The Music of the Various Tungus Races, Focussing on the Manchu

KOJIMA Tomiko

When discussing the origin of Japanese music, it is necessary to examine the music of various Tungus races, of which the close relationship with Japan has been pointed out in other fields. To date, we have had a considerable amount of information on Mongolian music; however, information on the music of the Tungus is very limited. This being the case, the author joined the “Urgent Research Study into Basic Materials of the Manchu Culture—Especially in the Fields of Folklore and History—” (under the subsidy of the Toyota Foundation), conducted by the Society for the Study of Manchu Culture to investigate Manchu music in February, 1990. This paper is the study report based on the results of the investigation.

Since investigations were restricted to Beijing this time, only a small amount of information on the Manchu and Evenki races was collected. The author reports on the music of these two races, adding some information on Mongolian music as a reference.

First of all, the shaman music of Manchu was investigated, mainly by means of video materials. Shamanism occupies a very important position in the Tungus Culture. The single-skin drum and many bells attached to the belt used by the shamans are features in common with the shamans of other Tungus races, are Japanese ethnic minorities, such as the Ainu, Gilyak, and Orocco. Manchu shamans are clearly of a different type from the influential shamans of ancient Japan, and the shamans still active in Korea today. The Songs of Manchu shamans are based on “min-yō” scale, strongly governed by the tetrachord; they have many features in common with Japanese songs.

As for the folksongs of the Evenki race, the author investigated the folksong collection which is the most reliable at the present stage, and found that the Evenki folksongs, like the Mongol folksongs, can be classified into the metrical type and the free rhythm type; the latter accounts for about 15%, which was unexpectedly low. In the former, pieces in simple duple time, those in simple triple time, and those in altered time or those in which the time alters in the course of a piece, accounted for 25% each; this is close to the rhythm of Korean folksongs. Pieces are roughly divided into three types of scale; “Min-yō” scale, “Ritsu” scale and “Ryo” scale. These are not so strongly governed by the tetrachord; rather, the Mongolian folksongs are closer to Japanese songs. As for ornamental movement of melody, the Evenki folksongs most resemble the Japanese songs.