Folklore Study and Marxism in Japan

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The folklore study in Japan was established in 1920s and 1930s by Yanagita Kunio. Those were the days when Japan was entering into the critical condition due to the economic depression. Same can be said to the formation and development of Marxism in Japan. Thus, the folklore and Marxism appeared in the same period and on the same stage with the mission common to each other, but it has been thought that there was no direct connection or relation between the two. However, in 1930s, there was a certain relation between the folklore study and the Marxism; the Marxists or those who “converted” from the Marxism had made great contribution to the establishment of the folklore in 1930s. It was either Marxists or those who converted from the Marxism who took the trouble to gather the persons in all over Japan who were interested in the folklore, held institute classes and organized those people. Without them, the folklore study would not have been established as a field of science.

Yanagita Kunio himself criticized severely the study from the standpoint of the Marxism. It was due to the difference in the outlook on the history. Especially, he did not approve of the existence of the universal law in the development of the history which is the fundamental standpoint of the Marxism. He thought that the voluntary actions and originality of the people “give rise to the social changes and he did not believe that human beings are heading for the specified target set by a certain law. However, the Marxism and Yanagita’s folklore had something common in the fundamental concept. They are those inherited from the evolitional anthropology in 19th century. It cannot be denied that, in a sense, this commonality made it easy for the some of the Marxists to convert from the Marxism to the Yanagita’s folklore.

Not many Marxism folklorists were born. Known Marxism folklorists include Hashura Yasuo and Akamatsu Keisuke. The folklore of Hashura Yasuo is not brought into existence as Marxism and only words of Marxism are used here and there. On the contrary, the folklore of Akamatsu Keisuke explicitly crit-
cized YANAGITA Kunio and his folklore and tried to establish the Marxism folklore. However, his criticisms were made only on the principles and he failed to make clear what method he maintained for the concrete folklore study. Thus, although the total picture of the Marxism folklore was not shown, his efforts toward the theoretical formation should be highly evaluated.