

Current State of Studies in Oral Tradition in Japan

Hiroyuki Araki

The present state of studies in oral tradition in Japan has remained almost unknown to non-Japanese during the thirty years since Richard M. Dorson contributed his article “Folklore Research in Japan” to *Folklore Research Around the World* in 1961. Dorson noted that Kunio Yanagita had published a hundred books and a thousand articles, to which he added (117) “—or more properly, he had permitted his name to be listed as author on those works. The disciples of the great scholar, pursuing their research under his sponsorship, were delighted to see his name on their work.”

Dorson’s statement is not quite accurate. It is true that Yanagita’s disciples sought to place his name on their works; but up to the time of Dorson’s arrival in Tokyo in 1956, Yanagita had published 149 books and 2,327 articles of his own (easily confirmed by supplemental vol. no. 5 of *Teihon Yanagita Kunio Shu* [*Complete Works of Kunio Yanagita*]). Of course, this number includes short articles that appeared in newspapers and monthly magazines; but, excluding those, more than one thousand articles can be described as regular treatises.

Dorson also mentioned that the Japanese Folklore Institute was almost literally the lengthened shadow of that one man, Kunio Yanagita; for he not only founded the whole field of folklore science in Japan and established the Institute in the large library of the house he had given his daughter, but he himself lived next door, in a small, newer, shrubbery-surrounded home. Though the Institute has since been moved to the campus of Seijo University, Yanagita’s lengthened shadow is still influencing us.

When folklorists in Japan begin to write a paper, they usually place the *Complete Works of Kunio Yanagita* within arm’s reach for ready reference. *Shinobu Origuchi’s Complete Works* (thirty-one volumes plus one supplemental volume) will probably also be at hand, though Dorson was not informed of Origuchi and his works. These two great folklore scholars tower high over the history of Japanese folklore research. Nevertheless, their works have gone untranslated into foreign languages, because their style and rhetoric—or rather, their way of *cutting out*

(perceiving) the given world—are completely different from those of Western cultures.

Language is deeply related to the personality of its culture, and Japanese is strikingly different from Western languages. The styles of Yanagita and Origuchi are especially emotion-oriented. This quality leads to esotericism, and even native Japanese scholars find them hard to understand. Both are famous poets, and their ways of grasping objects are intuitive; they pay little attention to the logical reconstruction of their inner world. Through their strange, enchanting force as well as their ambiguity, Yanagita and Origuchi are leading us into productive and significant new phases of folklore. Several decades have passed since Yanagita and Origuchi died, and still the status of Japanese folklore research remains unknown to the world, not because folklore studies in Japan are negligible or insignificant, but because the language barrier is still preventing exchange of information with foreign countries. Nevertheless, folklore research in Japan is prospering, in what may be termed a unicellular way.

Such being the case, in an effort to inform the rest of the world of Japanese folklore research since World War II, I am here going to introduce briefly the achievements in folklore in our country. At present, I will not go into theories of folklore or evaluations of folklore research in Japan. All that can be done in the present format is to let the world know about the publications and activities concerning oral tradition in Japan after 1945.

Since World War II there has been prolific folklore publication, including books, journals, and papers. It is impossible to count or list them exhaustively (I have been collecting assiduously, but what I have is only a drop in the bucket), so in this paper I shall list only dictionaries and books published in various series.

Dictionaries

1. Asakura et al. 1963 Haruhiko Asakura et al., eds. *Shinwa Densetsu Jiten* (*Dictionary of Myth and Legend*). Tokyo: Tokyo-do.
2. Inada et al. 1972 Koji Inada et al., eds. *Nihon Mukashibanashi Jiten* (*Dictionary of Japanese Märchen*). Tokyo: Kobun-do.
3. Inui et al. 1986 Katsumi Inui et al., eds. *Nihon Denki Densetsu Dai Jiten* (*Colossal Dictionary of Japanese Romance and Legend*). Tokyo: Kadokawa-shoten.

4. Minzokugaku Kenkyusho 1951 Minzokugaku Kenkyusho (Folklore Research Institute), ed. *Minzokugaku Jiten (Dictionary of Folklore)*. Tokyo: Tokyo-do.
5. Nagano 1969 Shoichi Nagano, ed. *Setsuwa-Bungaku Jiten (Dictionary of Japanese Folk Literature)*. Tokyo: Tokyo-do.
6. Nomura 1987 Junichi Nomura, ed. *Mukashibanashi-Densetsu Sho Jiten (Little Dictionary of Märchen and Legend)*. Tokyo: Mizumi-shobo.
7. Wakamori et al. 1972 Taro Wakamori et al., eds. *Nihon Minzoku Jiten (Dictionary of Japanese Folklore)*. Tokyo: Kobun-do.

Books Published in Series

Innumerable folktale collections other than the series listed below are published by individual scholars and aficionados, from prefecture to prefecture and from town to town, but I am unable to count or list them all here. All of the series listed below contain explanatory notes by noted folklorists in each volume.

1. Fukuda et al. 1968-89 Akira Fukuda et al., eds. *Mukashi-banashi Kenkyu Shiryo Soshu (A Series of Märchen Research Materials)*, 23 vols. Tokyo: Miyai-shoten.¹
2. Fukuda et al. 1983-90 _____ et al., eds. *Nanto Mukashibanashi Soshu (A Series of Märchen from Southern Islands)*, 10 vols. Kyoto: Dohosha.
3. Gyosei 1978-79 Gyosei, ed. *Nippon no Minwa (Folktales of Japan)*, 12 vols. Tokyo: Gyosei.
4. Inada 1967-83 Koji Inada, ed. *Nihon no Mukashibanashi (Märchen of*

¹ In this series tales are presented as they are told by storytellers, thus preserving the various styles and dialects.

Japan), 30 vols. Tokyo: Nihon Hosho Shuppan Kyokai.²

5. Inada and Ozawa 1975-90 _____ and Toshio Ozawa, eds. *Nihon Mukashibanashi Tsu-kan (Complete Survey of Märchen of Japan)*, 29 vols. plus 3 supplementary vols. Kyoto: Doho-sha.³
6. Iwasaki Bijutsu-sha 1965-72 Iwasaki Bijutsu-sha, ed. *Minzoku Mingei Sosho (A Series on Folklore and Folk Art)*, 80 vols. Tokyo: Iwasaki Bijutsu-sha.⁴
7. Iwasaki Bijutsu-sha 1974-87 _____, ed. *Zenkoku Mukashibanashi Shiryo Shusei (All-Japan Compilation of Märchen)*, 40 vols. Tokyo: Iwasaki Bijutsu-sha.⁵
8. Miyamoto 1957-90 Tsuneichi Miyamoto, ed. *Nihon no Minwa (Folktales of*

² This series was issued by the publishing department of the N. H. K. (Japan Broadcasting Association), a semi-governmental broadcasting organization.

³ This series aims at the synchronic collection of tales in a given area. Japan is divided into twenty-six districts and all the tales published in a given district are comprehensively surveyed. Tales are arranged according to Seki's Type Index (*Nihon Mukashibanashi Taisei*, 1978). For each tale type, one representative is presented as an example, followed by general outlines of all versions in the district. Each volume ranges from 600 to 1,200 pages.

The twenty-fifth volume, for example, includes all the tales in Kagoshima Prefecture published up to 1979, giving 308 types of ordinary tales, 230 types of jests, and 83 types of animal tales—621 tale types altogether, plus résumés of all the versions that have been published. The first tale type given in this volume is "Fate foretold as punishment," AT930. The sample tale is taken from Arima 1975, and seventeen outlined versions are drawn from various publications. The next tale is "The pre-destined wife," from Mizuno 1976, and sixteen outlines from various sources are provided. The volume contains 883 pages of tales and 61 pages of explanatory notes and index. Ninety-nine sources (books, journals, and so on) were used in compiling this volume.

⁴ This series contains a collection of folktales not only from Japan, but also from around the world.

⁵ In this series, tales are given as told by storytellers.

Japan), 65 vols. Tokyo: Mirai-sha.⁶

9. Ofu-sha 1967-76 Ofu-sha, ed. *Mukashibanashi Shirizu (Märchen Series)*, 20 vols. Tokyo: Ofu-sha.

Other Books

Translations from foreign publications also flourish. Here again I will list only translations published in various series. Besides the following, many translations in book form have been published since 1945. It is impossible to enumerate them here, but the total would certainly extend into the hundreds.

1. Araki et al. 1975-89 Hiroyuki Araki et al., eds. *Sekai Minkan Bungei So-sho (A Series of Folk Narratives of the World)*, 16 vols. Tokyo: Miyai-shoten.⁷
2. Araki et al.
1982-90 _____ et al., eds. *Sekai-no Mukashibanashi (Märchen of the World)*, 28 vols. Tokyo: Komine-shoten.⁸
3. Heibon-sha 1952-90 Heibon-sha, ed. *Toyo Bunko (Library of the Orient)*, 520 vols. Tokyo: Heibon-sha.⁹

⁶ Publication of this series began under the leadership of the late Tsuneichi Miyamoto, a leading folklorist succeeding Kunio Yanagita and Shinobu Origuchi. His selected works, in twenty-five volumes, are published by Mirai-sha.

⁷ Chinese, Spanish, Thai, Russian, Formosan, Austrian, Mongolian, Argentine, Icelandic, Chinese (other peoples), Korean, Finnish, Indonesian, Hungarian, and Danish-German.

⁸ Greek, Spanish-Portuguese, Austrian, Scandinavian, African, Korean, British, Italian, French, African (2), Russian, Chinese, Indian, Turkish, Irish-Scottish, Indonesian, Central and South American, East European, German, Formosan, Swiss, Philippine, Thai, and Australian.

⁹ In this series, translations of Oriental tales including *Sukasaptati*, *Textus ornatior*, *Nasreddian Hoca*, and others fill more than twenty volumes.

4. Miyamoto et al.
1958-63 Tsuneichi Miyamoto et al., eds. *Sekai no Minwa (Folktales of the World)*, 12 vols. Tokyo: Mirai-sha.¹⁰
5. Ozawa 1976-79 Toshio Ozawa, ed. *Sekai no Minwa (Folktales of the World)*, 25 vols. Tokyo: Gyosei.¹¹
6. Seki et al. 1953-55 Keigo Seki et al., eds. *Sekai Minwa Zenshu (Collection of World Folktales)*, 10 vols. Tokyo: Kawate-shobo.
7. Seki, Araki, and Yamashita 1978-80 _____, Hiroyuki Araki, and K. Yamashita, eds. *Ajia no Minwa (Folktales from Asia)*, 12 vols. Tokyo: Dai-Nihon Bijutsu.¹²
8. Yamamuro 1976-77 Shizuka Yamamuro, ed. *Sekai Mukashibanashi Shu (Collection of World Märchen)*, 10 vols. Tokyo: Shakai Shiso-sha.¹³

So far, I have discussed the present state of folklore research in Japan. By folklore, I have chiefly meant the study of Märchen. Here, let me shift the focus to legends, again providing a list of collections in various series.

¹⁰ African, Scandinavian, Indonesian, Russian, Czechoslovakian, Mongolian, Korean, Chinese, etc.

¹¹ German-Swiss, South European, North European, East European (2 vols.), British, African, Near Eastern, Asian (2 vols.), North American, South American, Mediterranean, Lorraine, Irish, Albanian, Kabir, Israeli, Punjab, Caucasian, Mongolian, Indonesian, Papua-New Guinean, Eskimo.

¹² Burmese, Cheju Island, Northern Tribes (2 vols.), Ceylon, Micronesian, Philippine, Indian, Chinese, Papuan, Vietnamese, Panchatantra. We have already several translations of Panchatantra, but the “Panchatantra” in this series is a direct translation from the “textus simplicior” by the famous Sanskrit scholar, Otoya Tanaka, and his disciple, Katsuhiko Kamimura. “Micronesian Folktales” is a translation from the tales collected by Roger E. Mitchell, University of Wisconsin.

Sekai no Minwa and *Ajia no Minwa* were both awarded the Nihon Honyaku Shuppan Bunka-Sho (Prize for Publications Translated into Japanese) in 1979 and in 1981.

¹³ British, German-Swiss, Scandinavian, French-South European, East European, Soviet, Indian, Chinese, African, American-Oceanian.

1. Araki et al. 1982-90 Hiroyuki Araki et al., eds. *Nihon Densetsu Taikei (Complete Survey of Japanese Legends)*, 15 vols. plus 2 supplemental vols. Tokyo: Mizuumi-shobo.¹⁴
2. Daiichi Hoki
1970-74 Daiichi Hoki, ed. *Densetsu Shiriizu (Series of Legends)*, 10 vols. Tokyo: Daiichi Hoki.
3. Kadokawa-shoten
1975-77 Kadakowa-shoten, ed. *Nihon-no-Densetsu (Legends of Japan)*, 24 vols. Tokyo: Kadokawa-shoten.
4. Kawade-shobo
1951-56 Kawade-shobo, ed. *Nihon Minzoku Densetsu Zenshu (A Collection of Ethnic Legends of Japanese)*, 10 vols. Tokyo: Kawade-shobo.
5. Shogakkan 1983-85 Shogakkan, ed. *Furusato Densetsu no Tabi (Trips Seeking*

¹⁴ I would like to go into detail about this series, because I have been so involved with helping to edit it. In 1979 we had the first editorial meeting in Tokyo. We divided the whole of Japan into fifteen areas, three of which were allotted to each editor, who were then supposed to select authors—usually two to four—who were gathering legends from publications, old and new, of the given area, or sometimes nationwide. These authors were requested to sort out and classify the materials they gathered. The editors were to supervise this classification. Editorial meetings were held once or twice a year.

Each volume gives representative tales for respective tale-types and tries to present all the possible versions that the authors could gather. Versions from old documents and literary materials were widely sought out. The editorial motto was to be “all-inclusive.” Many difficulties lay in wait: the problem of classification, validity of versions, reading the cursive characters written in old documents, and so on. After ten long years we have finally published fifteen main volumes and two supplemental volumes. The second supplemental volume contains the index and a list of collections of legends and other publications (4,118 books, periodicals, and journals) that the compilers of each volume used. Also included is a list of all the publications dealing with legends for which we have searched throughout the whole nation, amounting to 234 publications in book form and 2,101 papers and theses. This collection, together with each of the editors, has been given the Mainichi Prize, one of the most prestigious prizes for publishers and authors.

Legends of Your Provinces), 13 vols. Tokyo: Shogakkan.¹⁵

Next, I will give a listing of folklore societies:

1. Nihon Minzoku Gakkai (Folklore Society of Japan)¹⁶
2. Nihon Kosho Bungei Gakkai (Society for Folk Narrative Research of Japan)¹⁷
3. Setsuwa-Densho Gakkai (Society for Folk Narratives and Tradition)¹⁸

¹⁵ In each volume in this series a representative legend from each province is featured, supplemented with color photographs, maps, and authoritative explanatory articles by eminent folklorists.

¹⁶ This is the largest society of folklore in Japan with about 2,300 members; the current president is Junichi Nomura. It was founded by Kunio Yanagita in 1951.

¹⁷ This society was founded in 1977, with Keigo Seki elected as the first president. The members of the executive board at that time were Jingoro Usada, Taryo Obayashi, Koji Naoe, Junichi Nomura, Kinichi Yamashita, Hiroyuki Araki, and others. Current membership is approximately 400. Every year the Society publishes *Kosho Bungei Kenkyu (Journal of Folk Narrative Research)*. In 1987, the journal published a special issue commemorating the decennial of the foundation of the Society. Part of the content is as follows (according to order of appearance): “Folklore and the Modern Society,” by Hiroyuki Araki; “Human-Animal Relationship in the Folktale: The Case of Mosi Tales,” by Junzo Kawada; “A Study of the Songs of Shishi Dance,” by Yasuji Honda; “Swan Maiden and Resurrected Maiden,” by Taryo Obayashi; “‘Nonverbal Communication’ in Folktale,” by Fumito Takagi; and “How to Call to the Mind of a Storyteller,” by Junichi Nomura.

¹⁸ This society was founded in 1982 through the sponsorship of Ristsumeikan University and Doshisha University in Kyoto in order to promote the particular scholarship in Kyoto, as distinguished from that of Tokyo. Current membership is approximately 350. The society annually publishes a two-hundred-plus page research report in book form, as follows: *Setsuwa Densho No Nippon, Asia, Sekai (Folk Narrative and Tradition of Japan, Asia, and the World)* (1983); *Setsuwa-to Rekishi (Folk Narrative and History)* (1984); *Setsuwa-to Girei (Folk Narrative and Ritual)* (1985); *Setsuwa-to Shiso Shakai (Folk Narrative and Thought in Society)* (1986-87); *Setsuwa-no Shigen Henyo (Origin and Transition of Folk Narratives)*.

4. Mukashibanashi Gakkai (Society for Märchen Research)¹⁹

There are some other societies, such as Setsuwa Bungakkai (Society for Folk Literature) and Densho Bungakkai (Society for Folk Tradition), and local societies exist in various prefectures and cities; I am informed of very few of them.

Lastly, I have the sad duty of reporting the death in 1990 of Dr. Keigo Seki, the father of Märchen research in Japan, at the age of ninety. In 1958 he compiled *Nihon Mukashibanashi Shusei (Type Index of Japanese Märchen)*, 6 vols., which was revised and enlarged into *Nihon Mukashibanashi Taisei (Enlarged Type Index of Japanese Märchen)*, 12 vols. in 1978. His selected works, 9 volumes, were published by Doho-sha in 1980-81. These are entitled *Märchen and Society* (vol. 1); *History of Märchen* (vol. 2); *Methodology of Märchen and Legend* (vol. 3); *Comparative Study of Japanese Märchen* (vol. 4); *Structure of Märchen* (vol. 5); *Prologue to Comparative Research* (vol. 6); *History of Folk Study* (vol. 7); *Methodology of Folklore* (vol. 8); and *Ethnology and Folklore* (vol. 9).

Kita-Kyushu

References

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Arima 1975 | Hideko Arima. <i>Tenashi-museme (Märchen without Hands)</i> . Tokyo: Ofu-sha. |
| Dorson 1961 | Richard M. Dorson. <i>Folklore Research Around the World</i> . Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp. 115-26. |
| Miyamoto 1970-77 | Tsuneichi Miyamoto. <i>Miyamoto Tsuneichi Chosaku-Shu (Selected Works of Tsuneichi Miyamoto)</i> , 25 vols. Tokyo: |

¹⁹ This society was founded in 1988 as successor to Mukashibanashi Kenkyu Konwakai (Gathering for the Research of Märchen), which had a history of more than twenty years. The current president is Takehiko Ohshima; membership is approximately 200. Every year the society publishes *Mukashibanashi Kenkyu-to Shiryō (Research and Data on Märchen)* in book form, with such subtitles as *Mukashibanashi-to Kyoiku (Märchen and Education)*; *Mukashibanashi-to Yokai (Märchen and Monsters)*; *Mukashibanashi-to Chiiki-sei (Märchen and Regionalism)*; *Mukashibanashi-to Dobutsu (Märchen and Animals)*; and so on.

Mirai-sha.

- Mizuno 1976 Osamu Mizuno. *Tokuno-shima Minwa (Folktales of Tokuno-shima)*. Fukuoka: Nishi-Nihon Shibun-sha.
- Nagano 1969 Shoichi Nagano, ed. *Setsuwa-Bungaku Jiten (Dictionary of Folk Literature)*. Tokyo: Tokyo-do.
- Origuchi 1965-1968 Shinobu Origuchi. *Origuchi Shinobu Zenshu (Complete Works of Shinobu Origuchi)*. Tokyo: Chuo Koron-sha.
- Osumi 1986 Kazuo Osumi. *Nihon Kaku-Densho Jinmei Jiten (Dictionary of Fictional Names in the Japanese Tradition)*. Tokyo: Heibon-sha.
- Seki 1980-81 _____, ed. *Seki Keigo Chosaku Shu (Selected Works of Keigo Seiki)*, 9 vols. Kyoto: Doho-sha.