

Yanagita Kunio: An Interpretive Study

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Interest in the life and work of Yanagita Kunio has grown steadily in recent years in Japan. It is noteworthy, for example, that some leaders of the student movements protesting against the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in 1960 and again in 1970 became disenchanted with Marxist ideas of social change and turned to the study of Yanagita. A similar shift in orientation occurred at the beginning of the Shōwa period (1926-), but at that time government oppression of Marxism was the chief factor. By contrast, the chief factor in the postwar student leaders' turn to Yanagita, if occasioned by reflection on the breakdown of their movements, was their own free will.

Paul Tillich once maintained that one of the greatest issues in modern life is the religious encounter with Marxism. The focus of Yanagita's research is on the faith of the Japanese people, and the turn from Marxism to Yanagita would seem to suggest a tacit refutation, or at least modification, of Tillich's view. From this perspective alone the motivations and methods of Yanagita's research constitute a study theme of considerable importance.

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Family. Yanagita Kunio was born in 1875 in a small village in the western part of Japan. His father, Matsuoka Yakusai, was a physician who, like many doctors of his day, studied the Chinese classics and the National Learning of Hirata Atsutane in addition to medical science. After the Meiji Restoration, Yakusai relinquished his medical practice and

became a Shinto priest.

Kunio was the fifth of eight children. (When he married, he took the family name of his wife, Yanagita Taka.) Three died in childhood. Of the surviving four apart from Kunio, the two older brothers became doctors, one of whom was also a talented poet and close friend of the novelist Mori Ōgai. His next younger brother became a naval man who in his later years took an interest in linguistics and wrote several books about various South Pacific island peoples. His youngest brother was a painter.

As his brothers' careers show, Yanagita's home placed great value not only on science but also on understanding the classics, both Japanese and Chinese. The home breathed an atmosphere of artistic sensitivity, and the art of poetry, especially the *waka* form, was cultivated. This home environment greatly influenced the formation of Yanagita's character and later played a significant role in his attitude toward research and methodology.

Schooling. Yanagita lived with his parents until the age of thirteen, by which time he had already read in desultory fashion a number of Japanese and Chinese classics that he borrowed from a wealthy farmer. At the age of thirteen he was placed under the care of his two older brothers who were then living on the outskirts of Tokyo. He entered junior high school, but for some reason changed from school to school. This prevented his leading an ordinary student life, but even so he spent great blocs of time reading at an astounding pace not only the Chinese and Japanese classics but also modern literature, both Japanese and Western.

After graduating from Dai'ichi Kōtōgakkō, one of the most prestigious of the prewar high schools, he continued his studies at Tokyo Imperial University. Through his next older brother, Michiyasu, Yanagita had become acquainted,

even as a high school student, with a number of literary figures. While a university student, he started writing himself, both poetry and prose. Several of his works appeared in *Bungakkai*, which in the Japan of that day occupied a place similar to that of the *Saturday review of literature* in the U.S. Suffused with romanticism and exuding the aroma of medieval Japanese literature (not to mention a Wordsworth-like naturalism), Yanagita's writings treated mainly of love, death, and nature (Nakamura 1974, pp. 115-116; Hashikawa 1973, p. 262).

Western literature. Yanagita was probably more widely read in Western literature than any Japanese writer of his day. Masamune Hakuchō, a novelist, playwright, and literary critic just a few years younger than Yanagita, wrote in a subsequent reminiscence that it was Yanagita, then barely out of university, who had advised him to read Daudet, Maupassant, and others. According to Masamune, Yanagita was one of the founders of the Ibsen Association of Japan (1966, p. 410). He took particular interest in the sufferings and struggles of the peoples of northern Europe as they converted from their native faith to Christianity—a situation described in Ibsen's *Viking* (Yanagita 1964, vol. 31, pp. 347-348).

Another Western author who attracted Yanagita was Anatole France. Fascinated by ethnology, France was on friendly terms with James Frazer and wrote a preface to the French edition of his *Golden bough*. Yanagita, who read and reread France's complete works both in English and in French, showed interest in this author because he described the pre-Christian culture that still survived in western Europe (Yanagita 1964, vol. 25, p. 253). For the same reason he was attracted to Heinrich Heine's *Götter in Exil* (Yanagita 1962, vol. 7, p. 244). Only later, as he began to study folklore, did Yanagita read the works of

Edward Burnett Tylor, James Frazer, and other ethnologists (Yanagita 1964, vol. 25, pp. 232-247).

Yanagita's reading of Western literature during his formative years had considerable influence on his subsequent life and work. Many Meiji period writers, including his friends Shimazaki Tōson and Kunikida Doppo, were inwardly drawn to Christianity, but Yanagita responded to it a bit differently. He familiarized himself with Western culture as it came to him through Western literature, but this reading also made him aware of the continuing existence of non-Christian culture in western Europe. He recognized, therefore, that Western culture and Christian culture were not necessarily identical.

In his autobiography Yanagita wrote that only once in his life did he find himself attracted to Christianity. This happened during his university years. Far from home and lonesome, he began to attend a church near his boarding house and was favorably impressed by the character of a Canadian missionary then serving that church (Yanagita 1964, suppl. vol. 3, p. 448). His motivation for contact with Christianity, the step he took, and attraction he experienced paralleled the experiences of many fellow students who, while in the cities, turned to Christian churches. Yanagita, however, had fashioned a strong sense of identity with traditional Japanese cultural values and therefore did not become a believer despite his willingness to receive influences from Western culture. As he put it: "The life pattern of Japanese Christians did not suit mine. The Christians in Tokyo at that time were a westernized and new type of people" (1975, p. 153).

National Learning. Yanagita's identification with traditional Japanese values derived mainly from the National Learning influence he received through his father. This holds true even though he later criticized Hirata Atsutane

for treating only the classics as important and neglecting the real faith of the Japanese people (Yanagita 1962, vol. 10, p. 438). From childhood his father taught him, he said, that *totsu kuni buri* ("foreign ways," represented by Confucianism and Buddhism) and *nochi no yo buri* ("newfangled affectations," meaning ways of thinking and behaving that entered Japan after the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth century) were always to be corrected from a perspective rooted in traditional Japanese values. Distinguishing indigenous from imported values, he attached greater priority to the former. In this sense his National Learning studies appear to have permeated, however unconsciously, Yanagita's entire outlook (Yanagita 1962, vol. 10, p. 440).

OBJECT AND METHOD OF YANAGITA'S WORK

Science as humanizing knowledge. While a university student, Yanagita majored in agricultural administration. This choice was motivated not by ivory tower interests but by a desire to help Japanese people, the majority of whom were farmers, to overcome their poverty and attendant sufferings (Yanagita 1964, vol. 25, p. 327). Even after he switched from agricultural administration studies to folklore studies, the motivation remained constant.

Nakamura Akira, in an essay on Yanagita's ideas, emphasizes the importance of searching out his underlying intention.

It is impossible to gain a thorough understanding of Yanagita's folklore studies if one touches only on their externals. It is necessary to consider them from within, to enter deeply into his mind and see what he intended when he posed problems and thought about them as he did (1974, pp. 3-4).

Nakamura's perception is acute, for a grasp of the motivation guiding Yanagita's research is essential to comprehending its character. Contrasting Yanagita with Western scholars in general, Tsurumi Kazuko observes that whereas Western

scholars seek to remain "value-neutral" in order to ensure theoretical objectivity, Yanagita selected his field of study in order to realize a clearly conceived and highly valued purpose (1974, p. 148 and 1975, pp. 224-225). Opposing compartmentalization into pure and applied science, Yanagita wrote:

Science should be integrated. It should ultimately contribute to the completion of humanity. For each science to be isolated in its own sphere is nothing but a temporary division of labor. Many of today's scholars forget this (1964, vol. 25, p. 335).

When he turned to the study of folklore, Yanagita's motivation became, if anything, even stronger and more intense. His main purpose when studying agricultural administration had been social reform. His main purpose in studying folklore was to provide people with guidance that would enable them to see how they themselves could overcome their poverty and related sufferings.

This desire to help poor and suffering people sprang from a sympathy for them that went back to his impressionable childhood years. He had lived through a period of famine when young, and though he himself did not go hungry, he saw many people suffering from lack of food. In his autobiography he recalls hearing about mothers who sought out his older brother, a doctor, beseeching him to fill out death certificates for children they had killed rather than let them die slowly and painfully of starvation. He also tells of seeing a votive picture (*ema*) at a chapel to Jizō, the bodhisattva with a special fondness for children. The picture showed a mother wearing a headband (here a symbol of extreme and sacrificial action) in the act of killing her newborn baby; it also showed her shadow, this time with ogre-like horns, and beside her the figure of the weeping Jizō. This childhood recollection was so vivid that years

later he wrote, "I still remember that I shivered with fear" (1964, suppl. vol. 3, p. 21).

Views on agricultural administration. After graduating from university, Yanagita first worked at the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. During the decade following 1901, he wrote thirteen important papers having to do with his area of responsibility, agricultural administration. His opinions on farmers' unions and on cash payment of farm rents have been assessed as very advanced for that day (Tōhata 1961, p. 44).

In the wake of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) Japanese government leaders adopted the concept of physiocracy. They placed special value on an agricultural plan that made rice cultivation the central national industry and a military plan that regarded the farm villages as the source of the nation's defenders. Yanagita's writings on agricultural administration did not even touch on these physiocratic tendencies. He considered improvement in the life of sharecroppers and small-scale farmers as the goal of agricultural administration. The means he thought essential to attaining this goal was not Ninomiya Sontoku's still powerful moralism, but scientific observation and analysis of society—an idea he made the foundation of his many studies (Hashikawa 1973, pp. 277-279).

It is not clear why, during these years as a bureaucrat, Yanagita abandoned studies oriented to agricultural administration and turned to the study of folklore. Tōhata may be right in saying that he did so because his ideas were too advanced to win support (1961, p. 44); it also appears that he was disappointed because agricultural administration studies and politics in general were undertaken primarily to serve the interests of particular parties or factions (Yanagita 1975, pp. 150-151). Nonetheless, as long as he was a bureaucrat, he performed his role well, even becoming chief

secretary of the Upper House. The motivation for his studies was sympathy for suffering commoners, whose lot he sought to ameliorate, but he also remained aware of the bureaucratic elite, many of whom became peers (Nakamura 1974, p. 153).

Conception of history. In his folklore studies, Yanagita took as his object Japanese life as a whole: the way of thinking and the feelings of the Japanese people. He studied popular tradition, the past in the present of the Japanese people, in order to help them know themselves, overcome their difficulties, and live more happily. In this sense, according to Hashikawa, his folklore study can be called a historical science (1973, p. 313).

With this intention, Yanagita tried to make clear the true nature of the Japanese people, both in the past and in the present. For him, however, past and present are continuous. Most Western conceptions of history, as far as economic structures are concerned, involve stages of development. They tend to represent these stages as discontinuous, as a series of breakthroughs. The same holds true of spiritual structures. An ideal pattern is conceived such that for each new stage of history, a new spiritual structure appears, and whatever preceded it is no longer worthy of attention.

Yanagita's conception of history, on the other hand, sets value on continuity. He thinks that in Japan, with regard both to socioeconomic and to spiritual structures, the divisions between prehistoric, ancient, medieval, and modern ages are not clear. Thus at the present time the spiritual structures and customs of these several stages coexist as in a mosaic. Contrasting this notion of layered unity with the Western notion of disparate stages, Tsurumi characterizes Yanagita's conception of history as an "icicle model" (1974, p. 150 and 1975, pp. 227-228; cf. Ishida 1963, p. 38).

The "common man". For Yanagita the "common man" (*jōmin*) is the subject who assures the continuity of history. His folklore studies focus, therefore, on the common man.

The Japanese word *jōmin* was coined by Yanagita. Its first part, *jō*, means "continuing"; its second part, *min*, means "people." Another word with almost the same meaning is *heimin* or "commoners."¹ Until he wrote *Kyōdo seikatsu no kenkyū hō* [A method of studying local life] during the years 1931–33, Yanagita used the term *heimin*. Later he makes extensive use of the term *jōmin* (Gotō 1972, p. 49). One reason he changed from *heimin* to *jōmin* is that the former, in his view, had taken on socialist overtones on the one hand and militaristic overtones on the other. Neither suited his purpose, so he created the word *jōmin* to mean the common people, including illiterates, who stood at the center of his studies.

In protest against the fact that historians up until his time had neglected the common man, Yanagita made a prodigious effort to restore the balance. His focus on the common man constitutes the very core of his work. In his *Kyōdoshi ron* [A study of local chronicles] he criticizes the historians and lays out his own position.

I think that no history of the common man has ever been written in Japan. A chronicle, in Japan as elsewhere, is a record of certain incidents. The histories written up to now are largely collections of incidents concerning the ruling class and a number of heroes. It is of course true that politics and wars are important things in history and that all people have been influenced by them. But to ascertain the feelings of the people who participated in such wars

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1. The pre-Meiji system of four social classes—military, agricultural, artisan, and mercantile—was reorganized by the Meiji government into two classes: the nobility and the commoners. *Heimin* was first of all, then, a legal term, but later on, during the Taishō period movement for democratic rights, it came into use as a political term.

merely by reading articles about what happened is like trying to understand someone's feelings through a camera....

In the *Ehon taikōki* [An illustrated biography of Toyotomi Hideyoshi], along with terms for warlords and horses there often occurs the sign. This signifies the helmet of the foot soldier. Yet even though identified by this lowly term, some of these men had their own families, worked as town headmen, studied, looked after people, and in the modern period became prefectural representatives. Nonetheless, here they are treated coldly.... This kind of mistake is not limited to the author of this picture book. It also comes out in the concept of the *tami* ("common people") as used by historians (1964, vol. 25, pp. 9-10).

Scope of Yanagita's research. Transferring from the agricultural administration section to the legislative bureau, Yanagita found himself with plenty of leisure time which he used to travel around the country. He was able to observe in person nearly all the villages of Japan and the people living there (Yanagita 1975, p. 150).

His research covers the entire scope of the common man's life, his behavior and feelings. He classifies the popular traditions of the common man into three categories: (1) tangible culture, which includes housing, clothes, food, the way of acquiring the materials needed for living, transportation, labor, the village and the household, relatives, marriage, birth, calamities, funerals, annual events, festivals, dances, games, children's play, etc.; (2) linguistic arts, which include the process by which new words and phrases are created, proverbs, riddles, incantations, songs, narratives, old stories, legends, etc.; and (3) mental phenomena, which include knowledge of the art of living and an understanding of the purpose of life (Hashikawa 1973, p. 305). Among these three, he found the third the most important. Accordingly, the study of faith and the mind or spiritual orientation of the common man and his life constituted

the central theme of his study. For Yanagita, folklore study ultimately meant study of the history of faith (1962, vol. 10, p. 326). The research and reflection that followed led to an enormous mass of books and articles, the definitive collection of which comprises thirty-six volumes.

From a historian's point of view, Ienaga Saburō classifies Yanagita's research into seven categories: (1) a history of Shintoism or of Japanese religion in general, (2) a history of Japanese literature, (3) a history of Japanese manners and customs, (4) a history of the Japanese language, (5) a history of the family system, (6) a history of thought, and (7) a history of architecture (1973, pp. 144-145). This breakdown enables one to gain a clear idea of the scope of Yanagita's research.

Materials he selected for study. Yanagita's faith in the common man's ability to create history is clearly shown in his selection of study materials. He rejected the attitude of historians who find their materials in literary documents. Instead, he chose the popular traditions of the illiterate common people as the prime source.

Our aim is to broaden our knowledge of human life by observing the old ways of life, the ways of working and thinking, preserved among the people, that is, outside the intellectual classes, and by means other than the written word (1964, vol. 25, p. 343).

Here we find that the "icicle model" of history becomes the premise for his method of study.

The same outlook is evident in his assertions concerning the materials to be examined when studying the Japanese people's faith. He rejects the idea that the history of folklore and the history of Shinto are to be equated. He distinguishes between Shinto as the indigenous faith (*koyū shinkō*) of Japan, preserved by the common people from prehistoric

times to the present, and the Shinto represented by Shinto theologians and historians. The latter, he maintains, is a history of doctrines created by intellectuals; it differs from the history of the indigenous faith that informs the common man (1962, vol. 10, pp. 332–333). Yanagita placed a high value on Motoori Norinaga's view of *kokugaku* ("national learning"), but criticized him for his selection of materials, saying, "It is regrettable that he spent his whole life studying only the classics" (1964, vol. 25, p. 301). Yanagita's determination to make the popular traditions of the common man the material of his study amounts to a strong criticism against so-called intellectual historians and scholars of religion who rely solely on written materials and neglect the common man.

Yanagita's criticism of ethnology proceeds from the same kind of problem consciousness. He treats of the relationship between his own conception of folklore study and ethnology in *Minkan denshō ron* [A study of popular traditions]. This work gives the clearest presentation of his methodology. Here he draws a sharp distinction between ethnology and folklore study. Ethnology, he avers, is the study of life among peoples foreign to the ethnologist; folklore study has to do with the way of life among the researcher's own people. Both disciplines observe the same facts and employ the same methods, but the latter has the advantage that it can penetrate into the inner territory of mental phenomena, into the "something behind the facts" (see Hashikawa 1973, p. 303).

In more specific terms Yanagita criticized the ethnology of his day as follows:

In past times ethnological documents were long a tribute offered by faithful Christian missionaries. They went to the trouble of learning the native people's languages and described in considerable detail the feelings and intellectual faculties of the people.... There was, however, one pro-

blem: their preconceptions. These missionaries believed firmly in the absoluteness of their own religion. Moreover, they thought that the culture of each nation had to be located somewhere in an evolutionary series Such ideas exercised an influence on the teaching they gave, resulting in an unnatural and unfortunate interference in people's lives and causing the weak to suffer (1964, vol. 25, p. 225).

In his eyes such ethnology may have lacked seriousness in its research motivation and placed too low a value on the people and culture of other nations.

Value of comparative studies. Although Yanagita pointed out what he regarded as weaknesses in ethnology and religious studies, his own folklore study was not the narrow or nationalistic kind that would confine itself to one nation or assert that the way of life of any single nation was absolute. On the contrary, he affirmed the value of comparative studies and regarded his study of folklore as preparation for this goal.

The comparative study of folklore still has a long way to go. We think of this comparative study as the final stage of human self-understanding and wait impatiently for the day it will come to maturity (1964, vol. 30, p. 70).

We hope and believe that sometime the day will come when the past of many nations that lack documentary records will be clarified through our method of study, and that distinctions between "our culture" and "theirs" will disappear as all cultures come to stand on an equal footing in a unitary study of world folklore (1964, vol. 25, p. 296).

He insisted that anthropology or the comparative study of folklore should be a science motivated by the desire for self-understanding. Criticizing Western ethnology for adopting natural science and the theory of evolution as dogmas, Yanagita was of the opinion that in order to bring anthro-

pology as a comparative discipline to completion, it was first necessary for the scholars of particular nations to make a thorough study of the folklore of their own nations. He opposed facile universalization and concentrated his energies on elucidating the real faith, the mind, and the feelings of the Japanese people through the study of Japanese folklore. Indeed, he seems to have believed that it was precisely through study of the particular that he could hope to attain the universal—a methodology that was almost the reverse of Western ethnology insofar as it started from a universal concept of man and history and then tried to find proofs for such a conception in the cultures of different nations.

Inductive-empirical method. Yanagita's criticism of dogma-based universalizations in the evolutionary study of folklore derives from his critical attitude toward use of the deductive method in scientific research. He insisted on the empirical and inductive method, deeming it essential to any discipline that hoped to become a real science.

A science should reach inferences that follow naturally from application of the inductive method to a broad range of reliable facts.... The reason social science is taken rather lightly in Japan is that those who style themselves social scientists are too often unscientific (1964, vol. 25, p. 325).

His argument in favor of the inductive method as over against the deductive related to the contemporary situation in the Japanese academic world. A fierce debate was then going on about social reforms. Rightists and leftists were at each others' throats, and the social sciences in particular were under the influence of Marxism. Social scientists of this orientation weighed all social reform ideas deductively in accordance with their notions of revolutionary theory. The rightists, in their own way, were equally deductive. They held to the idea of the absoluteness of the Japanese

spirit and judged everything from that point of view. Yanagita criticized both. Against the rightists he contended that it was unscientific to assert the importance of everything Japanese without trying to investigate what the true Japanese spirit is. Against the leftists he maintained that it was unscientific to investigate old ways "with a certain plan or conviction already in mind" (1964, vol. 25, p. 325).

Scholars, he insisted, should observe and study the facts with an "honest mind." What he meant by an honest mind appears similar to what Motoori meant by the term *magokoro* or "sincere heart." Motoori says: "In order to understand the human Way (*michi*) through study, one should first of all get to the bottom of the Chinese spirit (*kara gokoro*).... Fundamentally, the human way cannot be understood by study but only by the original 'sincere heart' which itself is the human way" (Motoori 1968, vol. 1, p. 47). This outlook, together with the situation of the Japanese academic world in those turbulent days, appears to have been decisive in leading Yanagita to espouse a thoroughly inductive method.

Yanagita and ancestor worship. In studying Japanese religion Yanagita by no means forgot his inductive and empirical methodology. As mentioned above, his folklore research aims at the deepest levels of the human spirit, so it naturally took shape as a kind of sociology of religion. At the conclusion of his study of religious feelings, festivals, ballads, and other phenomena, he offers it as his conclusion that the primitive pattern of the Japanese common man's religion is ancestor worship, or more precisely, worship of the ancestral spirits. Viewed in terms of its results, Yanagita's study of Japanese religion is in fact a study of Japanese society as related to ancestor worship. Unlike Motoori Norinaga or Origuchi Shinobu, however, Yanagita did not himself believe in ancestor worship or make it his

own religion. Moreover, he neither absolutized nor universalized it. His opinion was that ancestor worship, as the indigenous faith of the common people of Japan, was bound to seem most natural to them, and he went on to justify this view by asserting that ancestor worship gives the Japanese common man a sense of well-being. If it is permissible to distinguish between research method, on the one hand, and assessment of results, on the other, it would appear that Yanagita's method remained strictly empirical and inductive, while his evaluation was at once historical and pragmatic.

As for himself, Yanagita had contacts with Christianity, Buddhism (especially Zen), and of course with Shinto, but among them all he felt most closely drawn to the merciful bodhisattva Kannon. He put it thus: "Once I hear that a temple is dedicated to Kannon, I feel that I want to go inside" (1975, p. 154). Sako Jun'ichirō, a Christian author of the present day for whom Yanagita was a personal friend, wrote about him saying, "I have never in my life met a man who thought as seriously as Yanagita about the soul after death" (1969, p. 8). It appears, then, that his intense interest in the soul after death was more than scholarly; it was existential.

The monograph *Senzo no hanashi* [About our ancestors], a renowned result of his study of Japanese religiosity, was written in response to the urgent question of what would happen to the souls of the many young people who died in World War II. It was in April and May 1945, not long before the end of the war and in the midst of daily air raids, that Yanagita wrote this work. Surmising that the war would soon be over and thinking about the many young men lying on battlefields in foreign countries, he declared, "This time of all times we must devise a system in society in accord with the nature of our people, something reliable, which will not be sacrificed through a reaction" (1962, vol. 10, pp. 151-152; Eng. transl., 1970, p. 20). With this intention,

he tried to clarify Japanese religious sensibilities in order to find a clue that would help answer the question of what the new, postwar society should be like.

For Yanagita ancestor worship, the core of the religion of the common people, is a natural and reasonable thing inasmuch as it has links both with family and with community. He insists, however, that his idea of ancestor worship does not harmonize with that of "the state as a family" (*kazoku kokka*), the official ideology of the Meiji and wartime Shōwa governments. In his view one of the chief characteristics of Japanese religiosity is that the souls of the dead, instead of going to the Pure Land or returning to nothingness, remain in Japan, especially in the mountains near their village communities. From there they watch over their descendants, who in turn communicate with them, welcome them on stated occasions, and see them off again by means of various religious observances throughout the year. Yanagita therefore characterizes ancestor worship as a kind of religious communication between the souls of the ancestors and their descendants (1963, vol. 15, pp. 560-561). He himself felt favorably disposed toward it, deeming it too important to let go.

The thought that the soul, even after death, remains in the land of the living makes me feel good, perhaps because I am Japanese. If possible, I want to stay in this land forever and, perhaps from some small hill somewhere, watch this culture grow a bit more beautiful and see my studies make some small contribution to the world (1963, vol. 15, p. 561).

Nonetheless, Yanagita never embraced ancestor worship for himself. He explains this as follows:

I was not so circumstanced that I always had to think about my own happiness.... I decided to study the native religion because when I wondered how people could live

happily and quietly, I knew it was not only because of Buddhism (1975, p. 154).

Yanagita left this world without any instructions concerning his own funeral. Even folk Shinto he could not make his own. Sako Jun'ichirō, in a reminiscence, said that Yanagita once told him: "I know where the soul is for the forty days after death, but I don't know what happens after that" (1969, p. 8). Folklore research gave him an answer to the question of the soul's whereabouts during the first forty days after death; it gave him no basis for answering the question of the subsequent place of the soul, so he would go no further.

From a Buddhist or Christian point of view, Yanagita's posture seems irreligious. As Nakamura Akira puts it:

Yanagita's standpoint is beyond doubt irreligious and scientific (1974, pp. 234-235).

By limiting himself to the study of folklore, he escaped from the problems of philosophy and religion. He did not touch the problem of man's ultimate way of life, a problem that should be confronted in the dimension of thought (1974, p. 130).

This criticism, however, assumes the Western viewpoint that an existentially authentic way of life is the most correct, the most serious, and the best. To apply this Western yardstick to Yanagita himself, to Japanese people, or to Eastern peoples in general illustrates the deductive standpoint that Yanagita disliked most of all. His goal is tranquillity of mind, both for himself and for Japanese people generally (Yanagita 1975, pp. 155-156). Though he did not believe in any specific religion, he was, as Sako pointed out, a deeply religious man in the sense that his life was spiritually rich. Even when he confronted an ultimate problem that involved his own existence, Yanagita refused

to draw any conclusions or make any declarations unless his method of study gave him a basis for doing so. I support, therefore, the opinion of Hashikawa Bunzō, who characterizes Yanagita's standpoint as that of "a spirit so free that we cannot conceive of it" (1973, p. 320).

Poetic intuition. One other characteristic of Yanagita's methodology is his use of poetic intuition or imaginative insight. As indicated above, Yanagita sought to develop folklore study into a science. He collected a vast quantity of materials and from them tried to identify what is essential to being Japanese, paying particular attention to the religious consciousness of the common people. In the work of induction, however, it is necessary, because of the un-systematic nature of popular traditions, to organize the materials and correlate them by means of a definite research method. Yanagita had enough students and staff members that he could acquire materials for study from all over Japan, and he instructed these people and taught them his method of research. Their work, however, ended when the necessary materials were collected. He did not let them participate in the work of organizing them. This he did himself, relying on his own imaginative power.

Ienaga Saburō, criticizing Yanagita's method of synthesis, speaks of it as "an art rather than a science."

In order to make his historical study both a science with an original methodology and something unique, he developed great efficiency in collecting materials through systematic collaboration with other students in the field, something that had no parallel in other academic circles. At the final stage of unifying the materials and formulating the historical system, however, he could not but depend on his own gifts. This is an art rather than a science, in the sense that the value of his study can be sustained only if the study is his own (1973, p. 160).

Yet even while criticizing Yanagita in this way, Ienaga holds, on the one hand, that social science should rely to some extent on individual ability and personality, but, on the other, that Yanagita's historical study depended too much on his own individuality. Ienaga's remarks are not without point, but they also lack clarity. The regrettable thing is not that Yanagita used his magnificent gifts, but that so few people are equally qualified.

When analyzing and interpreting popular traditions, Yanagita attached great value to the attitude of sympathy or empathy.

It is important to try to look at the old days with a feeling for the time and situation. We need, in a word, sympathy. This can be said not only when we study the lives of our ancestors but also when we study other peoples of the present time. It is essential to empty ourselves if we would understand the reality (1962, vol. 16, p. 168).

It was on the basis of this kind of subjective orientation that Yanagita organized his materials. It would be hasty, however, to conclude that his studies are merely products of his own subjectivity. His studies result from his extensive reading, knowledge of popular traditions, and a rare intuition that saw into the essence of things and was assisted by his unusually strong memory. When we realize that his folklore studies made phenomena expressive of the human mind or spirit the chief object of study and interpretation, we can understand that his intuitive power, as to a poet, was in fact indispensable.

YANAGITA'S WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS TIME

Scope of his social concern. In view of the fact that Yanagita spent his life during the period that Japan was taking shape as a modern nation, a time that coincided with its evolution into a totalitarian state under the ideology of the

emperor system, it is important to consider his work in relationship to the ideology of his time before proceeding to the question of its significance for the present day.

With respect to politics, Yanagita can be characterized as a progressive conservative, a gradualist who sought improvement while seeking to preserve traditional values. When he stopped working for the government in 1920, he became an editor of the newspaper known as the *Asahi shinbun*, a position he held until 1930. This was the time when Japan was becoming increasingly militaristic. Yanagita's editorials show how advanced his ideas were. Of Mussolini's fascism he wrote, "Without a shadow of doubt, there is nothing we can learn from Italy.... Those who love their nation should not be so narrow-minded" (1963, suppl. vol. 1, p. 103). He maintained that cabinet ministers with responsibility for the army and navy should be civilians, not military officers (1963, suppl. vol. 1, pp. 120-122). He opposed the suppression of dissidence under the Peace Preservation Law (1964, suppl. vol. 2, p. 122). He offered words of encouragement to the Laborers' and Farmers' Party, a proletarian political body banned in the name of the same law on the day of its inauguration (1964, suppl. vol. 2, pp. 325-327). He protested against the Imperial Rescript on Education saying, "We should not think that the Imperial Rescript on Education expresses the whole of Japanese morality" (Gotō 1972, p. 42). He criticized this rescript for enforcing an emperor-system ideology based on Confucian ethics and for neglecting the morality traditional among ordinary Japanese people.

Because of the stand he took against the education rescript, Yanagita came in for criticism by right-wingers. His position resulted from the value he attached to the traditions of the common man. From the right-wing point of view he appeared as a liberal, but in fact he had no interest whatever in social revolution. His concern was for the

maintenance of tradition, a goal he regarded as calling for the gradual, not abrupt, improvement of society and culture.

Yanagita's criticisms of totalitarian and militaristic policies were not, it should be noted, thoroughgoing. There was a point beyond which he refused to go, and therefore his views never got him into serious trouble. After retiring from the *Asahi shinbun*, he made almost no statements at all about political matters but devoted himself entirely to the study of folklore. (It was about this time, as noted above, that he started using the word *jōmin* in preference to the word *heimin*.) He never confronted the rise of militarism in the 1930s directly, whether politically or academically. The chief reason for this lies in his view of life and sense of values. From his *Watakushi no tetsugaku* [My philosophy] we know that his ultimate social concern was the happiness of the individual in day-to-day life (1975, p. 153). His conception of the individual was not that of an autonomous subject guided by his own will, but one whose daily life has its foundation in the group, in the household that is itself part of a small community. It was the happiness of persons in these circumstances that was of greatest value to him. He did not, however, go beyond this assertion of the importance of happiness for the people to any ideological or principled criticism of policies or institutions that prevented the realization of this happiness.

Emperor-system ideology. Yanagita's failure to criticize the emperor-system ideology of his day is often cited as a defect. During his governmental career, he served for a time as a secretary to the Imperial Household Agency and appears to have been a committed supporter of the emperor system. When the present emperor ascended the throne, Yanagita proposed an amendment to the *daijōsai*, the supremely sacred ceremony immediately after the coronation

when the new emperor first presents grain offerings to Amaterasu Ōmikami and the various kami of heaven and earth (1964, vol. 31, pp. 376-381). The fact that he was in a position to express an opinion on this ceremony shows that he had acquired certain privileges as a result of his public career within the system.

He himself preferred to speak not of the emperor-system ideology but of loyalty to the emperor.

I do not want to make a definite statement about the emperor system as such, but to tell the truth I have a sense of loyalty to the emperor. I think we should be loyal to the emperor whatever the situation.... The problem of the emperor is almost identical with the problem of the destiny of the Japanese people. It is a matter of religious feeling (1975, pp. 161-162).

This loyalty, then, embraces the emperor not only as a person but also as a religious symbol (cf. Mori 1979).

Yanagita's National Learning studies and his experience as a public official under the emperor system seems to have exerted some influence on his interpretation of folklore data. This influence seems evident, for example, in his treatment of the Grand Shrine of Ise where worship is offered to Amaterasu Ōmikami, the sun goddess from whom the imperial family is said to be descended. Alluding to the myths contained in the *Kojiki*, Yanagita speaks of the confrontation between the *amatsukami* ("gods of heaven") and the *kunitsukami* ("gods of the earth") as reflecting a confrontation between foreign conquerors (the ancestors of the imperial family) and the original inhabitants. With reference to the latter and their kami he continues:

The *kunitsukami* of the prehistoric age were divided into two groups. The majority, connected with people who lived in the villages, were assimilated into the ancestry of the imperial family; the rest went with those who lived in

the mountains and became known as “men of the mountains” (*sanjin*) (1963, vol. 4, p. 177).

He first saw the confrontation between the original inhabitants and the foreign tribe as a religious confrontation between polytheistic ancestor worship and worship of the universal sun goddess. Yanagita found, though, that the Ise Shrine ceremonies contain indications of faith in the tutelary deity (*ujigami*) of the priestly family itself. From this fact he inferred that the relationship between the sun goddess faith and the tutelary deity faith was continuous (1963, vol. 11, p. 318). This idea of continuity reflects his view that the Japanese people of prehistoric times came into being through the fusion of many different races without outright tribal or ritual conflict. It reflects, in other words, his belief that the unity of the Japanese people with the emperor at their center came about not as a result of subjugation but as an almost spontaneous occurrence.

Yanagita did not set himself into direct opposition to the absolutistic emperor-system ideology. Indirectly, however, the value he attached to the common man and to the scientific method constituted a criticism of that ideology. His empirical study of popular religion, for example, led him only to the ancestor worship rooted in the household and to the tutelary deity worship rooted in the community. Nothing that would justify the ideology of the emperor as head of a so-called “family-state” came out of his research. His study was in fact critical, therefore, of the modern Japanese state insofar as it relied on such an ideology and sought to unite people under an emperor-centered State Shinto by exploiting the religious traditions of ordinary people (1962, vol. 10, p. 33).

It was this difference between research results and the claims of emperor-system ideologues that led him, as noted, to distinguish between the Shinto of historians and theo-

logians who dealt solely with the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* and the Shinto of the common man whose faith, despite changes, went back to prehistoric times. He regarded the traditions of the common man as the source from which to build up the most veritable picture of the native faith. This standpoint implied a criticism of the official faith that relied on *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths in order to fabricate a notion of the state-as-a-family with the emperor as its paterfamilias. Nowhere does Yanagita even comment on this notion.

More directly, Yanagita opposed the state policy that called for amalgamating small local shrines and incorporating all shrines into a single hierarchy (1962, vol. 10, p. 39). This policy rested on the officially promoted idea that Shinto was not a religion but an institution for the ritual expression of patriotic feeling. Yanagita countered this idea, maintaining that the relationship between the people and the shrines is unmistakably religious (1962, vol. 10, pp. 431-432).

As indicated above, Yanagita deeply respected the emperor and did not question his right to occupy that status. At the same time, however, his chief social concern was the happiness of ordinary people living in families and small communities. This concern led him to protest against policies that suppressed dissident thought and forced people into war. His protests, however, were never stated in such a way as to invite government reaction. Unlike some Japanese Marxists and religious people who chose the way of open resistance, Yanagita concealed himself during the militaristic storm. While waiting for it to pass, he prepared to give people clues that would enable them to choose for themselves, on the basis of a self-understanding arrived at through reflection on their own traditions, the course they would follow when the storm passed.

Those who openly resisted particularistic nationalism

did so in the name of a universal religious or ideological commitment. Yanagita chose a different way, but his free spirit, firmly based on the ideas of the value of the common man and the value of science, likewise contained universal elements that enabled him to transcend narrow particularism.

In sum, Yanagita was seeking a way of overcoming the evils that followed in the wake of a modernization program that ignored the very people on whom its success depended. This he did through developing an immanent understanding of the life and spirit of the common man, and implicitly through criticizing the government-sponsored emperor-system ideology and policies that thwarted human happiness. As Gotō puts it, "He tried to discover, in the life of the people overlooked by the state, a principle that would transcend the contradictions of the modern world and of modernization" (1972, pp. 134-135).

CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF YANAGITA'S WORK

Scientific rigor and religious tolerance. The foregoing observations on Yanagita's methodology and his stance relative to the nationalism and ideological absolutism of his day indicate the consistency of his ideas and imply a certain evaluation of his work. The clear motivation of his research, his conception of the common man, and his insistence on the empirical-inductive method constitute an important criticism of many other approaches to the study of religion. Those who study religions other than their own out of mere curiosity, those who try to find analogies among all religions by starting from a universal concept of man without thoroughly studying actual human beings, and those who too hastily try to fashion a universal understanding of man in order to promote human coexistence—for all such people Yanagita's work sounds a great warning against resting content with externals and against deductive dogmatism.

As for his attitude toward people with religious orientations he himself could not swallow, Yanagita learned the lesson of tolerance. He expresses his tolerant attitude in general terms, then tells how he learned it.

I want them to realize what they believe in, without interfering, if they truly believe in it from the bottom of their hearts. It is easy to tear down what others have. I know of many people, however, who, when what they had was destroyed, could not find anything to replace it and straightway fell into a dissolute life. Therefore I respect the idea that everyone should rely on what he freely believes in. Having this feeling, I would not dissuade my daughter if she wanted to become a Christian.

In the past I acted contrary to this idea, and now I am sorry for what I did. My elder sister-in-law had a strong Christian faith and was baptized. I attacked her with a meaningless argument. Since she was powerless against my words, she gave up her faith, but soon afterwards, she died. I feel very sorry for her, thinking that she must have been anxious during her last moments (1975, p. 157).

For himself, Yanagita found Christianity, Confucianism, and most forms of Buddhism uncongenial. But after this experience, he became a staunch proponent of religious tolerance in interpersonal relations. He has nothing against debate between people of different religious commitments, but he warns us, in effect, against undermining the values that give a person hope and confidence in this life and the next.

Present-day responses to Yanagita. The difference between Yanagita's day and ours is great. He was raised in a time when people still drew light and warmth from the lingering flame of Edo period culture. He himself was happy to have lived in such a time.

The happiness of folklorists born in today's Japan is something special. It was only a little while ago that Japan

opened her doors to foreign nations. Most Japanese people belong to “the folk,” to use the English term, and even among those of us who have been modernized, “folk” elements remain (1964, vol. 25, p. 257).

Every time he stepped out his front gate, he found new study material. But in many respects that day is past.

Yanagita thought that ancestor worship, the basic form of popular, indigenous religion, was essential to the common people’s sense of well-being. Today, however, with the progress of modernization, many people, without any particular signs of reluctance, give up not only ancestor worship but also their residence in the land of their birth. In Yanagita’s day, most ordinary people were farmers; their ties to the land were part of their lives. Today most ordinary people have moved to the cities and become laborers. It would seem, therefore, that Yanagita’s concept of “the common man” is out of date. At a time when state power, industrialization, and modernization in general are bringing about the collapse of community, his idea of ancestor worship as the unifying basis for the family and, by extension, for the community no longer seems effective.

Among those who have written on Yanagita, Tsurumi Kazuko evaluates his work highly. She thinks that Yanagita foresaw the sad outcome of modernization—farmers and fishermen rapidly decreasing in number as urban laborers, cut off from land, kin, and community, increase at an incredible speed (1974, p. 180). She maintains that his concept of the common man offers a challenge to the Western concept of modernization.

I myself find it difficult to agree with this particular evaluation. I think that we have to accept the reality of today’s largely urban society and not pretend that we would be better off living in villages and cultivating fields. After all, Yanagita himself accepted the changes time wrought.

He sought the well-being of the common man not only through maintaining valued traditions but also through improving them.

Another writer on Yanagita, one decidedly more critical, is Gotō Sōichirō. Distinguishing between what Yanagita hoped to accomplish and what actually happened, he points out that although Yanagita intended to make of his folklore study a science that would enable people to cope with contemporary issues, in fact it did not provide an answer to the problem of war, to the collapse of community caused by postwar industrialization, or to the human loneliness brought about by modernization. Yanagita hoped that the common man, through coming into touch with the traditions of Japan, would find clues by which to shape the society of the future, but this hope has never been realized. As a source for solutions to the problems of industrialization and to the problems posed by increasing state control over all aspects of people's lives, Yanagita's studies are both philosophically and practically insufficient. "Yanagita's work can become a mirror of self-examination for each of us, but it has no power to determine the future" (Gotō 1972, p. 10; cf. p. 117).

At the beginning of this essay I pointed out that people had become interested in Yanagita's work two times in recent Japanese history. The first time was the period of the 1930s. One reason that some Marxists then turned to Yanagita has to do with the nature of his methodology. Yanagita's critical mind and his emphasis on the common man and his well-being have much in common with Marxism (Gotō 1972, p. 54). Moreover, Yanagita's research was based on a thoroughly empirical method, so the study of his work caused Marxists no particular problems. Of special interest, however, is the reflective character of Yanagita's work. Pointing out a common element in the motivation of Marxists who turned to Yanagita during the 1930s, Gotō

maintains that they found in his folklore studies “a mirror” in which they could “examine themselves” and a source of support for fascism-oppressed spirits “when they were weak” (1972, p. 7).

The second time was the period after World War II. Quite apart from the motivation provided by ideological oppression, a number of people came to take an interest in Yanagita's work, particularly after the failure of the political struggle to prevent ratification of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in 1960. Their turn to Yanagita was a sign of their reflection on the deficiencies of Marxist thought in Japan. Gotō himself is one of these people. Perhaps it may be said that a study of Yanagita's work is a process that Japanese Marxists need to go through in order to indigenize their universal ideology.

The “down to earth” effect of studying Yanagita comes out quite differently in the case of Tanigawa Ken'ichi. Tanigawa, once a Catholic, gave up his faith for two reasons: the Catholic Church's cooperation in the war effort, and its clinging to Western forms of thought while claiming universality. For about a decade he cast about, hunting for an alternative. “For about ten years after the war I was looking for a resilient way of thought suitable to the soil of Japan. It was as I was wandering about but finding no exit that I encountered the work of Yanagita” (Tanigawa 1973, pp. 20–21). He thereupon became one of Yanagita's students and continues the tradition of folklore research to the present day.

Judging from these responses to Yanagita's work, I find considerable merit in Umesao Tadao's remark that “Yanagita's work effectively provides us with a landing point that prevents our thoughts from spinning round and round in the air above the land of Japan” (1973, p. 113).

Yanagita's work does not have the power to establish in a person a strong sense of subjecthood. For this, one

may have to turn to Marxism or Christianity. But both of these will remain confined to a small minority of people as long as they go round and round in the air above the land of Japan, all the while insisting that they are universal.

Finally, as Yanagita's work becomes known outside Japan, it may make a significant methodological contribution to people in developing nations who see the importance of folklore and religious studies. I myself think that his methodology is likely to prove more effective than that of many Western scholars. If, in future, a genuine international study of folklore is established, Yanagita will doubtless be recognized as one of its most outstanding pioneers.

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