A Comparison of Modern Korean and Japanese Folktales

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There has already been considerable research on modern folktales in Japan, but research that compare modern Japanese folktales with modern folktales from societies outside of Japan cannot even be said to have begun. To address this shortcoming in research trends, this paper attempts to examine modern folktales in present-day Korean society through a Japanese-Korean comparison. The following is a list of issues highlighted in this paper:

1) In present-day Korean society, modern folktales are told very frequently. It can be noted that in contrast to modern folktales in Japanese society, modern Korean folktales not only appear in the form of ghost stories, they also contain many humorous stories characterized by social and political satire.

2) I believe that many modern Korean stories are humorous because of the social conditions and the struggles for democracy that have occurred under totalitarian regimes, as well as serious labor issues and rapid economic development and its associated conflicts.

3) Most modern folktales compiled and analyzed in current folklore research in Japan are ghost stories. It is difficult to find modern folktales characterized by social and political satire. This is due to a combination of elements including: i) the anti-politicization of Japanese society in the 1970's and later; ii) the decrease in the demand for modern folktales as a medium due to the absence of oppression, such as the repression of the freedom of speech; and iii) scholars' propensities in the process of objectivizing modern folktales.

4) Given the issues above, I have come to understand the necessity of reinterpreting and restudying the current situation. In addition, international comparative research provides an impetus to reconsider modern folktales such as this one. This paper proves the importance of comparative research.