Kunio Yanagita in His Infancy and Childhood in Tsujikawa

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This research is concerned with Kunio Yanagita in his infancy and childhood as a key to understand his critical mind that queried ‘Why are the peasants so poor?’ which is said to have motivated him to found Japanese folklore later.

Yanagita spent his infancy and childhood in Tsujikawa-mura, Kanzaki-gun in Hyogo Prefecture. What bearing did the days in Tsujikawa have on him in forming his later ideas?

Bunzo Hashikawa, as one of the attempts to identify the type of bearing, focus in his research on Yanagita’s particular “experience” he had in his infancy and childhood. Hashikawa asserts that Yanagita’s unusual “experience” had a significant meaning on the formation of Yanagita’s folkloristic inclination.

Different from the standpoint taken by Hashikawa, this research takes the standpoint of Yanagita’s “routine life” in his infancy and childhood as more significant for molding his patterns of thought, and thus focus on the economic aspect of his household.

Analysis was first made on his father’s professional life, revealing that it was his father’s main concern that he should maintain the “survival of his family” on his meager income from his occasional jobs as a temporarily-employed school teacher.

Investigation then was made on the life of Yanagita’s elder brother, whose main concern was the “rebuilding of his family.” He had first served as a local school principal but, because of the income problem, later became a doctor and finally spent his later years on education of his brothers.

Final analysis was made on Yanagita’s position as a “marginal man”; he was the second son but also acted like the first son in the poor household for which his brother had to work early, and he was a descendant of a farming family but was not a farmer himself in the farming village. His unique position enabled him to observe the problems of the household and the village from an objective point of view.

As a conclusion, the results of research point out that Yanagita was in a position to seriously observe the poverty problems of the household as well as the village, causing him in his later years to take on the cause of poverty as his lifelong subject of research.