied principally by untranslated researchers in their host countries.

Back in 1985 I reviewed *Nihon minzoku gairon* 日本民俗概論, a similar book with a similar purpose, scope, structure, and size (METEVELIS 1985). It was a fine book, but not without its problems. Virtually all the problems and desiderata I reported with that volume have been dealt with successfully in the present volume, which is more theoretical, better balanced, and

better written (although it does not completely replace the former work).

The only criticism I find worthy of mention here is that *Gendai minzokugaku nyūmon* fails to show sufficiently the distinction between the pursuits of sociology and those of folklore studies, something one might expect in an introductory book of this nature. But my overall impression is that it is well thought out, to the point, accurate, straightforward, very well-written, up to date, incredibly well-balanced, and informative. For years I wondered if there were a general introduction to Japanese folklore studies that might be worthy of translation into English. Now at last I have found one.

REFERENCE CITED

METEVELIS, P

1985 Review of Fukuda Ajiō and Miyata Noboru, eds., *Nihon minzokugaku gairon* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1983). *Asian Folklore Studies* 44: 124–26.

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CHINA

BØRDAHL, VIBEKE. *The Oral Tradition of Yangzhou Storytelling*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 73. Richmond, Surrey TW9 2QA: Curzon Press Ltd., 1996. xxxii + 497 pages. Illustrations, tables, storytellers' terms, recordings of the project, bibliography, index. Cloth £60.00; ISBN 0-7007-0436-1.

The Oral Tradition of Yangzhou Storytelling is the most in-depth work on traditional oral narrative in the Yangzi delta published in English to date. The object of Børdahl's study is *Yangzhou pinghua* 揚州評話, a style of storytelling traditionally performed north of the Yangzi River in the Yangzhou dialect area in story houses and the homes of wealthy patrons. The art consists of a complex weave of narration, dialogue, and gestures, and is performed by a single storyteller. Among the most famous stories in the repertoire are renditions of classic romances in the written tradition such as *Shuihu* 水滸 [Outlaws of the marshes], *San guo yanyi* 三國演義 [The three kingdoms], and *Xiyōu jī* 西遊記 [Journey to the west]. *Yangzhou pinghua* 揚州評話 is related to a number of other narrative traditions in China, particularly the art of *Suzhou pinghua* performed in the Wu dialect regions south of the Yangzi river and certain chantefable (*tanci* 彈詞/*xianci* 弦詞, or "storsinging") traditions within the delta region.

Trained as a linguist, Børdahl makes use of a wealth of written sources in Chinese, personal interviews with local researchers and storytellers in Yangzhou, and field tapes recorded in the late 1980s and mid-1990s. Part 1 of her work includes discussions of problems that have been much debated by scholars of Chinese vernacular literature over the last few decades, particularly those involving the relation between professional oral storytelling and written works that imitate certain conventions of oral style. Børdahl notes that the relation between the written and oral in Chinese professional storytelling is not simple and lends support to the idea that the two modes of communication have had a complex history of mutual influence over the centuries. They are similar in the "common framework of plot and development" (242), though oral versions of written works tend to differ greatly in detail from written correlates, thus making Børdahl "suspicious of the closeness of the connection" between the modes.