“Hometown” and Folklore

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The rapidly changing modern society is discarding the “folk customs” entirely that have been the traditional life styles of the people. On the other hand, a booklet entitled “folk edition” is almost always added to the histories of cities, towns and villages. In such booklet, not only the old customs and practices that had ceased to exist long time ago can be found, but also the values of folk customs for the regional life and culture in the future are triumphantly stated. A keyword that acts as intermediary between the two contradictory evaluations for the folk customs is a concept of “hometown”. In this paper, the author discusses taking into account the relations between the present state of “hometown” and the folklore. It is because the actual states of the above mentioned two factors have come to offer serious problem in the field of the folklore study.

“Hometown” is originally a concept when those who left their birth places to live in cities or remote places think of their birth places. But now that the urban residents who have lost the relations with their birth places account for the majority of the nation’s population, “hometown” is not necessarily the word that links those who left their native place and their birth places. This word has come to be used in slightly different context.

① A case when the self-governing communities of depopulated agricultural and mountain villages use this name to call their own community as a symbol for reactivation. The society to be achieved is often compared to a Utopia.

② A case when new residents who moved into a place where the population is rapidly growing envision the hometown modeled after the society of the agricultural and mountain villages in the past for their foundation of the identity.

③ A dummy hometown offered where the desire of the urban residents and residents of agricultural/mountain villages matches with each other. At present, there are various forms, including the utilization of leisure time by the urban
residents and direct dispatch of foods through the “hometown membership system”, educational desire such as “staying in a mountain village for educational purpose”, etc.

The modern culture guided by the expanding urban society without any order is still unable to find out a clear future vision, because the gap between what people expect of the sentiment and of the economic requirements is large even taking an example of the “hometown”.