Transmission of Folk Songs in Tsugaru District, Aomori Prefecture

—Centering around Folk Songs of Tairadate Village——

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Investigation of the folk music in Tairadate Village revealed that very few labor folk songs were handed down there; the only example was the “herring fishing song” which was once sung by the herring fishers. Songs which were closely tied with the local community life were also very few: in their place, the “Jonkarabushi”, known all over Japan, was sung as a Tsugaru folk song, and folk songs from prefectures on the Japan Sea side and Hokkaido were sung on the occasions of Bon-Odori (summer festival dances) or feasts.

So the author investigated how the people of Tairadate Village had handed down the folk songs. The results showed that of course some songs were memorized naturally in their daily lives in the usual manner. However, most of songs were memorized from professional singers, through radio, records, concerts of travelling artists, and “Bosama”, people who go from door to door singing for money.

Tairadate Village was opened up by settlers from around the 16th century onwards. Life centered on fishing continued for a long time, village communities organizations were not active, and people were rather free from the restraint of traditional folkloric phenomena which are generally handed down in community life; so the village was in a state where new things or things coming from the outside were easily accepted.

However, it was found that the way Minyō (folk songs) were handed down in Tairadate Village was common to the whole Tsugaru area. Tsugaru has produced a large number of professional Minyō singers since the 1910's, and the Minyō has been literally the staff of life. The Tōō-Nippo-sha, a typical local newspaper of Aomori Prefecture, has held a Tsugaru Minyō Contest since as early as the 9th year of Showa (1934), which has been accepted by the Tsugaru people enthusiastically.

Thus, on the one hand, Tsugaru Minyō have been made known nationwide by professional artists; but on the other hand, this resulted in the oblivion and decline of other local Minyō. What the Tsugaru Minyō experienced early on is now making an appearance in the Minyō of the whole country. In this sense, the state of Minyō music in the Tsugaru Region shows not only its regional characteristics, but is also an example which indicates the future trends of Minyō music all over Japan.