Knowledge and Vision: “Way of Looking/Seeing” in Cultural Anthropology and Folklore Studies

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This article examines how the vision or looking/seeing relates to the process of acquisition and formation of knowledge by fieldwork. In association with the relativization of the assumption of “objective” observation in natural science, and the aspect of interaction and unification between subjectivity and objectivity observed there, this article explores the concept of “looking/seeing” in cultural anthropology and folklore studies. Its first basis is a comparison of the “way of looking” and the “way of seeing.” The former is a specific way of observing things, and the latter indicates interpretations of human and society that serve as background of individual techniques. This article examines how observational research especially of cultural anthropology is carried out in the field through both of the above modes of observation. It deals with the “cooperation of subjectivity” as a characteristic of observation in folklore studies. Observing nature, and feeling seasonal changes and determining the beginning period of farm work based on the observation of nature is generally an individual and subjective sense. However, in the “cooperation of subjectivity,” the subjective sense becomes cooperative among people within a certain range as seasonal idiomatic expressions and agricultural rituals. That simultaneously means the generation of a metaphoric vision such as "mitate" and "nazorae." Thus, as the second basis for the study, the theory of aspects of Wittgenstein is examined, and the issue of context dependency in understanding of meaning is drawn. Based on this viewpoint, this article examines the descriptions in ethnography of Evans-Pritchard, and Michel Leiris, Kunio Yanagita, etc. Through those arguments, this article concludes that the characteristics of the observational method of cultural anthropology and folklore studies are not observations on a clean slate without any foresight, but rather observation conducted in the context as logic of the field, and understanding and descriptions that reflect the modification of aspects. Based on such mode of observation and description, this article closely examines the way of approaching the living world where reality and imagination come and go.

Key words: Methodology of vision, participant observation, way of looking, way of seeing, cooperation of subjectivity, aspect