Possibility of Folkloric Studies by Orikuchi—Focusing on His Works around the Publication of “Kodai Kenkyu (Ancient Studies)”—

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Shinobu Orikuchi, as well as Kunio Yanagita, played a leading role in the formative period of Japanese folklore studies, but the folklore as Orikuchi first portrayed has not been appreciated well enough. This thesis focuses on the formative period of “Kodai Kenkyu,” his main work on folklore, and tries to extract from it the possibility that was originally embodied in Orikuchi’s idea of folklore. This is also an attempt to break the present stagnant situation of the Japanese folklore studies, which are also too much dependent on and inclined toward the works of Kunio Yanagita.

The following features of Orikuchi’s folklore studies could be elicited from “Kodai Kenkyu” and his other related works or from what he stated in regard to folklore:

(1) In editing “Kodai Kenkyu,” Orikuchi collected theses that contribute to the general understanding of Japanese “Ancient Period” or folklore rather than ones that record concentrated studies on specific areas. This editing principle reflects Orikuchi’s characteristic style of dealing with the same matter repeatedly with more detailed description each time.

(2) Orikuchi preceded Yanagita in giving lectures on the general folklore in the 1920’s. According to the proceedings of those lectures, Orikuchi held the outstanding philosophy of religion-oriented folklore. Orikuchi evidently failed in his several plans to cultivate his followers to share and develop his ideas. He later turned to his own liking of classical literature to orient his studies of folklore.

(3) Orikuchi also noted early that folklore changes. This viewpoint of his led to historical folklore. Orikuchi believed that the history of folklore was incarnated in the current people. His approach to folklore was applied in his description of literary history, but was not applied to the description of actual production or labor problems.

The above features of Orikuchi folklore present important problems to the historical as well as current studies of folklore.