Tentative Assumption for Regional Study of Japanese Folk Songs

—Japanese Folk Songs on the Japan Sea Side and the Inland Sea Side—

KOJIMA Tomiko

It is generally said that there are differences in Japanese folk songs between the western group and the eastern group. I have analyzed folk songs contained in the “Complete Collection of Japanese Folk songs”, taking examples from the songs of Yamaguchi and Akita prefectures, and have clarified that there is a large difference between them in the scales and melodics.

In this paper, I have classified the folk songs of Yamaguchi prefecture, which have the characteristics of the western group as a whole, into those of the Chōshū region on the Japan Sea side and those of the Suō region on the Inland Sea side. I then collected the statistics of the two groups again to determine whether there was any difference between them. For the purpose of this study, I used the scale which showed the most distinct characteristic in my previous paper. The scales showed clear distinctions even after considering accidental factors, such as the volume of materials, and imbalance of scales according to the types of folk songs.

My results showed that the Minyō (folk song) scales accounted for a considerably larger part of the folk songs in the Chōshū region than the Suō region. I then analyzed the folk song of Shimane prefecture, adjacent to Yamaguchi prefecture on the Japan Sea side, and that of Hiroshima prefecture, adjacent on the Inland Sea side. The results showed that the Minyō scale is found in an overwhelmingly large part of the folk songs in Shimane prefecture. In particular, in the Izumo region, which corresponds to the eastern half of Shimane prefecture, the Minyō scales appeared with a very high ratio, almost exceeding that of Akita prefecture. On the other hand, in Hiroshima prefecture, the Minyō scales appeared in about half of the songs examined, and the Ritsu-type scales (including the Ritsu scale and its variations, and the Miyakobushi (capital city melody) scale and its variations) accounted for the remaining half. A large difference has been seen again between the Japan Sea side and the Inland Sea side.

Considering that the scale is an element rather difficult to change, and admitting
a certain extent of logic jumping with these results in considering the problem of the origin of Japanese music, the people who sang songs with the Minyō scale entered the country on the Japan Sea side, and instead of proceeding to the Inland Sea side, they possibly proceeded to the east. Or it is possible that there was a continuous flow of people who sang folk songs with the Minyō scale to the Japan Sea side.

Also in the process of this analysis, I found that the existence of nuclear notes and tetracords was not clear in about 20 pieces. Such examples existed elsewhere, but it was rare for them to appear in such a large number as in this case. This problem will require further discussion as to how it relates to the scales.