Folktale Telling and Storytellers in Japan

By

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I. Background Information on Japanese Folklore Studies.

Material on Japanese folklore in languages available to the Western reader is relatively scarce. While collections of Japanese folktales have appeared in Western languages almost since the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, there has not been extensive discussion in Western languages of either the material or the science of Japanese folklore. Before beginning a consideration of the state of one particular facet of Japanese folklore, that of the folktale, I should like to introduce the material available in Western languages on Japanese folklore and Japanese folklore studies.

Surveys dealing with the development of Japanese folklore studies have appeared in three previous issues of this journal. The first of these was an article written by Oto Tokihiko[1] with the advice and assistance, and under the name of the founder of Japanese folklore studies, Yanagita Kunio.[2] The article dealt with the origin and development of the study of folklore in Japan up to about 1942. It was translated from the original Japanese by Matthias Eder and appeared in this journal in German.

In the second article, written four years after the end of the Second World War, Naoe Hiroji described the state of post-

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1 The names of all Japanese appearing in this paper are given in the Japanese order, with surname first, followed by the given name.

2 Yanagita Kunio, "Die Japanische Volkskunde. Ihre Vorgeschichte, Entwicklung und gegenwärtige Lage," *FS*, III, No. 2 (1944), 1-76.

war Japanese folklore studies.[3] He surveyed the postwar publications of major folklore scholars and emphasized the role being played by the newly founded (1947) Minzokugaku Kenkyusho (Institute of Japanese Folklore).

By the time the third article[4] appeared in 1959, the Institute of Japanese Folklore had, for a number of reasons, ceased to function. But the author of the article, Matthias Eder, found abundant evidence of folkloristic activity in the recent publication of the thirteen volume *Nihon Minzokugaku Taikei.*[5] Eder's review of a number of the volumes of this ambitious encyclopaedic endeavor makes up the major part of the article.

In publications appearing in the United States, we find two descriptive accounts of Japanese folklore studies written by Richard M. Dorson. Dorson spent the academic year 1956-57 as a Fulbright professor in Japan. It was on the basis of this experience that he wrote a chapter in *Folklore Research around the World,* reviewing Japanese folklore activity up to and during his sojourn in Japan.[6] A subsequent and considerably more detailed account of folklore activity in Japan was written by Dorson as the introductory chapter to *Studies in Japanese Folklore.*[7] Here Dorson discussed the material on Japanese folklore available in Western languages. He gave emphasis to the three articles in *Folklore Studies* mentioned above, and mentioned numerous reviews in the same journal of articles which had appeared in various Japanese folklore publications.

Aside from two extensive bibliographies, one in English,[8]

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3 Naoe Hiroji, "Post-war Folklore Research Work in Japan, *FS,* VIII (1949), 277-84.

4 Matthias Eder, "Japanese Folklore Science Today," *FS,* XVIII (1959), 289-318.

5 Omachi, Oka, Sakurada, Seki, and Mogami, eds., *Nihon Minzokugaku Taikei* [Encyclopaedia of Japanese Folklore Science], 13 vols. Tokyo, 1958-60.

6 Richard M. Dorson, "Folklore Research in Japan," *JAF,* LXXIV (1961), 115-26. This volume of *JAF* also appeared as *Folklore Research around the World: A North American Point of View,* Ind. Univ. Folklore Series, No. 16, Bloomington, 1961.

7 Richard M. Dorson, "Bridges between Japanese and American Folklorists," in *Studies in Japanese Folklore,* ed. Richard M. Dorson, et al., Ind. Univ. Folklore Series, No. 17, Bloomington, 1961, pp. 3-49.

8 *K.B.S. Bibliography of Standard Reference Books for Japanese Studies with Descriptive Notes.* VIII, *Manners and Customs, & Folklore.* Tokyo, 1961.

and one in French,[9] the five articles described above are the major sources of information on the state of Japanese folklore studies for the Westerner who does not read Japanese. While they give an excellent overall view of the field of Japanese folklore, they could not be expected, in the course of a general survey, to cover any particular field of Japanese folklore science in great detail.

Japanese folklore science follows the pattern of European folklore in that all areas of traditional folklife are included. The characters used in the Japanese term *minzoku* are a compound of the character *min* 民 [folk, people] and *zoku* 俗 [custom, manner]. Thus all that might be included in the rubric of folk custom is studied by Japanese folklorists. The study of oral tradition, while a major contender for consideration, shares attention with folk religion, costume, arts, crafts, and all other facets of folklife.

Yanagita Kunio first approached Japanese folklore through the gateway of oral tradition, particularily that of the folktale. It was this early impetus toward the study of the folktale that has caused this field to continue to receive considerable attention, and has contributed to the continuing collection of folktales by interested individuals and societies throughout the country.

Prof. Seki Keigo, one of Yanagita's most active disciples, has done most of the theoretical work on the folktale in Japan. His comprehensive six volume type index of Japanese tales[10] is one of the most valuable tools available to students of the Japanese folktale. An English translation of the abridged index, which appeared in the final volume of the *Shusei*[11] was published in Volume XXV of this journal.[12] Prof. Seki has generously given me a great deal of valuable advice during the course of my research in Japan, and has greatly assisted me in developing contacts with Japanese folklorists.

In Japanese universities folklore science itself has not reached the status of an independent academic discipline. While cultural and social anthropology enjoy academic distinction in

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9 Rene Sieffert, "Etudes d'ethnographie Japonaise," *Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise* (Tokyo), Nouvelle Série, II (1952), 9-110

10 Seki Keigo, *Nihon Mukashi-banashi Shusei* [A Classification and Catalogue of Japanese Folktales] 6 vols. Tokyo, 1950-58.

11 *ibid.*, VI, 823-927.

12 Seki Keigo, "Types of Japanese Folktales," *AFS*, XXV (1966), 1-220.

a number of Japanese universities, folklorists are found to be teaching in various fields related to folklore. Departments of anthropology, sociology, literature, religion, and agriculture all harbor individuals deeply interested in the folk tradition related to their field of interest. These individuals usually belong to one or more local or national folklore societies.

There is an unexpectedly large number of such folklore societies in Japan. I am presently carrying out a research project on Japanese folklore involving the well-known Asian tale of the Monkey-Crab Quarrel (Saru-Kani Kassen).[13] In this connection I have contacted all of the active or recently active folklore societies in Japan about which I have been able to obtain information. I have found a total of seventy-eight local and national societies in Japan which are primarily concerned with folklore. The great majority of these organizations are active, functioning societies which hold regular meetings and publish either regular journals or occasional reports. A few of the organizations no longer hold regular meetings or publish, but their corresponding representatives have maintained contact with the former membership to the extent that individuals interested in research can be easily located.

Included in the membership of these societies are individuals interested in one or another of the various areas of folklore. In a preliminary survey of twenty-one folklore societies, conducted in 1963, I found that an average of five percent of the membership of any one society was expressly interested in the folktale. Correspondents reported a total of 137 society members who had done folktale collecting in the field.

The most active folktale collector in Japan is Mizusawa Kenichi, a member of the Niigata Folklore Society. Mizusawa has published eleven volumes of tales collected in the Niigata area. A number of his publications have been reviewed by

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13 Related to Types 130, The Animals in Night Quarters, and 210, Cock, Hen, Duck, Pin, and Needle on a Journey. The latter part of the tale includes Motif K1161, "Animals hidden in various parts of a house attack owner with their characteristic powers and kill him when he enters." The first part of the tale, in which a stronger animal tricks a weaker one out of his fair share of food, usually by climbing a fruit tree and eating the fruit, then throwing green fruit or hulls at the weaker animal, has been indexed in neither the Type Index nor the Motif Index. The tale is related to Types 51-56 in Seki's "Types of Japanese Folktales," noted above.

Fanny Hagin Mayer in the pages of this journal. Mizusawa has written numerous articles in various journals and has appeared with many of his informants on both local and national radio and television.

While Mizusawa is an outstanding example of the individual collector, co-operative collecting, especially by high school and university student folklore societies, has recently produced some excellent collections of tales. Of particular interest are publications of the Kokugakuin University Folk Literature Research Society. For the past four years an annual number of *Densho Bungei* [Traditional Literature] has been published by the society. Each number runs to about 125 pages and contains the tales collected by student members of the society in a selected region of Japan. The fifth number in the series is due to appear in the spring of this year. Professors Usuda Jingoro and Nomura Junichi direct the collecting work of this society.

Encouraged by the active interest in Japan in the folktale, I made plans for a year of research on the present day use of the folktale in Japan as well as the distribution of the Monkey-Crab tale. Awarded research funds by a National Defense Education Act related Fulbright-Hays grant, I began field research in September, 1966, with a ten day trip to Kcchi prefecture. The months of October and November were spent in Nagasaki, Kagoshima, Miyazaki and Kumamoto prefectures. Three weeks in January 1967 were devoted to research in a number of areas in Niigata prefecture. The remainder of the winter months will be spent in the Tohoku area, the northeastern part of the main island of Honshu. The spring and summer months will see research in the western part of Honshu and contiguous areas.

During my extensive research trip to Kyushu I was expertly guided by several members of the Kagoshima Folklore Society, notably Araki Hiroyuki, Yamashita Kenichi, Ebara Yoshimori, Murata Hiroshi, Shimono Toshimi, and Kibara Saburo. Mr. Shimono, in particular, has done extensive collecting on both Tanegashima and Yakushima, two islands off the southern coast of Kagoshima prefecture. In Miyazaki prefecture, Prof. Tanaka Kumao gave me the benefit of his wide acquaintance with informants and officials in a number of areas of the prefecture. Prof. Maruyama Manubu directed the students of the Kumamoto Commercial College Folklore Society in guiding me to numerous productive areas for folktale research in Kumamoto prefecture. In Kochi prefecture, Prof. Ninomiya Tetsuo and

Katsurai Kazuo of the Tosa Folklore Society were instrumental in the success of my first field trip. Mizusawa Kenichi, mentioned above, devoted three days to guiding me to his best informants in the Nagaoka area of Niigata prefecture. He generously gave me the benefit of his extensive experience in folktale collecting in the Japanese countryside. The president of the Niigata Folklore Society, Prof. Yamaguchi Kenshun of the Agriculture Department, Niigata University, was kind enough to furnish me with introductions to many persons in several areas of the prefecture, and thus contributed a great deal to the success of the research trip to that area.

II. The Folk and Folktales

The folkloristic activity reported on in the publications mentioned earlier in this article, and being continued by the individuals and societies listed above, has made it possible for me to embark on my present research program. In the first part of this article I discussed material relating to how the Japanese folklorist has studied his material. In the remainder of this report I will attempt to present some preliminary firsthand observations on the present day use of folktales by the folk themselves.

While my research is far from being completed, I have contacted a large enough number of informants, and have been given enough information by them to be able to formulate some general conclusions on the use of folktales in past and present Japanese culture. I shall continue to test these conclusions during the remainder of the research period, and when the research is completed, I hope to present them in the form of definite rules of folktale behavior, with references to parallel studies by folklorists in Europe and America.

Taking advantage of the generous introductions to informants by the many folklore society members who are interested in the folktale, or who have done research in various areas of their own prefectures and are acquainted with knowledgable informants, I have been able to contact approximately 130 storytellers in five months of research. From these informants I have recorded over one hundred hours of tales, and information on the usage of folktales. The tales recorded include not only the Monkey-Crab tale, of which I

have collected some 150 variants, but also many other tales of various types. Anecdotes, legends, märchen, and fabulate have all been recorded.

While the tradition of telling folktales is fast dying out, the tales themselves are still alive in Japan, and will continue to live for a number of decades. The criers of doom in the folklore world may have some basis for their melancholy observations on the moribund state of the folktale in Europe and America, although one suspects that most such predictions are made from the safety of the armchair without the benefit of field research, but such a gloomy outlook is definitely premature when applied to Japan.

Until about twenty or thirty years ago, the tradition of telling folktales was still very much alive in Japan. Following the end of the Second World War, social conditions changed rapidly and the tradition of folktale telling began a steep decline. However, the bearers of the tale, the raconteurs themselves, are still to be found in relatively great abundance. It may be too late to easily observe the storytelling session in the same form in which it existed prior to the Second World War, but the storyteller is still alive. With some ingenuity and a certain amount of luck, the proper conditions can either be found or recreated and the raconteur, assured of eager ears for his art, will perform with the skill and ease which are his heritage. Admittedly, such storytelling sessions are rare. But, nevertheless, the storytellers themselves, and their tales, are still there.

What has been the cause of this relatively abundant preservation of folktales in Japan? What is causing the rapid disappearance of the tradition of storytelling? Finally, what are the characteristics of the Japanese storyteller, that in exceptional cases, a single informant should remember a stock of stories numbering up to 140 tales.[14] These questions will be taken up one by one in the remainder of this report.

A. Cultural Conditions in Japan Favoring the Preservation of Tales.

All the informants alive today were born after the introduction of Western influence and thus are able to give only second-

14 Mizusawa Kenichi, *Obaba no Mukashi-banashi* [An Old Woman's Tales]. Sanjo, 1966. In this collection Mizusawa records 140 tales from seventy-five year old Ikeda Chise.

hand information on the use of folktales before the spread of Western cultural forces began to be felt. However, the elderly persons from whom they heard their tales were completely uncontaminated by Western ideas, so that it is still possible to discover, from informants of seventy to ninety years of age, the use to which their grandparents, born some 150 years ago, put the tales. Conditions in Japan favoring the preservation of storytelling include both local and national situations. On a nationwide scale, Japan, until slightly over one hundred years ago, was cut off from outside influence as a matter of policy by the Tokugawa shogunate. This "closed country" policy was in effect for nearly 250 years. It successfully prevented the influence of the Western industrial revolution on Japanese life, so that until the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese economy was based almost completely on agriculture. A rising merchant class was beginning to make its influence felt even before the massive entrance of Western industrial techniques, but rice was still the mainstay of the economy up to, and for some time after, the Meiji Restoration. Thus the rice producer, the agricultural family unit, made up the basic structure of the society. Due to a limited supply of land suited to agriculture, the available acreage was intensively cultivated. The size of the family was purposely limited in order to avoid dividing the family holdings among a large number of children. The nuclear family, along with paternal grandparents, made up a tightly knit unit which was engaged in the production of rice for tax purposes, and in other grains for home consumption. Little cash was used by the farm family. The majority of the necessities of daily life were manufactured in the home. What could not be produced in the home was obtained through barter, using homemade goods manufactured for that purpose.

The Japanese climate, with a relatively cold winter during which little agricultural work can be engaged in, favored the employment of the winter season for the home manufacture of daily necessities. The weaving of straw and bamboo articles, the spinning of thread, weaving of cloth, and sewing of clothes was all done during the cold winter months. These sedentary occupations, generally carried on around the open fireplace, created an ideal situation for the use of folktales to relieve the boredom of repetitive handwork.

Dependent upon its own resources for entertainment, the family turned to its elderly members for stories to while away

the long winter evenings. The grandfather, born in the house in which he then lived all his life, was required to recall the tales he had heard as a child from his own grandparents, who in turn had spent all their lives in the same house. The grandmother, born and raised in another part of the village, or in a neighboring village, brought with her a supply of tales somewhat different from that of the male members of the household. It was the mingling of these two sources of tradition which helped to create the extraordinarily large stock of tales found in Japanese tradition. Added to the tales recalled by grandparents were those told by traveling merchants and craftsmen. The medicine peddlers from Toyama prefecture, the tinkers and the bamboo weavers, all were welcomed into rural homes. Dependent on a warm reception for a successful business venture, the traveling merchants became skilled in the relating of tales picked up in their travels. The larger their stock of tales, the greater their welcome in the village. Present day informants recall the anticipation with which they awaited the annual visits of the various peddlers.

Occasions calling for the telling of tales, aside from the usual winter evenings, included many of the annual agricultural festivals. The annual, and in some areas, monthly, moon festival, was often the scene of extended taletelling sessions. This moon festival, *Nijusanya* [night of the 23rd] of August, was one of the most popular occasions, in some areas, for the relating of tales. Informants on the island of Oshima in the Amami Oshima islands recall sitting up until two or three o'clock in the morning, waiting for the moon to rise, all the while listening to one tale after another told by the old people of the village. In other areas this festival was held on the 15th, or the 28th of the month.

New Year's Eve, customarily spent in various activities while awaiting the arrival of the New Year, was in some households the occasion of storytelling to occupy the hours of waiting. Other informants recall that folktales began to be told only after the arrival of the New Year, with much of the first few days of the year devoted to leisurely feasting, visiting, and recounting of old stories.

We can see that before the introduction of Western influence, folktales were used as much for the entertainment of adults as they were for children. All the members of the family listened to the tales as they were told around the *irori,* the open fireplace. Male members of the family, engaged in such communal occupa-

tions as charcoal burning, and firewood gathering, used the tales for the same entertainment purpose in the mountain huts in which they often spent several consecutive nights. There the tales were told with a gusto still recalled by some male informants.

Some informants report that the tales were often used for didactic purposes; and that the moral of the tale was always expressly pointed out. Other informants state that their elders never drew a moral lesson from the tales. Approximately half of the storytellers report that some tales were used to teach a lesson but that others were purely for fun. The use of tales as a didactic device seems to have been a highly individual matter, rather than a pervasive cultural phenomenon. When my research is completed, I hope to give conccrete figures on the percentage of informants reporting didactic use of the tales.

B. Cultural Conditions Tending Toward the Disappearance of Taletelling.

With the introduction of Western influence, the taletelling situation gradually began to change. For the first few decades, however, the taletelling milieu was apparently able to change to fit new conditions, and the tales themselves continued to be told with much the same frequency as before. In fact, a new reason for tale telling began to appear. A rapid increase in family size, allowed for by the possibility of employment in the new industries being developed in the cities, created a larger audience for the tales. Grandparents were continually pressed into service to entertain the ever expanding brood of children. Many of today's informants recall being required to sit quietly, along with seven or eight brothers and sisters, by the side of the *irori* while an aged grandmother or grandfather told folk-tales. Nearby, mother and father were engaged in sewing clothes, and weaving articles of straw and bamboo. The tales were used to quiet the children and allow the adults to work with greater efficiency to care for the large number of children.

However, with the promulgation of the Education Rescript in 1893, the situation began to change rapidly. Education for males became compulsory. Children no longer had the long evenings free to listen to tales. School homework was heavy. All the boys, and in better-to-do families, the girls, too, attended at least four years of school. Before the end of the Meiji era,

education for girls became compulsory and the minimum period for all children was increased to six years. Not only was the old evening taletelling session being crowded out by the necessity for studying the next day's lessons, the tales themselves began to be introduced into the school texts. Variants of the same tales heard from grandparents were included in the texts and gradually began to replace the old oral variants. Present informants of fifty to sixty years of age often have difficulty in distinguishing between the tales heard from parents or grandparents and those read in school texts. The spread of education also created a market for storybooks which began to appear in large quantities. Whereas during the Tokugawa period only the merchant and upper classes in the cities had enjoyed illustrated editions of novels and folktales, now even the poorest villager was able to read the cheap books distributed by peddlers.

With the industrial buildup, children other than one of the sons, usually the oldest, left the home as soon as they reached employable age. After marriage they settled in the cities and began to raise families of their own. Separated from the reinforcing influence of constantly repeated retellings of the old tales, and generally too busy to tell tales to their own children, by the time they became grandparents they were no longer able to remember the tales told in their youth, and thus the taletelling tradition was not transferred from the countryside to the city.

Meanwhile, back on the farm, the increasing reliance on a cash economy and manufactured industrial goods began to break down the network of home manufacture and barter. No longer were evenings spent in home manufacture. Instead, where possible, outside winter employment was taken up. The new industrial goods themselves created a demand for an ever increasing supply of new items. Mass communication media began to make their influence felt even before the explosive impact of television. Radio and motion pictures became commonplace in prewar village life. The desire to live the kind of life portrayed on the screen and described on the radio helped to increase the use of industrial goods and hasten the disappearance of handcraft work and its attendant opportunity for telling tales. The entertainment value of the radio and motion pictures, too, decreased the necessity for the telling of folktales.

With the advent of the Second World War and its aftermath of social upheaval, the Japanese rural scene underwent a drastic change. Now the introduction of mechanized farming required

a complete reliance on a cash economy. Expensive tractors and tools began to be widely used, allowing for more efficient farming methods. But the increased free time was devoted, not to leisure activities, but to part-time and slack season employment in nearby industries. The new supply of ready cash was used for the purchase of the new goods flooding the market. Television sets, washing machines, and refrigerators became common features of village life.

Children, brought up in this new atmosphere of outside cultural influence, found that the new ideas presented on television and the other ever present mass communication media, were much more compatible with their concept of the new life than the ancient ideas of their grandparents, or even the rapidly changing, but still partially conservative opinions of their parents. The storytellers, keenly aware of the distance between the traditions of their own childhood and the new kind of life being lived by their grandchildren, were at a loss as to how to bridge the gap. Remembering the nightly storytelling sessions of their youth, and the ever present readiness of their own grandparents to comply with a request for tales, today's storytellers are dismayed at the lack demand for their tales. Observing their grandchildren caught up in the whirl of modern life with the incessant beat of mass communication media dinning in their ears, the storyteller realizes that today's youth has no time for folktales.

Since in their own youth it was not necessary to purposely set aside a time for storytelling, the present day storyteller is not able to comprehend the necessity for creating a storytelling session. Unable to recreate a taletelling milieu, the aged raconteur has nothing to do but watch his grandchildren as they sit in front of the television screen. Not realizing that it might be possible to impart his tales to his grandchildren if the proper approach were used, the storyteller gives up in despair and, willy-nilly, watches television along with all the other members of the family.

On one occasion I watched this process in action. In the hamlet of Oura, Ogimachi, Sado Island, I spent several hours listening to the tales of Kikuchi Kyo (86), who had been recommended to me by Hamaguchi Kazuo, Sado's most active tale collector. Mr. Hamaguchi had collected tales a number of times from Mrs. Kikuchi, and knew her to possess a large stock of tales. I found that she indeed had an extensive repertoire of stories which she related with a considerable degree

of skill. The day was a cold and snowy Sunday, and the *kotatsu*, with its charcoal fire and heavy comforters to cover one's legs, was a welcome haven in the chill of the otherwise unheated farmhouse.

I found Mrs. Kikuchi sitting in the *kotatsu* and was immediately invited to join her. She soon began to relate a number of her favorite tales. After a short while her greatgranddaughter, Satomi, a girl of about ten or eleven, entered the room and got into the *kotatsu*. "Have you very often heard your grandmother's tales," I asked her. "No, only just a little," she replied. "Your grandmother is telling a very interesting story now, this is a good chance to hear it," I suggested. Satomi gave a noncommital nod and stuck her hands into the *kotatsu* to get warm. The grandmother continued with the tale and after a few minutes Satomi, having warmed herself in the *kotatsu*, got up without a word and left the room. The grandmother made no attempt to urge Satomi to hear the rest of the tale, rather she continued with her story as though nothing had happened.

After a half hour had elapsed, Satomi again entered the room. This time she went to the television set, which stood near the *kotatsu*, and turned it on. Knowing that the sound of the television was spoiling the tape recording of the tale, I asked Satomi if she wouldn't rather hear her grandmother's tales than watch television. Satomi, her eyes glued to the television screen, made no answer. Soon the grandmother, conquered by the powerful eye of the television tube, began to devote only half of her attention to the tale while her eyes strayed repeatedly to the screen. Quietly switching off the tape recorder, I turned around to face the television and the folktale trailed off into oblivion.

Some forty-five minutes later, after the television comedy program had ended, Satomi left the room to eat lunch. I was generously served a heaping bowl of delicious noodles, and soon the grandmother, having also eaten lunch, returned to the *kotatsu*. She began again on the uncompleted tale, and the storytelling session continued for another hour and a half.

It is difficult to judge the precise degree to which folktales were still being told immediately prior to the widespread adoption of television into Japanese city and rural homes some four or five years ago.[15] It is probable that the custom of telling

15 Without exception, every rural home which I visited was fur-

tales had already been largely replaced by the other means of entertainment available before the advent of television. Since the taped interviews are still in the process of transcription, I do not have precise figures to report, but I would judge that perhaps twenty percent of today's storytellers who have teenage grandchildren testify to having told tales to those grandchildren when they were small. A somewhat larger percentage, approximately forty to fifty percent, report having told tales to either their own children or to grandchildren now twenty to thirty years old. But when we come to that class of informants who have grandchildren in the five to ten year age bracket, we find that there is near universal failure to tell the tales. Perhaps one person out of ten reports having told any of his stories to his young grandchildren.

Without exception, informants blame television for the failure to communicate the stories. The demands which television makes on the attention of the young should not be underestimated, but we have seen that the habit of telling folktales was already in decline before television's advent. Television has, however, undoubtedly hastened the process. When the present research is completed I hope to be able to report precisely the extent to which folktales were still being told at various intervals during the past seventy-five years. In the meantime I shall have contacted several hundred more informants and will have a much broader foundation upon which to base percentages.

III. Characteristics of Present Day Storytellers

A brief account of the general characteristics of the Japanese storyteller will serve to introduce a detailed classification of the varying degrees of skill found among informants in Japan. First I should explain that more than half of my informants had never had their tales recorded before in any form. They were introduced to me as being fond of talking, knowledgable about the old traditions of their area, but not necessarily known as raconteurs of folktales. In some areas, such as Miyazaki prefecture, there has been little folktale recording done, and I relied on the introductions of village officials or school teachers

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nished with a television set. Informants generally reported that the television was purchased from three to six years ago.

to elderly informants in their areas who might know folktales. In some cases I was able to discover in this way excellent storytellers who remembered many tales with great clarity.

In areas where recording had already been done, I contacted informants on the introduction of the folklorist who had previously recorded that storyteller's tales. In such cases I was assured that the informant knew a number of tales, and the task of recording was considerably lightened. Being interested in collecting variants of the Monkey-Crab tale, I probed the memories of storytellers of varying degrees of ability after they had told a number of their favorite tales, for variants of the tale central to my research. In this way it was possible to observe the way in which tales long dormant in the memories of the informant were brought back to life.

Folktale collectors often report that most of their informants are women. I found that in Japan, too, women make up a majority of informants, but that the percentage of female informants is not overwhelming. Some fifty-five to sixty percent of the storytellers I interviewed were women. Mizusawa Kenichi, reporting on his extensive collecting in the Niigata area, found that out of eight informants who knew more than one hundred tales, six were women.[16] The best informant I found in the Niigata area was a woman of seventy-four, but the most outstanding storyteller I met in two months of research in Kyushu was a man of sixty-three.

The youngest qualified[17] storyteller I met, aside from folklore students who must be considered too sophisticated to count as uncontaminated bearers of tradition, was a woman of about forty.[18] The oldest still active storyteller was a woman on Amami Oshima ninety-eight years of age. I met another woman on the same island who was 107 years old, and until three or four years ago, still able to tell tales with some vigor. At the time I met her, however, she was too feeble to do more than invite me to have a cup of tea. The average age of all storytellers was about seventy to seventy-five.

European folklorists have divided storytellers into two

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16 Mizusawa, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

17 This term is used here to indicate informants ranking in the first four classes on the scale of storytellers given below.

18 A maid in a Niigata inn, she declined to give her exact age, but stated that she had worked at the inn for nearly twenty years.

classes: active and passive bearers of tradition. I have found this distinction to be too gross for effective use in classifying informants. One informant may be an active bearer of a number of tales but a passive bearer of many others. Another informant may have been active for a brief period when grandchildren were young but has now lapsed into inactivity. One particular informant, Watanabe Tsune, was active until recent family conditions curtailed her storytelling. Until two years ago she operated a small candy shop near the village primary school in Tsugawa, Niigata prefecture. Her shop was also the location of the local bus stop. While waiting for the bus, school children purchased candy and listened to her tales. Many residents of the community thirty to forty years of age recall hearing her tales as school children. Two years ago her daughter-in-law died and the care of six school-age grandchildren fell on Mrs. Watanabe's shoulders. Forced to close her candy shop, she no longer has the free contact with the community's children she previously enjoyed. Her grandchildren, she reports, are absorbed in watching television during free hours, and have no interest in listening to folktales. Delighted to have an audience for her stories, Mrs. Watanabe poured out one tale after another until late in the evening, and then again the next morning until time for my train to leave.

Rather than the simplistic two step classification of active and passive tradition bearers, I have set up a seven stage classification of storytellers, based on their skill in remembering and retelling the tales they have heard. In the first rank are the master raconteurs which one meets but rarely. The seventh rank includes those persons who remember only bits and pieces of tales. Between the first and seventh ranks are the varying degrees of skill which will be explained below.

To begin, I shall examine in detail the first rank storyteller. The first class raconteur is one of those rare individuals who possesses a tremendous stock of tales which he is able to relate with a creative flair not found in any other type of informant. The storyteller in this class may know a hundred or more tales. He is able to recreate practically any tale he has ever heard, by adding bits of detail from a fertile and active imagination. His tales are superb masterpieces of the highest form of traditional oral art. Needless to say, the ability to tell tales in such a manner was not achieved overnight. It has required constant reiteration to develop a grasp of the dramatic, and

sharpen a sense of timing, to the point where each story is an outstanding recreation of the traditional tale. This raconteur possesses a phenomenal memory, and has without exception, taken a consuming interest in folktales since childhood. As a child he never missed an opportunity to hear tales and often recalls having driven adults to exasperation with his demands for "just one more story." Among many well-known reports, the three informants detailed in Azadovsky's *Eine Sibirische Märchenerzählerin*[19] would fall into this and the following class of informants.

The second class of storytellers includes the active taleteller who readily remembers many tales, perhaps as many as fifty or more, which he recites with great precision. A distinguishing characteristic of this raconteur is that he generally attempts to tell the tales just as he heard them. He possesses an exceptional memory, and repeated recordings of a tale, even though taken some years apart, show little variation. Deeply aware of the value of the tradition he has received, he is careful to preserve it as faithfully as possible. Happy to accept a hint to jog his memory, this raconteur may be able to recall up to a hundred or more tales, but, when faced with a forgotten passage, he is unable to fill in the missing portions from his own imagination.

The third degree of proficiency as a taleteller is displayed by the person who, until some time in the past, was active as a raconteur of a large number of tales, but due to a variety of circumstances, has ceased his activity for a considerable number of years. This person usually is able to recall up to thirty or more tales, most of them complete as to plot, but usually lacking the valuable detail which marks the full-blown tale of the first and second rank taleteller. While formerly active in transmitting traditional tales, this informant has lapsed into passivity, and his tales have suffered the effects of disuse.

A fourth type of informant is the storyteller who has harbored a favorite tale or two all his life and may have occasionally retold it to children or grandchildren. While this informant knows only a severely limited number of tales, he can tell with a fair degree of accuracy and with considerable self-assurance those few tales he knows. He has usually heard many tales and remembers the plot of most of them, but has

19 FF Communications No. 68. Helsinki, 1926.

consciously selected a limited number of stories for occasional retelling.

The fifth group of informants is made up of those who can recall major and detailed parts of some tales but tend to confuse the parts of similar tales, or to borrow, without realizing it, whole passages from widely different tales. This informant may have occasionally attempted to retell the tales he knows, but he can hardly be considered an active folktale bearer. The bastard tales he tells to the collector upon request have had little chance to enter the stream of tradition. This type of informant possesses a good memory and may be able to give valuable variants of other genres of oral tradition, such as songs, or legends. But he has never taken particular interest in folktales, and consequently does not remember them well.

The sixth class of informants contains those persons who can recall most of the plot of some tales, and if pressed, can give a description of some of the major scenes of the tale. But this person has never, or only rarely, ventured to retell the tales he has heard and has forgotten practically all the detail of the stories.

The seventh and last rank of informant can barely be classed as a storyteller. He can remember only bits and pieces of tales. He is totally unable to recall the plot of any of the stories he heard as a child. He may be fond of talking and full of personal anecdotes, but he can dredge up only the barest fragments of folktales.

In classifying the informants which I have contacted thus far during the course of this research, I should point out that no persons above fifty or sixty years of age with whom I talked claimed to have never heard folktales. Spending a considerable amount of time in traveling from one place to another, I have made it a habit to occasionally engage fellow train or bus passengers in conversation. In this way I have had an opportunity to discuss folktales and folktale telling with a great number of people of all types. Even in a casual conversation of this kind, persons over fifty or sixty years of age never fail to confess to having heard tales in their childhood. But the usual person met in this way can recall nothing about the tales he heard.

At this stage of my research it is difficult to assign percentages to the representatives in each rank of storyteller. The taped informant interviews are still in the process of transcription and not available at present, but an approximate percentage

of storytellers which would fall into each class is somewhat as follows.

Let us suppose that we had five hundred average Japanese of rural or small town extraction. All are between fifty and ninty years of age. Upon questioning, all would readily admit to having heard folktales in their childhood, but at least four out of five of these persons would not be able to readily recall more than just the names of a few tales heard from oral sources. This leaves us with one hundred persons who could recall enough of the oral tales to serve as storytellers in the broad sense of the term.

Out of the one hundred, perhaps one person would be a first rank creative raconteur. Four or five persons may qualify as second rank storytellers, faithful to tradition but not creative. Ten or so storytellers would tell many tales but their stories would lack the detail of the first two ranks, so that they would fall into the third class.

Another ten raconteurs would possess only a limited number of tales of fair quality, these storytellers we would put in the fourth rank. We now come to the fifth and larger group of informants, numbering about twenty persons, who recall the details of some tales, but are not sure of themselves and tell somewhat garbled variants.

A sixth and still larger group, made up of twenty-five or so storytellers, would be able to recall the outlines of some oral tales, but few details of any. The seventh and final class is the largest of all with some thirty members, who can tell us fragments of some oral tales, but the plot or outline of none.

It should be stressed here that emphasis has been put on the recall of oral tales. There are few elderly Japanese, or for that matter, few Japanese of any age, who have not read, at least in the school texts, the half dozen or so well-known and widely circulated tales such as Momotaro, Urashima Taro, Kachi Kachi Yama, and Hanasaki Jiisan. But these tales are not always the ones most popular with the traditional storytellers. Other media beside the printed page have drawn upon these few well-known stories. Drama, motion pictures, radio, and television have all adapted these stories to fit their own particular formats. Mass media variants of these tales cannot escape the attention of present day Japanese, and in many cases have replaced long forgotten variants of the oral tradition. The Monkey-Crab tale, too, has suffered from the adoption by literary media, but by

carefully stressing a desire for the old, oral variants, I have generally been able to find informants who can distinguish between oral and literary variants.

Summary

In summary, we have seen that while Japanese storytellers are still to be found, the traditional folktale telling sessions have almost disappeared. But by questioning the remaining storytellers, we can discover the situations in which stories were told, and the uses to which the tales were put. There are still enough expert storytellers available to allow for the recording of a large quality of high quality texts. Recorded along with information on the function of the traditional storytelling situation, these texts will be available for valid content and stylistic analysis as well as for tale diffusion and distribution studies.

Extensive interviews with informants has allowed for the preliminary classification of informant types given here. An analysis of the tape recordings of these and future interviews will make it possible to prepare a definitive study of the Japanese storyteller.