Dear Izuru Shinmura: Fragment of History of Folklore Studies Seen in Letter of Kunio Yanagita

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This article proposes “Kyoto as a method” in order to challenge a series of biased views such as “Yanagita-centric historical view,” “Tokyo-centric historical view,” and “pure folklore-centric historical view” that exist in conventional “history of folklore studies.” This article examines Izuru Shinmura (1876 - 1967), who was an editor of the national dictionary “Koujien.” Shinmura continued to be a friend of Kunio Yanagita for life, but the meaning of this friendship in the history of studies has not been fully discussed. One of the reasons for this is that no materials that evidence the exchanges between them had been found. However, the author of this article found more than fifty letters from Yanagita to Shinmura during research on materials in Chozan-bunko Collection of Shinmura Izuru Foundation and Shinmura-bunko Collection of Osaka City University. For convenience, the letters may be classified into a) responses for research, b) favors for materials, c) folklore studies as a movement, d) dialectology as a movement, and e) records of friendship. From these letters, the following facts have been confirmed: they exchanged opinions mainly on vocabulary studies from the late Meiji period to their last years; Shinmura obtained permission of reading materials by favor when Yanagita was the chief of the record section of the Secretary to the Cabinet; Yanagita consulted Shinmura who was the director of Kyoto University Library about the purchase of materials; Yanagita asked Shinmura to introduce him to persons concerned of Kyoto University for the grant for “Survey on Mountain Village” (1934 - 1936); for the management of the Society of Japanese Dialects founded in 1940, Yanagita consulted about various things such as study meetings, publication of the journal of the Society, selection of chairman, financing, etc. Such relationship between Yanagita and Shinmura may be considered an “inescapable relationship” since the time at Daiichi High School. However, we should remember that their relationship was based on their basic agreement on language recognition such as strong will toward “living language,” insatiable collecting of materials, and optimism for progress of language. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that their relationship promoted exchange between researchers around Kyoto University and the folklore studies of Yanagita.

Key words: Kunio Yanagita, Izuru Shinmura, Kyoto, language, letter