The Epistemological Critique of Postwar Folkloristics and Potential of the Comparative Research Methods: Experiments in Deciphering Regional Differences in Bon Festival Events and the Significance Thereof

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In view of recent epistemological critique of postwar folkloristics, this paper presents practical examples of application of the comparative research method advocated by Kunio Yanagita from again giving attention to the changes in folklore theory that formed the basis of folkloristics as conceptualized by Yanagita. Firstly, in terms of postwar folkloristics having disregarded changes in folklore theory, we reconsider the main points identified by Michiya Iwamoto, which were established separately from folkloristics as conceptualized by Yanagita. Secondly, we have clarified problems relating to the distribution of the Double Grave System, which was a point of controversy between Iwamoto and Ajio Fukuta. Thirdly, the paper discusses practical examples of Yanagita's comparative research method by looking at Yanagita's views and the effectiveness of his method through specific examples of Bon Festival events, since Iwamoto referred to Yanagita's changes in folklore theory but failed to suggest practical examples of this fundamental comparative research method. The main points of this are as follows. (1) Looking at the extension of the Japanese islands from above, we can identify trends showing that festivals and locations that clearly differentiated the features of three types of spirits (ancestor spirits (such as those worshipped in the home), shinbotoke (the newly dead), and unrelated spirits (such as muen-botoke, the spirits of those who died without known relatives, and gaki-botoke, the 'hungry' spirits of those who sinned while alive)) indoors and outdoors (type 3) are remarkable in the central parts of the Kinki region; that festival types without such differentiation using outdoor stands, etc. (type 2) are popular in central regions such as Chugoku, Shikoku, Tokai and Kanto; and that festival types with features of no differentiation, held in graveyards with stands established for exchanges with the spirits of the deceased and senzo (ancestors) by giving food and drink, etc. (type 1) are seen around the outer edges of Tohoku, Kyushu, and elsewhere. (2) Both from the distribution of modern-day folk customs and information gleaned from ancient document records, it can be assumed that type 1 folklore was seen throughout ancient Japan from the eighth century to ninth century. (3) Type 2 folklore is thought of as being a new form of folklore in which there were changes to ideas regarding spirits, such as the effects of Kyotocentered aristocrat advisers' notions of impurity, etc. (4) From facts regarding the distribution of type 3 and type 2 folklore, it can be assumed that type 3 was preceded by type 2. (5) In this way, by refining the methodology for reading and understanding folklore information as historical information, it is possible to clarify historical transitions of life and culture in three dimensions and in great detail, which literature alone cannot clarify.

Key words: Kunio Yanagita, epistemological critique of postwar folkloristics, changes in folklore theory, comparative research method, bondana (stand for food offered to spirits of ancestors during Bon Festival), three types of spirit