

What is *Minzokugaku*?

An Introduction to Japanese Folkloristics*

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1. Introduction

Among the many traditions of folkloristics that exist around the world, this paper tries to establish the position of the Japanese school, known in the vernacular as *minzokugaku*, outlining the process of its formation, the process by which it came to its current position, and its prospects for the future. In doing so, I also hope to make some more general observations on the nature of folkloristics.

2. Folkloristics before Yanagita

Folkloristics as a distinct branch of the humanities was established in the early 20th century, but in the 17th to 19th centuries intellectuals working in a number of other disciplines, such as *kokugaku* (philology of ancient Japanese classics), Confucianism, medicine and literature, had written accounts of local customs in travel essays, local magazines, etc. Officials of the Tokugawa shogunate also carried out questionnaire surveys in each of the *han* (fiefdoms) in the land, again asking about local customs. However, none of these accounts had been organized into a recognizable scholarly system.

1868 saw the end of the shogunate and the Meiji restoration. Japanese society embarked on modernization, and Tokyo Imperial University¹⁾ became the centre of a drive to import scholarship from the Western world. One of the imports was anthropology. Shōgorō Tsuboi (1863-1913) launched the university's Anthropology Society with some friends of his in 1884, while he was still a student. Tsuboi went on to study in Great Britain, later becoming a professor at TIU, at which point the university's anthropology course was established. The group centred on Tsuboi followed the trail blazed by the TIU Anthropology Society to organize the Tokyo Anthropology Society and started publishing a scholarly journal, which along with its archaeological content also included reports on topics that later would come to be viewed as 'folklore' once the discipline of folkloristics was established.

Then in 1912, the Folklore Society of Japan (*Nihon Minzoku Gakkai*) was established by Tsuboi and other anthropologists, along with an assortment of historians, linguists, literature specialists, etc.

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1) Japan's most elite university was founded in 1878 and named the University of Tokyo (*Tokyo Daigaku*). It changed its name to Imperial University (*Teikoku Daigaku*) in 1886, then to Tokyo Imperial University (*Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku*) in 1897. It reverted to being called the University of Tokyo (*Tokyo Daigaku*) in 1947.

The following year they launched the association's journal, *Minzoku* (Folklore), though it published only five issues before petering out in 1915. Each issue carried on the opening page the Association's mission statement:

“What we here call folkloristics (*minzokugaku*) has the same sense as *Volkskunde*, namely research on things inherited from ancient culture that still survive among the common people, such as legends, children's stories, dialects, folksongs, superstitions, manners, customs etc. The word 'folklore' was first used by the Englishman William John Thoms in 1846. In Europe and America this kind of research has already gathered large amounts of material from every source, and is now engaged in using these materials to clarify connections, differences, origins, changes etc. among them and seeking to explain them.”

We can clearly confirm from the above that the Japanese word *minzokugaku* was used as a translation for the German 'Volkskunde' and the English 'Folklore'.²⁾

3. Kunio Yanagita's Folkloristics

3.1 The early years of Yanagita folkloristics: 1910-1920

From about 1910, the work of Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) started to take off. Yanagita, who would later become known as the founding father of Japanese folkloristics, started out as a bureaucrat in the Meiji government. His early works were based on observations he made while visiting remote areas of Japan on government fact-finding missions. They included *Nochi no Kari Kotoba no Ki* (Notes on Traditional Hunting Lore; 1909), an account of hunting customs in southwestern Japan; *Tono Monogatari* (Tales of Tono; 1910), a collection of folk legends from a small town in a basin among the mountains of north-eastern Japan; and *Ishigami Mondō* (Questions and Answers about Stone Gods; 1910), a collection of letters between himself and his research associates on folk beliefs relating to stone. Then in 1913 a group centred on Yanagita launched the journal *Kyōdo Kenkyū* (Local Community Research). This journal would publish a whole string of Yanagita works that are of great importance in the history of folkloristics, as well as carrying the earliest works of Shinobu Orikuchi, who would come to be counted alongside Yanagita as a representative folklorist of Japan. The journal also sparked interest in local community studies among many people living in the provinces, some of whom would become independent folklore scholars.

Kyōdo Kenkyū lasted for only four issues (12 numbers) before suspending publication in 1917, but was succeeded by several other folkloric periodicals, including *Dozoku to Densetsu* (Local Customs and Legends; 1918-1919), *Minzoku* (Folklore; 1925-1929) and *Minzokugaku* (Folkloristics; 1929-1933). In the pages of these journals, Japanese folklorists gathered rich materials and started to build research findings upon them. They also played an important role in communicating with a provincial readership that included independent scholars who would go on to be organized as members of a nationwide network centred on Yanagita.

2) Yutaka Suga has recently come up with a fresh insight into the question of when the English word 'folklore' was first used in Japan. According to Suga, a Japan-resident Irishman named Charles James William Pfoundes (1840-1907) used the word 'folklore' in his 1875 publication, *Fu-so Mimi Bukuro: A Budget of Japanese Notes*. To date this is the earliest example that has been found (Suga 2016).

3.2 The systematization of folkloristics: the 1930s

Going into the 1930s, Yanagita's writings sought to systematize folkloristics, establishing a scholarly framework and methodology (Yanagita 1934, 1935). In 1935 the Japan Folklore Training Courses (*Nihon Minzokugaku Kōshūkai*) were started, offering training to folklore enthusiasts and independent scholars scattered around Japan. In the same year, the Folk Tradition Society (*Minkan Denshō no Kai*) was founded as a national organization for folkloristics, and the journal *Minkan Denshō* (Folk Traditions) was launched. The characteristics of folkloristic methodology propounded by Yanagita during this period may be summarized as follows:

1. Folkloristics was defined as an 'alternative history', in contrast to traditional history studies based on formal written sources.
2. The fragmentary materials of the folkloric tradition were to be put together like superimposed photographs in order to recreate history—a technique that Yanagita called 'proof by re-citation' (*jūshutsu risshō-hō*). Another term he invented, peripheral zone theory (*shūken-ron*) held that cultural elements tended to spread out from the geographical centre to the periphery in concentric circles, so that ancient elements no longer found in the centre could still be found surviving in the periphery, making it possible to reconstruct the historical phases of folkloric change at the level of the nation.
3. The research objects of folkloristics were set very broadly, to include oral traditions, religion, ritual, performing arts, material culture, social organization, economic phenomena etc.
4. Folkloric research could not be satisfactorily achieved just through the observations of outsiders. The local people themselves were best suited to carry out such research. This emphasis on local knowledge applied not only to regions within Japan, but very probably also at the national level: the study of a nation's folklore should not be left to the one-sided surveys of foreign anthropologists, but rather should be carried out by folklorists from the nation in question. Ultimately the folklorists of all the nations would come together to create 'world folkloristics' (Kuwayama 2004, 2008, 2014).

Yanagita's systematization of Japanese folkloristics was interrupted by World War II, but resumed soon after with the creation of the Folkloristics Institute (*Minzokugaku Kenkyūjo*, 1947)³ and the Folklore Society of Japan (*Nihon Minzoku Gakkai*) in 1949.⁴

3.3 Relationship with anthropology

As I mentioned above, the pioneering figures in Japanese folkloristics can be seen in the context of early 20th century anthropology. Even after Yanagita established *minzokugaku* as an academic discipline, Japanese anthropologists often did research in their own country as well as overseas, and frequently shared space with folklorists when it came to publishing research findings. This comes through particularly clearly in the pages of the two folklore journals, *Minzoku* and *Minzokugaku*. But during the 1930s, the two disciplines started to drift apart. The anthropologists who had been publish-

3) The Folkloristics Institute was a private-sector research centre created under the direction of Yanagita. Its activities included publication of the Folkloristics Dictionary (*Minzokugaku Jiten*) and collections of materials containing lexicons of folk terms (*Minzoku Gōi*).

4) This association, *Nihon Minzoku Gakkai*, was formed by renaming the old *Minkan Denshō no Kai* and adding a set of rules. It survives to this day. It is not to be confused with the earlier *Nihon Minzoku Gakkai* created in 1912 (see section 2 above), nor with the *Minzoku Gakkai* founded in 1929 by Shinobu Orikuchi, Kyōsuke Kindaichi and Kizaemon Aruga, which published the journal *Minzokugaku*. These two associations have no direct link with the *Nihon Minzoku Gakkai* founded in 1949.

ing in folklore journals found a new home in 1935 when the Japan Ethnological Association launched its journal, *Minzokugaku Kenkyū* (Ethnographic Research).⁵⁾ Some of their work still related to Japanese folklore, but the emphasis on overseas research became even heavier. In that same year, the Yanagita folklorists created the *Minkan Denshō no Kai* (Folk Tradition Society), which started to show its colours as a theatre for ‘one nation folkloristics’ (*Ikkoku Minzokugaku*), pursuing research taking the nation of Japan as a single unit of analysis.

4. The Move into Academia as ‘Historical Methodology’: the 1960s

4.1 Dissolution of the Folkloristics Institute and the advance into universities

Thanks to Yanagita the framework of the discipline had been established and its methodology systematized. However, unlike other branches of the humanities, folkloristics were not formally represented in academia for many years, instead being carried forward by the efforts of independent scholars. The first university course in folkloristics was not introduced until 1958, when historian-folklorist Taro Wakamori established a major in ‘historical methodology’ in the Department of History, Faculty of Letters, at Tokyo University of Education. There were places for just five students a year, and folkloristics were taught alongside archaeology. In the same year, Seijō University also created a cultural history course in the Arts and Literature Department within the faculty of the same name, in which folkloristics could be studied as a specialist subject.⁶⁾

Another important development on the road to academic recognition also occurred in 1958, with the publication of the first of the 13 volumes in the Survey of Japanese Folkloristics (*Nihon Minzokugaku Taikei*). This massive project was undertaken by a group of researchers, including Masao Oka and Keigo Seki, who had university positions in ethnology/anthropology or sociology but also shared a deep commitment to folkloristics. This was reflected in the content of the Survey, which sought to theorize folkloristics while holding on to the discipline’s connections to anthropology and sociology. This shows that the systematization of folkloristics did not proceed only within the framework of historical research. However, at this stage the only cases of systematization within academia were under the rubric of historical methodology (Tokyo University of Education) and cultural history (Seijō University).

4.2 Using the framework of history rather than linguistics

A major feature of folkloristics’ move into academia was its use of the framework of historical studies (Hayashi 2010). This is in striking contrast with the development of folkloristics in the United States, where the discipline of folkloristics was theorized, by Dell Hymes and the like, in close relationship to sociolinguistics and in the context of performance research.

5) In Japanese, ‘ethnographic research’ is written 民族学, and ‘folkloristics’ 民俗学. Confusingly enough, these two words are pronounced exactly the same – *minzokugaku*. Hence people tend to speak of “two minzokugaku”. On the finer points of the relationship between the two, see Kuwayama (2004).

6) Separate from these two developments, Shinobu Orikuchi had been lecturing on folkloristics from before the war at Keio University and Kokugakuin University. However, these lectures were offered under the auspices of ‘history of performing arts’ (*geinōshi*) or ‘national literature’ (*kokubungaku*); there was as yet no such thing as a course specifically devoted to folkloristics.

5. Academic Folkloristics: the 1970s

5.1 The ‘organic association’ of the folk in the social context

Academic folkloristics, centred on Tokyo University of Education, were influenced by the structural functionalism then prominent in social anthropology, but from the early 1970s there was a rapid shift in methodology from research aiming at the national perspective that was supposed to be obtainable through ‘proof by re-citation’ and ‘peripheral zone theory’ to a new emphasis on organic folkloric association within the social context of a single district – and using that awareness to drive surveys and research seeking to grasp the folkloric history of specific individual localities. This approach was called ‘individual analysis’ (*kobetsu bunseki-hō*; Fukuta 1982) or ‘regional folkloristics’ (*chi’iki minzokugaku*; Miyata 1985 b). The old Yanagita school of national folkloristics, and its stress on proof by re-citation and peripheral zone theory, came under severe criticism as an essentialist project that failed to pay due attention to regional social contexts.

5.2 Declining interest in language

In the days before folkloristics entered academia, the methodology of organizing and analysing lexicons of folkloric language terms was given great importance. As Furuie put it, a folkloric lexicon could be defined as “vocabulary chosen for its potential to be a tool to understanding folklore, accompanying a detailed explanation of a given region’s folklore materials” (Furuie 2000: 649). The project was not necessarily limited to mere indexing; scholars such as Ichiro Kurata (1995) used vocabulary collections as material for analysis. Folkloric lexicons were divided by genre during the 1930s, and published under titles such as Folkloric Lexicon of Childbirth and Child-Rearing (*San’iku Shūzoku Go’i*), Folkloric Lexicon of Funerals (*Sōsō Shūzoku Go’i*), Thematic Lexicon of Mountain Villages (*Bunrui Sanson Go’i*), Thematic Fishing Village Lexicon (*Bunrui Gyoson Go’i*), etc. After the war came a grand, comprehensive collection, the General Folkloric Lexicon of Japan (*Sōgō Nihon Minzoku Go’i*; Minzokugaku Kenkyūjo 1955-56).

However, under the methodological change of direction outlined above, research using lexicons came to be criticized as ‘lexiconism’ (*go’i-shugi*). There was no deepening of study or debate on methodology relating to vocabulary collections; instead there was a rapid dwindling of interest in language itself as an object of study.

5.3 Splintering of academic associations

This period saw the foundation of the Oral Traditional Arts and Letters Association (*Kōshō Bungei Gakkai*, 1977), The Japan Association for the Study of Folk Tools (*Nihon Mingu Gakkai*, 1975), and the Association for the Study of Folkloric Performing Arts (*Minzoku Geinō Gakkai*, 1984). It could be argued that, as folkloristics entered the academic mainstream in the framework of historical studies, studies of language, material culture and aesthetics, which had hitherto been flexibly included in folkloristics, started to break away.

5.4 Comparative folkloristics

During the 1970s, researchers emerged who were willing to engage in comparative studies of other East Asian countries, such as South Korea, China and Taiwan. As stated in sub-section 3.3

above, the Yanagita school of folkloristics that held sway from the 1930s had increasingly emphasized ‘one-nation folkloristics’. This could be read as an expression of Yanagita’s methodological aversion to international comparative studies: for him, it was unwise to start looking for comparative material abroad before folkloristics of a single nation had reached a high level of completion. As the discipline developed after Yanagita’s death, however, some researchers did try to take up the challenge of international comparative research with due regard for methodological caution. Their work generated empirical data on shamanism (Sakurai 1987), ancestor worship (Suzuki 1974, Takeda 1994), material culture (Shimono 1989) and various other topics.

5.5 From Tokyo University of Education to Tsukuba University

As part of the government’s higher education policy in response to the ‘university wars’ of the 1960s and ’70s, Tokyo University of Education was closed in 1978. The job of training folklore researchers that had been done by TUE’s graduate school was now passed on to the graduate school of Tsukuba University, which had been founded in 1973 under the same policy that called for the closure of TUE, and had institutional connections with it. Tsukuba’s graduate school included a Department of Historical and Anthropological Research with a course on folkloristics and ethnology (the ‘two min-zokugaku’), launched in 1975. This department went on to produce numerous folklore scholars, many of whom would subsequently obtain tenured positions at universities all over the country. As we may see from the nomenclature of the course, and that of its host faculty, the connection with history was maintained, and the link with anthropology/ethnology was strengthened.

6. Cultural Anthropology, Cultural Semiotics, Social History, Urban Folkloristics: the 1980s

6.1 Cultural anthropology/semiotics and folkloristics

The 1980s were the heyday of structural anthropology, symbolic anthropology and semiotics. Researchers based in cultural anthropology moved into the field of Japanese folkloristics, while some folklore scholars tried to incorporate the new intellectual trends into folkloristics. The former were led by Kazuhiko Komatsu (1985); the latter by Noboru Miyata (1985 a). Thus, for example, research emerged that sought to interpret the places where fairies appear as symbolic boundaries between this world and the next (Miyata 1985 a).

6.2 Social history and Folkloristics

During this period, European research on social history, such as that of the *Annales* School, was introduced into Japan, and historians like Yoshihiko Amino generated large volumes of research into the social history of Japan. Studies in Japanese social history showed a particularly direct connection with folkloristics. The National Museum of History,⁷⁾ at Sakura in Chiba prefecture, was founded in 1981 and became a crucible for cross-disciplinary research projects between historians, archaeologists and folklorists. One notable outcome of these collaborations was the publication over the years from 1982 to 1987 of the Survey of Japanese Folk Culture (*Nihon Minzoku Bunka Taikei*). With 14 vol-

7) Such is the official English title of this institution. However, the Japanese title, *Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan*, would be better translated as ‘National Museum of History and Folklore.’

umes and one supplement, it was a rich collection of joint research among specialists in history, archaeology, folklore and cultural anthropology.

6.3 Urban folkloristics

Another development of the 1980s saw concerted attempts to develop urban folkloristics, taking as their theme the production and transmission of folklore in cities. Among the many themes tackled were housing estates, business districts, companies, commuter trains, taxis, entertainment districts, markets, festivals, ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, graveyards, urban shamanism, new religions, fairies, and urban myths (Miyata 1982, 1986, Iwamoto, Kuraishi and Kobayashi 1989 a, Iwamoto, Kuraishi and Kobayashi 1989 b). These interactions with cultural anthropology, cultural semiotics and social history, and the incorporation of the city into the object of folkloric research, made the 1980s a golden age for folkloristics – or so it seemed.

7. The ‘Misery’ of Folkloristics: The 1990s

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, some severe criticism of folkloristics emerged from young researchers, some still graduate students, others with recent doctorates. Behind the surface appearance of a golden age of folkloristics, they identified a lack of original theory, a lack of firm grounding as an academic discipline, and a lack of awareness among folklorists that these problems even existed. They condemned the contemporary situation as “the misery that is folkloristics” (Ōtsuki 1992). Some wanted the discipline to go back to basics: the great strength of folkloristics was an ability to grasp the reality of the here and now, using one’s own body to experience the totality of the folkloristic experience. This appealing intellectual characteristic of folkloristics was not suited to the controlled environment of formal academia – yet it was in this characteristic that they saw some possibility for the development of folkloristics. However, for the most part the world of folkloristics made no serious attempt to take on board these criticisms, and time just drifted by.

8. Confusion and Groping for New Directions: the 2000s

8.1 The study of fairies, the study of Yanagita

Noboru Miyata,⁸⁾ the leading figure in folkloristics since the 1970s, suddenly died in 2000, plunging the world of folkloristics into a period of confusion. Ever more refined individual case studies were piled on top of each other, but with no attempt to reveal the totality of the discipline. No spirit of intellectual adventure could be observed among the young generation of researchers; rather they headed off in two directions: the study of fairies and the study of Yanagita. The former involved an obsessive but trivial pursuit of fairies and other such exotic objects of local folk beliefs, without devoting any thought to fundamental questions such as why studying the beliefs in question constituted folkloristics, or what other phenomena they might relate to. The latter tried to find the possibilities of folkloristics in the works of Yanagita and became trapped in a series of sterile attempts to re-read and

8) Noboru Miyata (1936-2000) is known for his study of the folkloric development in Japan of the Maitreya cult, a form of Buddhist utopian millenarianism; and for his work in urban folklore. He wrote many books aimed at the general reader, designed to popularize folkloristics. He also trained a new generation of folklorists in his position as a professor at Tsukuba University.

re-evaluate the old master, without ever escaping from the limitations of Yanagita's research paradigm.

8.2 Establishment of the Society of Living Folklore

In 2008, a group of scholars hoping to somehow revive the ailing discipline of folkloristics created a new society, outside the long-established Folklore Society of Japan. This was the Society of Living Folklore (*Gendai Minzoku Gakkai*). The new society set forth three objectives: 'sharpening' (*sen'eika*), an attempt to construct new theories; 'actualization' (*jisshitsuka*), an attempt to clearly express the intellectual underpinning and techniques of folkloristics hitherto taken for granted, and thereby create the basis for dialogue and open discussion with other fields of study; and 'internationalization' (*kokusaika*), an attempt to establish intellectual exchange with folkloristics in other countries.

9. Internationalization and Public Folkloristics: the 2010s

9.1 Internationalization

The activities of the Society of Living Folklore imparted a significant positive influence on the discipline as a whole, and from about 2010 change started to become apparent. One such change was a greater willingness to look abroad. In our survey of the 70 years since the War, we have seen how comparative folkloristics were carried out in relation to South Korea, China and Taiwan, but there was almost no effort to engage with Euro-American folkloristics. Nowadays, however, we are seeing a sharp increase in cases of the translation of papers from American, German and Chinese folklorists, invitations to those folklorists to speak at Japanese conferences, invitations to Japanese researchers to attend and present at meetings of the American Folklore Society, and so on.⁹⁾

9.2 Public folkloristics

Another interesting recent development has been the call for 'public folkloristics'. In recent years the humanities and social sciences in general have faced calls to engage with the general public, and there are encouraging signs that this development will meld well with the essential characteristics of folkloristics. After all, folkloristics started out as a grassroots discipline, largely carried out by private individuals outside the academy, and to this day includes many independent scholars. This would appear to put folkloristics in a strong position to contribute to the debate on the public contribution of academia, and there are moves afoot to establish 'public folkloristics' (*kōkyō minzokugaku*) as a major pillar of folkloristics (Suga 2013).

10. The Recontextualization of Folkloristics: The Future of Folkloristics

10.1 From 'minzokugaku' to folkloristics

The discipline of folkloristics arose and developed in various parts of the world at roughly the same time. As a result, there are multiple varieties of folkloristics to be found around the world. Many

9) In October 2015, the 67th annual meeting of the Folklore Society of Japan took 'Folkloristics in the World' as its conference theme and invited folklorists from Germany and the United States to address the conference. Then in October 2016, a joint German-Japanese folklore symposium was held in Munich.

nations' schools of folkloristics are now creating networks, based on respect for each other's scholarly traditions, and are engaging in dialogue.¹⁰ Japanese folkloristics has yet to fully link up with these networks, but there is a great necessity for us to join the debate and share our concerns with colleagues around the world. In the global condition of academic discourse today this is unavoidable; or rather, positive participation in these networks will be deeply meaningful for our discipline. In recent years the author, when writing in Japanese, has taken to calling his own discipline not *minzokugaku* but *fōkuroa kenkyū* – 'folklore research' or 'folkloristics' – using a Japanese pronunciation of the English word 'folklore' (Shimamura 2014).

10.2 'Folklore' and 'Folkloristics'

I would now like to discuss the definition of 'folklore' in our discipline's current state of development, and seek further to define 'folkloristics' as the title of our discipline in the Japanese context (see also Shimamura 2014).

'Folklore' is a concept designed to signify the research object of folkloristics, and I define it as follows: "Something involved with the experience, knowledge and forms of expression created by and lived by members of a group of people (folk) who have some kind of shared context. It is related to high culture, elite culture, mass culture and popular culture, but conceptually differentiated from all of them." The process of communication related to folklore I call 'folk communication', and the media that make folk communication possible I call 'folk media'.

Next, I define folkloristics as one of the disciplines created amid the cross-disciplinary condition of the fields of study in the humanities and social sciences. Its objective is to use folklore research to explicate how the world (*sekai*)¹¹ came to be the way it is. Folkloristics in Japan critically and developmentally inherits the intellectual tradition of *minzokugaku* (Japanese Folkloristics); the prototype for this new discipline is an amalgam of the following seven features:

1. It takes folklore as its object of study.
2. The methodological core of the discipline is an awareness that the present is built upon thick historical layers (chronicity), armed with which it seeks to analyse phenomena of the present in terms of its relation to the past.
3. It emphasizes the connection between people and things (man-made objects; material phenom-

10) Examples of this would include Folklore Fellows (FF), an international network of folklorists based in Finland (<http://www.folklorefellows.fi/>), and the [US-based] internet list, H-Folk Network (H-Net's on-line network on folklore and ethnology). As I write (October 2016), plans are afoot to create the International Federation of Folklore Societies, with the United States, China and Japan as founding members.

11) I am really not overly concerned about the precise definition of the 'world' (*sekai*) to be explained by folkloristics. Taking a few examples translated from a major Japanese dictionary, it could be 'the entirety of human society', 'the zone in which humans live', 'the moral environment', 'the world as it is', 'the entire surface of planet Earth', 'space', 'the objectively perceived world', 'the conceptually constructed mechanical world', 'the psychological world', or 'the world of direct experience' (Shōgakukan, 2006), etc., etc. According to circumstances and needs, the scale of the 'world' addressed can be freely designated. Of course, the explication of the 'world' is not to be attempted only by folkloristics. Just as sociology seeks to explain the world through the concept of 'society', anthropology through the concept of 'humankind', linguistics through the concept of 'language', literary studies through the concept of 'literature', geographical research through the concept of 'geography', economics through the concept of 'economy', and political science through the concept of 'politics', so folkloristics seeks to explicate the world through the concept of 'folklore'. The 'world' will be explicated by the combined and cooperative efforts of these numerous disciplines.

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4. In addressing its object, it emphasizes both the social-scientific context (the context addressed by the social sciences, such as society, politics, economics etc.), and the humanities context (the context addressed by the humanities, such as language, literature, art, history etc.)

5. There is a deep reciprocity between researchers and the living people (folk) who create folklore and the field in which they live.

6. This is not an ‘imported discipline’. It is an endogenous efflorescence of the linguistic zone that is the mother body from which it grew.

7. The folkloristics that have endogenously developed in each linguistic zone will pursue mutual collaboration among folkloristics on a global scale, giving birth to knowledge that is not restricted to a single linguistic zone.

10.3 The ‘right to narrate’ and folkloristics

The role of folkloristics in a global context is a major one. Faced with the overwhelmingly powerful onslaught of globalization, how will people living in the various regions of the Earth respond to that onslaught, and how will they seek to live on in the midst of globalization? How can we express that wisdom as folklore? That is the challenge that folkloristics must tackle. Folkloristic schools have a history of developing not in super-powerful countries but on the margins. Folkloristics developed in Germany, Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, Ireland, Japan, and the United States of America as an emerging country. Even within powerful countries, it developed in marginal regions, such as Brittany, Wales and Scotland. Its practitioners were none other than inhabitants of these regions. This is a great difference between folkloristics and anthropology. Anthropology was born as a project by Britain, France, and the United States of America as a great power, hegemonically to research the non-Christian ‘other’, and is not a discipline emerging from the position of the weak.

Postcolonial scholars of comparative literature, such as Spivak, Said and Bhabha, insist on ascribing autonomy to the “countless indigenous languages in the world” (Spivak 2003:15). Spivak writes: “We must take the languages of the Southern Hemisphere as active cultural media rather than as objects of cultural study by the sanctioned ignorance of the metropolitan migrant (Spivak 2003:9). Or as Said puts it, “schooled in its abuses by the experience of Eurocentrism and empire, one could fashion a different kind of humanism that was cosmopolitan and text-and-language-bound in ways that absorbed the great lessons of the past” (Said 2004:11). By doing that, Bhabha argues, “(I do want) to make graphic what it means to survive, to produce, to labor and to create, within a world-system whose major economic impulses and cultural investments are pointed in a direction away from you, your country or your people” (Bhabha 2004: xi). Bhabha emphasizes “the right to narrate” of “those who were silenced” (Bhabha 2016).

This emphasis on guaranteeing the ‘right to narrate’ of people who are the object of study dovetails with the mission of folkloristics that I outlined above. More than that – the postcolonial project of making the object of study into an autonomous subject and comparing that subjectivity on a global scale is precisely where folkloristics has its greatest strength.¹²⁾

12) As I pointed out in subsection 3.2, Kunio Yanagita once argued that when folkloristics had developed to maturity in different parts of the world, a ‘world folkloristics’ would emerge out of mutual comparison between the research outcomes of national schools (Yanagita 1934). In recent years the cultural anthropologist Takami Kuwayama has related this ‘world folkloristics’ to the global system of knowledge regarding anthropology, pointing out that unlike the disciplinary ↗

10.4 The vernacular

How do people respond to globalization, and how do they carry on living in the midst of globalization? One of the analytical tools available to folkloristics in answering this question is that of the vernacular. The term is usually employed to signify things that are local, or specific to a particular place. Here, however, I use it to mean ‘creativity that is heterogeneous to authority, or difficult/impossible for authority to control’. American folklorist Roger Abrahams puts it this way:

“The stuff that folklorists study is human accomplishment. It arises from the creative vernacular response of humans on their most gregarious occasions. It is a way of responding to forces that would otherwise make us into a race of only spectators. A vernacular randomness and even rowdiness stands at the center of the subject – it involves people negotiating with one another by drawing on the practices of the past as a means of addressing the present. Folk culture stands in contrast at every level with the construction of official culture, even in those situations in which reigning political ideologies are said to derive from *das volk*, or the common man. Vernacular vigor announces itself from without and within whenever parody, lampoon, or carnivalesque motives enter into cultural production. Here I refer not only to the ways in which political and social humor have entered into the maintenance of spirit while resistance movements had their way with repressive regimes, but also to the vernacularity implicit in the conservationist mood that seeks to resist consumption and to privilege recycling, remodeling, renovating, repairing, restoring, customizing, and humanizing mass-produced objects and environments.” (Abrahams 1993: 5-6).

In the face of globalization, we seek ‘the right to narrate’ and ‘the creative, vernacular human response.’ Here we find the themes that folkloristics will have to tackle from now on.

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↙ system of western anthropology, in which the West hegemonically and unilaterally researches non-western societies, ‘world folkloristics’ has the potential to serve as a model of equal and mutual international academic collaboration in which the anthropology and folkloristics of non-western regions can participate on the basis of autonomous, endogenous development (Kuwayama 2004, 2014). Yanagita himself saw the establishment of ‘world folkloristics’ as something for the distant future. That was only natural in an age before the advent of the global information environment in which we now live, but surely today we have reached the stage where ‘world folkloristics’, or ‘global folkloristics’ as the author prefers to call it (Shimamura 2014), can be achieved.

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What is *Minzokugaku*? :
An Introduction to Japanese Folkloristics

ABSTRACT

Among the many traditions of folkloristics that exist around the world, this paper attempts to situate the Japanese school, commonly known as *minzokugaku*, outlining the process of its formation, the process by which it came to its current position, and its prospects for the future. In doing so, I also hope to provide some more general observations on the nature of folkloristics.

The role of folkloristics in a global context is a major one. Faced with the overwhelmingly powerful onslaught of globalization, how will people living in the various regions of the Earth respond to that onslaught, and how will they seek to live on in the midst of globalization? How can we express that wisdom as folklore? That is the challenge that folkloristics must tackle.

Key Words: *Minzokugaku*, folkloristics, folklore, globalization, vernacular