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**Fifteen Years of Folk Song
Collection in Japan:
Reports and Recordings of the
“Emergency Folk Song Survey”**

Abstract

Over the last fifteen years a major effort to collect and preserve Japanese folk songs (*min'yō*) has been made by the Japanese Ministry of Culture in conjunction with regional boards of education. This “emergency survey” includes tapes of some 50,000 songs performed by individuals throughout the land. In addition, several dozen fieldwork reports—one for each prefecture—have been published. As the project nears completion, it is becoming possible to judge its strengths and weaknesses, to take stock of what has been accomplished and what remains to be done. This review article evaluates the project as a whole and outlines the main features of the fieldwork reports. Special emphasis is placed on the methodological problems underlying the classification of Japanese folk songs.

Key words: Japan — folk song — *min'yō* — *min'yō kinkyū chōsa*

INTRODUCTION

SOME fifteen years have passed since the first volumes of the “Emergency Folk Song Survey” (*min'yō kinkyū chōsa* 民謡緊急調査) appeared. This survey, perhaps the most significant project of Japanese folk song collection ever undertaken, was planned by the Ministry of Culture in the late 1970s and funded (inadequately to be sure) by both the prefectural and national levels of government. A huge number of Japanese able to sing “folk songs” (*min'yō*) were mobilized in the hopes of capturing on tape this “intangible cultural property” (*mukei bunkazai* 無形文化材) before it too fell victim to Westernization and modernization. Unprecedented in its scope and aims, the project has to date (1993) produced some three dozen reports (*hōkoku-sho* 報告書), based on perhaps 50,000 songs and variants.¹ Much still remains to be done, but it is now possible to begin to turn back and take stock of what has been achieved. Below, I shall first introduce the published materials resulting from the survey and then discuss briefly the methods and materials used.

Each survey report is some 300–500 pages in length; one volume is devoted to each prefecture or major urban area. With few exceptions (noted below), the titles of these reports follow the pattern *X ken no min'yō: min'yō kinkyū chōsa hōkoku-sho* (X 県の民謡——民謡緊急調査報告書), where X stands for the name of the prefecture. Each book is published locally (the exact city is usually not given) by the prefectural or municipal board of education (*kyōiku iinkai* 教育委員会). The following survey reports have already appeared, and several more are underway (dates of publication are given in parentheses):

Aichi (1979–80)

Akita (1988)

Aomori (1988)

Chiba (*Chiba ken min'yō kinkyū chōsa hōkoku-sho* 千葉県民謡緊急調査報告書) (1981)

Ehime (1979–80)
 Gifu (1983)
 Hyōgo (1981)
 Ibaraki (*Ibaraki no min'yō* 茨城の民謡) (1987)
 Ishikawa (1981)
 Iwate (1985)
 Kagawa (1981)
 Kagoshima (1984)
 Kanagawa (1981)
 Kumamoto (1988)
 Kyōto (*Kyōto-fu no min'yō* 京都府の民謡) (1983)
 Miyagi (1985)
 Miyazaki (1981)
 Nagano (1984)
 Nagasaki (1988)
 Niigata (1986)
 Ōita (1985)
 Okinawa (*Okinawa no min'yō* 沖縄の民謡) (1983)
 Saitama (*Saitama no min'yō* 埼玉の民謡) (1981)
 Shiga (1986)
 Shimane (1986)
 Shizuoka (1986)
 Tochigi (1983)
 Tōkyō, outlying islands (*Tōkyō no min'yō: tōsho-hen* 東京都の民謡
 島嶼編) (1983)
 Tottori (1988)
 Toyama (1985)
 Wakayama (*Wakayama no min'yō* 和歌山の民謡) (1983)
 Yamagata (1983)
 Yamaguchi (1982)
 Yamanashi (1983)

Until the Emergency Survey the only modern, thorough survey of Japanese *min'yō* was the thirteen-volume *Nihon min'yō taikan*, edited largely by Machida Kashō 町田嘉章 (NHK 1944–89). In its completeness, its depth of research, and its generosity with (admittedly not always entirely accurate) musical examples, the *taikan* has hitherto stood unrivaled. In addition, the most recent reprint of the *taikan* includes CDs of the fieldwork material, allowing the reader to hear what is being transcribed.

Like the editors of the recent *taikan* reprint, the planners of the Emergency Survey appear to have understood that, whether the ob-

ject of sheer pleasure or serious research, *min'yō* need to be heard, not just read as song texts or musical scores. Thus the Emergency Survey placed much emphasis on (eventually!) making fieldwork recordings available, albeit in edited form. Sound recordings were to be entrusted to the boards of education of each area, for eventual donation to a major public library or similar facility. A copy of tapes was also to be deposited at the Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties (*Tōkyō kokuritsu bunkazai kenkyū-jo* 東京国立文化財研究所). Thus, ideally, anyone who wished to listen to material from their local area would one day be able to do so, either at a nearby library, or at the central Tokyo location.

THE SURVEY REPORTS: CONTENTS AND METHODS

Except for a few early volumes (e.g., Hyōgo, Miyazaki), each survey report is divided into roughly three major sections.

I. Introductory section

This section, generally some 30–40 pages in length, is subdivided into a number of chapters devoted to the general nature of the survey, the characteristics of the area studied, and the results of fieldwork.

The first chapter usually describes the fieldwork itself, listing in detail when and where collection took place. Maps indicating administrative divisions (metropolitan areas, counties, etc.) of the area surveyed are usually provided. Such administrative divisions in turn often serve as chapter headings for the *min'yō* text transcriptions in the body of the book. The maps placed at the outset are thus of cardinal importance for anyone unfamiliar with the tangled and historically changing geographical divisions and subdivisions of each prefecture. But here the reader will find what is perhaps the greatest hurdle in using the reports: the stubborn insistence on geographical organization, and the failure to provide adequate indices for cross-referencing. Organizing a *min'yō* survey along the lines of administrative boundaries may well have been politically expedient, but cultural and stylistic boundaries, which often have little or nothing to do with such governmental divisions of territory, have thereby been blurred or simply eliminated. To make matters worse, Japanese geographical designations are often read in the most irregular, not to say bizarre, fashion, turning the use of these volumes into an exercise in frustration for anyone not already thoroughly familiar with local nomenclature.

The opening chapter of each report usually provides a sample of the data sheet used in the collection process. As a general rule, collectors recorded the name, age, qualifications, and place of origin

of performer(s); the name, type, function, of the song(s) collected; the type and number of accompanying instrument(s); a description of relevant body movements or dance; the date and place of recording; the name(s) of fieldworker(s); and a transcription of the song text, usually as given by the performer(s).

Nearly all volumes present an explanation of the system used to classify the type of songs collected. This system almost invariably appears as follows. (Each category in lower case letters is further subdivided into specific local types of songs, e.g., "tea-picking songs," "New Year's songs," "*Daikoku* 大黒 dance songs," etc. The presence of an asterisk indicates that the category is missing in some prefectures.)

- A. Work songs
 - a. Songs related to farming
 - b. Songs related to lumbering in the mountains
 - c. Songs related to fishing
 - d. Songs related to other types of work
 - *e. Songs related to transportation
- B. Festival songs, songs of celebration, *spells
 - a. Songs related to festivals (*matsuri* 祭)
 - b. Songs related to celebrations (*shūgi* 祝儀)
 - c. Songs related to events (*gyōji* 行事)
 - *d. Songs related to spells (*majinai* 呪い)
- C. Dance songs
 - a. Dance songs
- D. Songs of amusement (*zakyō uta* 座興歌)
 - *a. Drinking songs
 - *b. Songs of celebration
 - *c. Boisterous songs (*sawagi uta* 騒ぎ歌)
- E. Narrative songs, good luck songs (*shukufuku-gei no uta* 祝福芸の歌)
 - a. Narrative songs
 - b. Songs associated with performing arts that bring good luck
- F. Baby-sitter songs (*komori uta* 子守歌)
 - *a. Songs for putting a child to sleep
 - *b. Play songs
 - *c. [Other] Baby-sitter songs
- G. Children's songs
 - a. Game songs
 - b. Recited songs (*tonaegoto* 唱え事)
 - *c. Songs concerning weather or nature
 - *d. Songs concerning animals and plants

*e. Songs concerning festivities

The above system, which tends to reflect twentieth-century Japanese “common sense” conceptions of song types, finds its most obvious theoretical precursor in the classification system published in 1906 in the journal *Teikoku bungaku* 帝国文学 by the literary scholar Shida Yoshihide 志田義秀 (See ASANO 1966, 46–51).² Shida’s typology has often been criticized for its overlapping categories and vagueness, its disregard for musical and historical factors, and its evasion of the issue of what a *min’yō* is in the first place.

The survey reports are plagued by many of the same problems. For example, some volumes claim to avoid songs written by “professional composers,” but some so-called *shin-min’yō* (新民謡 new *min’yō*) have nevertheless found their way into the pages (and tapes) of the surveys. In addition, the collections contain many songs that Western researchers would prefer to label “popular songs” (Japanese researchers would say “*ryūkōka*” 流行歌): songs originating from urban areas, songs disseminated largely by printed media, or songs fashionable for only a short period of time. Some may wish to see the lack of definitional precision as a sign of sloppy research methods. Yet the effect of this lack is on the whole positive, for the sample collected is endowed with a breadth that represents more accurately the types of songs traditionally sung throughout Japan than would a purist approach in which only “authentic” *min’yō*, however defined, were included.

The first section of each volume concludes with what is often a substantial introduction to the geographical and historical background of the area, its cultural characteristics, the actual *min’yō* present, and the history of local song collecting. Here one can sometimes also find a useful bibliography (in most cases placed at the end of the volume). Some of the reports present discussions of song distribution within each prefecture, and paths of song transmission. Least useful, though apparently presented with the most pride, are the repeated appeals to *fūdo* 風土—invariably misguided attempts to explain cultural factors by climate and geography—and sketches of the “spirit” of the natives of each prefecture.

II. Song texts

The body of each book is devoted to transcriptions and categorization of song texts. As noted earlier, this section is organized geographically, according to administrative region, usually by district, county, city, and village. Some volumes preface each subdivision with maps and a general explanation of the history and topography of the area.

Methods concerning song text transcription vary significantly. Some volumes include almost all texts collected (e.g., Akita), while others limit themselves to only a small percentage (e.g., Niigata, in which no less than 3686 songs and variants were collected). Here too, criteria for inclusion or exclusion are not stated, but repetitions of the same text are often avoided. In some cases only one verse or the opening lines of a song are given (e.g., Saitama). Though transcriptions are generally accurate, and of great value to anyone not conversant in local dialects, some problems may arise "behind the scenes": texts given are often versions notated on the fieldwork data sheets by the performer, but a comparison of the performer's transcription with the taped rendition may show that something quite different was actually sung. Alternatively, singers occasionally notated a large number of texts potentially sung to a given tune, but then chose to sing only one or two verses. Thus the published reports and the tapes may be quite at odds, puzzling anyone who does not have access to the original fieldwork material.

Each transcription of a song text is preceded by at least the following data:

1. Song name
2. Song type (according to the classifications presented above)
3. Exact location where the song is transmitted
4. Name and age of performer(s)

Some volumes greatly expand this scheme, adding such details as the origin of the performer(s); the condition of transmission; an explanation of the meaning of the song texts; the function and history of the song; the song's musical characteristics (scale, rhythm, tempo, etc.); musical instruments used in the accompaniment; the presence or absence of dance or other body movement, and a description of these when present; the poetic meter of song text; and the catalogue number of the tape. Photographs of accompanying dances, activities, and rituals are also occasionally presented.

Although the amount and relevancy of information provided varies greatly, all volumes share an extremely lopsided emphasis on song text and function, at the expense of musical characteristics. Dance movements are also inadequately described or passed over in silence. In their treatment of musical characteristics, the volumes dedicated to Kanagawa and Aomori prefectures stand head and shoulders above the rest (a limited number of musical examples can also be found in the volumes devoted to Miyazaki, Okinawa, Kagawa, and

Gifu). In the Aomori volume one finds copious and generally accurate musical examples (especially of scale types), comparative scores showing relations between songs, rhythmic patterns used in drum accompaniments, and other relevant musical elements. That this was not possible in other volumes must count as one of the greatest failures of the series as a whole. Perhaps editors from most prefectures simply assumed that the eventual availability of the recorded performances would render a discussion of the musical aspects of the songs superfluous. But even if this ignorant and anti-musical attitude were justified, it would still remain highly impractical. Since no sound recordings accompany the reports, anyone wishing to know about the musical characteristics of songs outside their local area must either travel to Tokyo or to other prefectures in the hopes of hearing the (so far largely unavailable) tapes.

III. *Appendices and indices*

Appendices and indices provided at the end of most volumes are an indispensable addition for the researcher. These listings usually indicate the name of each song, the name (and sometimes age) of the performer(s), the site where the song was collected, the song type, whether or not the text is transcribed in the book (but unfortunately not on which page), and in some cases the number of the tape on which the performance can be found.

Here again the insistence on geographical organization makes many indices useful only to those who are already intimately familiar with the area. Only two volumes (Aomori, Miyagi) index song titles for all songs recorded; a few others (e.g., Akita) include an index of song titles and song text incipits for those songs whose text appears in the body of the book, but not for all songs recorded on tapes. Most volumes, however, have only geographical indices. Thus anyone wishing to know, for example, whether any so-called *yomiuri* 読売 songs (i.e., songs of newspaper or broadsheet vendors) are found in Niigata Prefecture, must comb through 95 pages of double-column lists, to find (luckily!) that such a song did indeed exist (song number 92 of Nagaoka City, p. 306)—but that its text is not given in the volume. Had the text been reproduced, the reader would still have had to hunt through the section devoted to Nagaoka City in the body of the text, since no page number of texts is given in the index. And locating the section on Nagaoka in the body of the text is itself more time-consuming than it need be, for the entire volume is once again organized geographically (divided into no less than 112 sections). One senses here a kind of jealous sectionalism in which each specific locality wishes to protect

its individuality, each area convinced that it alone possesses an "authentic" version of a song. Most *min'yō* are, however, by no means limited to one small area, nor, pace the *fūdo* theorists, are the peculiarities of a specific performance reducible to unique local factors. Instead, today, as in the past, the vast majority of *min'yō* exist in a myriad of variants scattered throughout the country, and differences between individual performers from the same area may be greater than those between performers living at great distances from one another.

Yet another major shortcoming of the indices is the lack of information regarding the location of songs on the tapes. Admittedly, the tapes of most areas have still not been made available to the public, and in fact, many tapes have not yet even been sent from the prefectures to the central Tokyo location; those that have been sent still await organization. Nevertheless, when the recorded materials are finally made public, the user will find that although the accompanying volumes usually list all songs collected, the tape number is either missing or given in inadequate form (tape numbers are almost never present in the body of the text, requiring continual reference to the index).

SOUND RECORDINGS

As mentioned above, field recordings (originally reel-to-reel tapes, edited versions of which have been transferred to cassettes) are today generally in the possession of prefectural or municipal boards of education, and a few have found their way to major prefectural libraries. Unfortunately, most Japanese libraries are ill-equipped to handle such material, and requests to hear or copy a song are likely to be met with silence or, at best, great reluctance (copyright problems remain a substantial hurdle to free access to tapes). Almost fifteen years after the inception of the survey, tapes are in most cases still collecting dust in the basements of prefectural government buildings, or even in the private homes of lazy or forgetful fieldworkers. The stipulation that tapes submitted to Tokyo be in a reel-to-reel format has caused an unforeseen additional problem, since such machines have today become something of a rarity outside the professional recording studio; consequently, the machines used to make copies of fieldwork tapes were often near-antiques, with an intolerably high level of hum and distortion. Thus, even after fieldwork recordings have been catalogued, many tapes will remain of limited use to the researcher.

CONCLUSION

Although the Emergency Survey still harbors great potential for future research, the *Nihon min'yō taikan*, especially in its new format

with CDs included, has by no means outlived its usefulness. In the Emergency Survey one misses the synthetic, global overview and intelligence of a Machida, in favor of a tremendous amount of piecemeal information. The Emergency Survey provides much data, but in one case (the Ryūkyū Islands), the recently completed *taikan* volumes contain a still greater variety, quality, and grasp of fieldwork material, complemented with scrupulously detailed musical transcriptions and analyses. Whether the Emergency Survey can ultimately be labeled a success or failure depends on whether the recorded performances, in conjunction with the survey reports, can be made easily available to those who wish to use them (and not at the highway-robbery prices of the *taikan* reprint). One would hope that eventually even the fieldwork reports in their raw form could be made public (perhaps in microfilm format), since they include much material not given in the survey reports or on the tapes. Unedited fieldwork tapes should also be made available, although bureaucratic inflexibility as well as the huge quantity of material collected makes this highly unlikely. In addition, despite the copyright problem, provisions should be made for those who wish to make copies of these tapes for research purposes. Listening to songs to be reminded of the "home village" is an understandable need for some; but without the appropriate facilities for copying recorded performances, research on *min'yō* will benefit little from this ambitious and in many ways quite remarkable undertaking.

NOTES

1. One of the major shortcomings of the published survey reports has nothing to do with their content, but lies in their inaccessibility. Publication has been restricted to a small limited edition, with no provision made for anyone who would like to purchase a volume. As a result, individuals and smaller libraries cannot obtain copies; reports that miraculously find their way onto the used-book market are sold at outrageously inflated prices. Only a handful of percipient editors had extra copies printed (at their own expense), allowing someone with the right connections and sufficient luck to obtain a volume.

2. Influential alternatives have been offered by folklorist Yanagita Kunio (YANAGITA 1969) and the musicologist Machida Kashō (See HUGHES 1985: 22-24).

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