Telling Stories about Oneself:

Reflexivity in Folklore Studies

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I. Self-representation in interviews

I developed an interest in religion within folklore studies and have conducted researches on modern pilgrimages in particular. Why is it that in these secular times, people continue to gather at sacred places instead of abandoning their faith? To answer such questions, I interviewed people who went on pilgrimages. As abstract questions like "What does pilgrimage mean to you?" yield only abstract answers, to get people to answer in more concrete terms, I asked them how they decided to go on a pilgrimage. The following story is of a woman from Kyoto who explains why she went on a pilgrimage to Sefa Utaki, a holy site in southern Okinawa. Sefa Utaki is a unique Okinawan sacred place and a UNESCO World Heritage site as well. It has also benefited from the recent popularity of so-called "power spots," or spiritually charged spaces, and an increasing number of people have visited the site to experience its "spiritual atmosphere."

> "Once a year, I have to take time off from my part-time job. My income can't go over around a million yen, since I'm a dependent of my husband. So, I get ten days off every year, which I use for [a trip to] Okinawa. Well, I don't know about every year—this only started last year (laughs). Last year, I didn't make any reservations, but before I knew it, I was here (Sefa Utaki). I didn't make any reservations this year either. Actually, I don't have a place to stay (laughs).
>
> My friends often say I neglect my kids and that I just go off to travel. My older [child] is in the 11th grade and my younger one is in the 9th grade. The older one's currently away for a school match.
>
> I mean, when I was in junior college—like 18 or 19 years old—I had an 8 o'clock curfew (laughs). Then, I got married right after graduating, you know? So, now I guess you could say I'm making up for my lost youth."
>
> (in Nanjō, Okinawa, July 2013)

There is no mention in this narrative of Sefa Utaki or faith. According to the research

method that has been practiced in folklore studies thus far, it would not come as a surprise to see this written off as mere chit-chat, which is unrelated to the topic.

What I would like to point out here is the very simple fact that everybody has their "pet topics." Even if the interviewer wants to obtain information directly related to pilgrimages, the conversation might turn to family or daily life, for instance. From a methodological standpoint, the practice of interviewing is a technique to elicit information from a person by actively soliciting a response to a prompt such as "Please talk about XYZ," which is a form of "strong communication" (Sugawara 2006: 90). Thus, without the willingness to engage with the interviewee's pet topics, communication becomes less of a mutual act and more of a coercive one.

An example of this is of a student who made a faux pas while researching the topic "Memories about Objects" at the Ogi Folk Museum for a research practicum. The Ogi Folk Museum in Sado Island, Niigata Prefecture, was built at the request of famous Japanese folklorist, Tsuneichi MIYAMOTO (1907-1981) and others. The museum houses objects from the daily lives of the local residents. Although, the museum has accumulated numerous objects, many of the exhibits lack explanatory captions (Kadota & Sugimoto 2013). Thus, the students conducted a sampling of the objects and made inquiries about them from the residents, based on their memories. However, what people *actually* talked about went beyond the topic. For instance, their memories of an old teacup or wristwatch from the museum's collection expanded to include the state of the community today, their families, TV programs, politics, and so on. One student, who had to collect the information within a limited amount of time, ignored what the informants said about their grandchildren and kept changing the subject back to the objects. Having hurt the informants' feelings this way, the student ended up at the receiving end and was ultimately unable to conduct a follow-up research.

From this, one might suppose that while an informant's pet topic appears at first glance to be relatively unrelated to the original topic, the two are in fact quite closely connected. The reminiscence method, wherein a person recalls past experiences through the medium of (in this case) old objects from daily life that have become folk art, shows us that stories about objects are not limited to memories about the physical objects; they spill over boundlessly into all areas of life.

Similarly, in the first story of the pilgrimage to Sefa Utaki, the topic expanded to include the woman's family and college days more so than the pilgrimage itself. While at first these topics appear disparate, for her, they were all connected to a single event—the pilgrimage—and were presented as a meaningful story. The topic of the pilgrimage was used as a segue, so to speak, for the speaker to present a narrative about herself. If the objective of folklore studies is to understand the significance of the various acts and events in the everyday life of common people within their lives as a whole, as it has been, then it should not be possible to abstract away the vague notion of *telling stories about oneself*.

However, the field of folklore studies in Japan has thus far instructed its practitioners to ignore such stories as meaningless content. This is not a simple case of research method; rather, it reflects how folklore studies have conceived of the Other. In this paper, I (1) describe

how the act of *telling stories about oneself* is an important point to consider when thinking about the ideal form of human life in contemporary society and (2) identify a perspective for furthering human understanding through the medium of narrative and orality.

II. "Successor" as a fiction

1. Modest "successors"

Folklore(Minzoku) refers to traditions and legends passed down through generations, and *folklore studies(Minzoku-Gaku)* is the field of study that researches those oral traditions. As people are originally *Homo narrans*, or "storytelling humans" (Lehmann 2007: 9), research on folklore studies in countries such as Germany, the United States, and Northern European countries such as Finland has come to focus on orality.

As compared to the emphasis on narrative in Western folklore studies, folklore studies in Japan may emphasize acts more (Fukuta 2009). However, the discipline of folklore studies in Japan is still about narrative, in the sense that its practitioners conduct "folk culture researches" of people called *successors and storytellers*, which mainly consist of writing down what an informant says in a face-to-face interview. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that folklore studies in Japan differ greatly from folklore studies in the West in terms of its practitioners' awareness of orality and narrative.

This means that talking to "non-chatty people" has been the shared research methodology. For example, in the *Encyclopedia of Folklore Studies (Minzokugaku jiten)* , which was edited by the Folklore Institute and founded mainly by Kunio YANAGITA, there is an entry on "successor" (*denshōsha*). A successor is an informant who has faithfully preserved folk traditions (the subject of folklore studies) and can convey it to an interviewer. The *Encyclopedia*' s entry contains the following passage:

> Those who have extensive knowledge about the origin and history of life in villages are often village intellectuals showing off their book knowledge. What they say is generally subjective and biased, and they lack accurate knowledge of local traditions; on the contrary, it is not uncommon for them to regard them with disdain. In contrast, while successors also respond to questions that are asked of them, they do so modestly, and though they are reticent at first, they have much to say once they open up. (Folklore Institute [ed.] 1951: 389–390)

The best successors, then, are considered to be "modest" characters who are not particularly talkative, while people "showing off their knowledge" —that is, opinionated people who are eager to share those opinions with others—are considered less desirable as successors.

If that is the case, then people who are eager to tell others about their experiences should not make good informants. Some people have even opined to me, someone who writes about pilgrims' self-narratives, that "eloquent people are shady." While this may reflect a "silence

is golden" mentality that declares it virtuous to be silent, or at least reticent, what lies between the lines here is a view of people that is unique to folklore studies.

The excerpt above was written in the mid-20th century, but it is not impossible for any of us to look around and find people who "respond to questions that are asked of them [but] do so modestly." Therefore, it is not impossible to imagine such successors in contemporary society. But does that mean we can consider those who "subjectively" share their own opinions as special cases? No, not in contemporary society, where, because of the development of the school system, the information literacy rate has improved to a level that cannot be compared with that of 1951, when the Encyclopedia of Folklore Institute was published. Rather, it could be said that all modern people are articulate "non-successors."

How should the folklore studies framework be rewritten in a society that assumes everyone has some degree of storytelling [1] ability? This is also a reorganization of folklore studies' view of people, in that it entails the question: *Which aspects should we try to capture of the people we encounter through our field work?* To do this, it is necessary to further dissect the perspective, unique to folklore studies, encompassed by "successors."

2. Talking about folk culture, telling oneself

Another thing I would like to point out in the above excerpt from the *Encyclopedia of Folklore Studies* is the use of the word "intellectual." The ideal successor in folklore studies is not someone who is reserved or taciturn, but rather someone who does not assert their subjective, individual perspective, or add their opinion or interpretation. That is, folklore studies has historically associated the ability of someone to tell a story, while giving their own interpretation of it, with "intellectuals," a modern social class. Its practitioners have thought that folklore studies ought to deal with the pre-modern knowledge of people outside of that class. If we refer to agentive, independent, and articulate people as modern individuals, then it can be said that, according to early folklore studies, it is precisely by removing individuals' agency and subjectivity that we can extract their essential nature, which has not been tainted by this "modern" era.

What we have tried to extract by removing modernity is knowledge about life traditions rooted in the land. The *Folk Culture research Handbook (Minzoku chōsa handobukku)* (Ueno, Takakuwa, Fukuda, and Miyata [eds.] 1987: 4) takes after the image of the successor in the Encyclopedia when it states that "women and elderly people who were born and raised in a village and have seldom left it have experienced the life of that village more consistently than others," and thus make for more appropriate successors. According to Toshikazu SHINNO, folklore studies assume that people basically live their lives in one area without moving, inherit the folk culture that has been passed down through generations on that land, and in turn pass that culture down to the next generation.

It must be said that the kind of person imagined within the confines of the concept of "transission agents *(Densho Shutai)*" (Takakuwa 1994) is detached from reality. The people that folklore studies have described were only expected to accurately *communicate* the knowledge and norms common to their group, or to the land, to the folklore studies practitioner who had

come to conduct a research, not to interpret and *narrate* their lives and experiences. Shinno criticizes this classical view of people, in which people pass down traditions unchanged, and states that people can be understood as *Homo folkloricus*, who in reality change and create traditions (Shinno 2007).

However, real people do not necessarily live their lives with a constant awareness of their *folk culture* (traditional culture); engaging with folk culture is just one aspect of their everyday life. For this reason, as Shinno states, seeing people *only* through the lens of folk culture is akin to taking just a sliver of their multifaceted, complicated lives. People's roles in society are more multifaceted than that; they have thoughts and feelings, and they have an *individuality* that cannot be substituted by anyone else.

In a backlash against this idealized "blank-slate" view of people, folklore studies have in recent years described individual agency positively, with more and more research being conducted on aspects that do not fall under the structure of traditional society as well. How is it possible, then, for folklore studies to ignore the fact that people are inherently predisposed to share opinions and experiences relating to themselves?

3. Successor under a gag order

If we were to "invert" the folklore studies view of people, the ideal person would be someone who has their own ideas and articulates them well, or, in other words, someone who expresses themselves to others. When applied to ourselves, it is a realistic view. The point is that folklore studies have arguably "hushed" people out in the field. This is because to be a practitioner of folklore studies is to assume a role of researching "folk culture" and writing ethnographies; meanwhile, local people have only been given the role of an "informant," wherein they are asked to provide data for ethnographies to be read by readers. It is fair to say that they were always put in a passive position and that this was never questioned.

In cultural anthropology during the 1980s, the structure of ethnography drew criticism for being based on a power imbalance between the "writer" (a Western anthropologist) and the "writee," who was frequently exposed to the Orientalist gaze (Clifford & Marcus 1996). Folklore studies face the same issue, which has led to disputes on the asymmetrical relationship between the urban center and the rural periphery. This of course does not refer only to geographical differences, but to differences in social standing.

One clue lies in Akira KIKUCHI's *Kunio Yanagita and Modern Folklore Studies*, which discusses the relationship between a folklore studies' researcher and rural communities in the context of a folk-cultural asset, an annual event called Aenokoto. According to Kikuchi, the researcher studying Aenokoto sometimes "assigned excessive meaning" to it beyond what the successor intended (Kikuchi 2001: 25), making it out to be a cultural asset with a direct connection to the nation. In the knowledge-production system that is ethnography, the "representer" is the agent and the "representee" is the object, which was made part of a modern nation-state in this case.

The asymmetry that Kikuchi points out may be a kind of *habitus* that has become internalized in folklore studies. research methods, wherein the researcher invites people from

the village to the community center where they reside, unilaterally grills them about only the things *the researcher* wants to know, and then sends them on their way, have repeatedly been criticized for being authoritarian, and the authoritarian research methods of the practitioners of folklore studies have been criticized for causing "damage to the survey area" (Miyamoto 1986).

Recent years have witnessed the criticism of "the privilege of representation" and a desire to reflect people's individuality in ethnography, which has thus far been lost in the representation of villages. This has led to the emergence of a movement from within village studies to encourage practitioners to hear their informants out as they tell unprompted stories, and to use the *individua*l as their starting point when they write. In contrast to the descriptions of group norms in village communities to which folklore studies have been wholly devoted thus far, and under which individuals' agency has been subsumed, declarations about describing "each individual person, endowed with a rich individuality" (Yasui 1997: 131) and "a reality that demands [people to] act as responsible agents" (Tsuru 2003: 17) imply an intention to uphold that agency when writing about them.

III. Self-reference and experience

Folklore studies have thus far placed an emphasis on finding data to assemble knowledge shared among social groups and "folk culture materials." To accomplish these tasks, it has espoused a fictitious view of people that reduces "successors" to a source of information required. Narratives about oneself, then, become extremely important materials in overcoming this lack of imagination with regard to the lives of others and in reorganizing the field into one that considers the everyday lives and typical ways of the life of normal people.

1. The development of life history research

The academic term for telling stories about oneself is *self-reference*. As a human act, self-reference is something that exists in any time period, ancient or modern, but scholarly interest in the general masses' records about themselves is by no means old. Sociologist Takashi NAKANO's "life histories" are pioneering works that examine the self-referential narratives by ordinary individuals who are not historical figures or politicians. For example, Nakano's *Oral Life Histories* includes a description of the life history of an elderly woman living in Kurashiki, transcribed verbatim (Nakano 1977), which reveals stories about family and love from her youth, uncertainties she experienced during hardships, and her belief in the god Inari. Through these narratives, not only do readers get to know of the path she has walked as an individual, but they also learn about what society was like in each period through her perspective.

Life history research originated as a field within sociology that focused on the individual instead of being predicated on the "macro" system that is society. Rather than just simply understanding the individual, it intended to approach the world of a storyteller's subjective

awareness through their narrative and describe the society of the time through their individual perspective. In that sense, life history research is certainly not a distant relative of folklore studies. In fact, after the 1980s, the necessity of life history research was brought up in folklore studies in Japan as well. However, in folklore studies, it was understood as a method to describe the individual and *not* village communities or groups, as opposed to adopting a sociological perspective of "seeing society *through* individual narratives." As a result, life history research was relegated to a single genre about "individuals," making it difficult to say that it has established as a field.

Meanwhile, sociological life history research would later develop into life *story* research, emphasizing the expression of life experiences through storytelling. The major difference is that the latter focuses on orality—subjects' voices and speech—and highlights the narrative quality in individuals' stories. Narrative quality refers to the fact that even stories in individuals' spontaneous speech have a plot, just like a work of literature. Narrating one's life experience is also an act of arranging individual events to create a story out of them. That is to say, narrating one's experience is not merely enumerating a laundry list of facts, but rather assigning them meaning from a certain perspective and arranging them to create a *reality* (the woman's pilgrimage story at the beginning of this paper is a remarkable example of this).

The significance of life history research and life story research to folklore studies lies in the scholarly interest they take in narratives on individual experiences, which have thus far not been paid much attention to. For instance, sociologist Atsushi SAKURAI states the need to collect and analyze "experiential narration" that is based on individual people's experiences, and not just the village- or group-wide "normative narration" that has historically been the subject of folklore studies (Sakurai 2007). As Sakurai writes, it is certainly true that folklore studies did not place much emphasis on individuals' subjective experiences and collected only those narratives that could serve as a source of information for defining "folk culture." This may potentially result in abstracting away the diversity of individual experiences.

2. Expanding self-referential media

It is possible to express one's life experience through other methods than orality. Diaries, a textual medium, are the oldest medium for self-reference that summarize the writer's ideas and thoughts. At the same time, they are also a record of daily life and can therefore serve as a social-historical resource for readers to understand the time in which the writer lived. In that sense, it is a tool for perceiving society through the words of the individual, similar to orality research.

Diary analysis has also been conducted in folklore studies in Japan (Yamamoto 2010), but the field that has most notably regarded it as being useful for human understanding is *Volkskunde*—European ethnology in German-speaking countries. While Volkskunde has a tradition of research on oral literature such as *Märchen* (folktales), recent years have seen work not only on fairy tales, legends, and other stories with fixed forms, but also the chit-chat, gossip, and rumors that people share with others daily, which it calls "everyday narration."

This has led to an accumulation of research on the self-representation of ordinary people, as opposed to the "great men of history." Diary research is an extension of this, characterized by the archiving of a large number of journals at city- and state-level public facilities, which citizens can browse like a public records office. Just like everyday objects on display at a folk culture museum, this arrangement enables people to learn about their history, as well as themselves, through diaries [2].

In contrast to diaries, which are ultimately a self-referential medium hidden away in the private domain, "lifelogs" are a web-based textual medium that is written with the intention of being published for others to see. Though blogs and social networking sites have seen a remarkable rise in popularity, written records of them disappear without being archived, and so they have not been the subject of folklore studies research thus far. However, lifelogs have attracted the attention of many researchers because they serve as parenthetical material in thinking about the significance of the very act of writing and telling stories about oneself (Kishi 2013).

We, who live in contemporary society, are wrapped up in self-referential media; the very act of expressing and telling stories about ourselves has become anything but out of the ordinary. Now, we are half-forced to tell stories about ourselves, whether we like it or not, as if obeying a system that compels us to engage in self-reference. For instance, when soon-to-be graduates embark on a job hunt, there is emphasis on the process of self-analysis. This is a process wherein a student introspects on the traits they have and highlights how those traits can be applied in the workplace by reflecting on their life up to that point in terms of their home environment, school career, extracurricular activities, and interpersonal relationships, and then synthesizing the experience and ideas they have acquired therein.

This process is frequently inverted. Earlier, an individual would have concluded through self-analysis that they were suited to ABC company (job) because they had past experience with XYZ. Now, it often happens that this order is flipped, such that the individual creates their self-image in reverse: They want to work at ABC company, so they curate experiences from their life history that align with the description of ABC's ideal candidate in order to cultivate the desired image. For example, a student who wants to work at a trading company would combine their past experience of traveling and studying abroad to create a highly cosmopolitan self-image, in accordance with that company's ideal candidate. If the student was unable to create a satisfactory image (from the company's perspective) and make a positive impression in the interview, it would be due to "insufficient self-analysis."

Therefore, self-reference can be rephrased in the following way: Telling stories about ourselves is a way for us to create our Selves. A job hunt is not the only example of this. Through self-referential acts, we understand who we are; and by reflecting on our life histories, we think about what to do next, continually revising our way of being in the world. Self-reference and self-representation are thus modern issues in a society that demands us to have utmost clarity about our self-identity.

IV. A self-referential society

1. Reflexivity

People kept diaries and narrated their experiences before the modern era. However, creating one's Self through reference to that Self is a modern phenomenon. With regard to the question of *why* we have to clearly define our own Self, the field of sociology, known as the theory of self, has looked for an explanation in the changes in society rather than attributing it to some change that has occurred within us or in our minds.

For example, in traditional societies where people were placed in collective groups and classes, knowing a person's dress, dwelling, and kinship relations was enough to talk about their characteristics. In a low-mobility society, such as a village, it would be a foregone conclusion that someone born into a family of farmers would end up living the same life as their parents and siblings, regardless of their wishes and desires. Therefore, it does not make sense to ask what one's self-identity is. That question arises in a society where people live as individuals, emancipated from collective groups. In a society where everything—choice of occupation, residence, views, thoughts, religion, love, marriage—is at the individual's discretion, even the kind of person one is is a choice to be made.

Of course, emancipation from collective groups has given us this "freedom." However, at the same time, it has become impossible for us to escape the search for "self-identity." Sociologist Anthony Giddens states that this kind of "life politics" affects all of us (Giddens 2005: 243). As Giddens writes, we search inside ourselves for the resources that are necessary for self-realization. That is to say, we create a coherent self-image (self-identity) by recalling our own life history and combining past experiences together. The creation of vast narratives about our individual life experiences and the influence of self-referential media, such as job-hunting, books, and social networking sites, on us is a result of the Self no longer being self-evident.

The nature of self-reference lies in the fact that referring to something has an effect on that thing and causes it to change. This quality has normally been called *reflexivity*.

Sociologists such as Giddens initially used this concept to explain the origins of modern society. For instance, in pre-modern traditional societies, the basis for people's actions was an appeal to tradition that "it has always been done this way." "Tradition," which sometimes manifests as threats like "God's wrath will befall you if you do not comply," has been considered to have its basis in transcendence (religion); that is, society was rooted in something external. However, modernization shook this "something external" that held those roots. For example, after the separation of church and state detached politics from religion and gave rise to a secular political system, traditional customs came to be reformed and protected by cultural policies rather than piety. At this point, religion and tradition were no longer the yardstick by which to organize society or judge people's actions[3].

In the same way that the "correctness" of the law is rooted in law itself or the development of medicine is supported by specialists who have received an education in medicine, the system of modern society creates the basis for its legitimacy within itself. *Reflexivity* refers to

this continual process of self-monitoring and self-correction.

2. The concept of reflexivity in folklore studies

While the concept of reflexivity is not a concept native to folklore studies, it is by no means a stranger to it. This concept has conventionally been used in the following two contexts.

The first context is the methodological question of how the researcher should be depicted in an ethnography. For example, if a researcher studying dance or some kind of performance art can influence the performance or the conversations in that space, then the researcher cannot write themselves out of the ethnography. Sims and Stephens use the term "reflexive ethnography" to describe work in which the researcher, conscious of this fact, reflexively refers to themselves (Sims and Stephens 2011: 148).

Along with the issue of ethnographic representation in cultural anthropology, the issue of reflexivity for practitioners of folklore studies has been discussed as a part of a larger question: Is it actually possible to examine the actions of another in a vacuum and describe them objectively? In recent years, some have argued that practitioners of folklore studies should approach the field (that is, fieldwork) pragmatically, as an independent observer, while also including their inner selves and the inner transformation effected by their research (practice) in their writing (Suga 2013).

The second context is Kazutoshi SEKI's argument that the essence of folk culture is that it consists of actions with no self-referentiality, which he explains in the following way: Participants of many Japanese folk beliefs would not be able to answer if asked "Why do you do this?" Someone who prays to a stone Buddha near their house every day would seldom respond to such a question with anything more than "Because I have always done so." Even people who are not ordinarily religious sometimes pray to the gods and Buddha out of reflex, say when their family's lives are in danger. Seki alludes to Masao TAKATORI when he says that the "freedom of folk culture" lies in the "convergence of infinitely many ideas that do not even occur to its participants." He goes on to write:

> The domain referred to as folk belief or, more broadly, folk culture consists of essentially unnamed practices, to which its participants cannot ascribe a meta-level explanation. Or rather, "folk belief" and "folk culture" were the names given to such phenomena that refuse to be named. (Seki 1998: 15)

Seki writes that folk culture lies out of its participants' control. This is the assumption under which research on folklore studies has so far been conducted. That is to say, folklore studies have objectified "folk culture" on behalf of its participants, who lack the "meta-level" language for it, and have divided it into categories such as "folk belief," "performing arts," and "livelihood."

However, the act of self-reference is no longer only the domain of researchers whose focus is meta-level thought; it has come to affect all of us in contemporary society. In other words, reflexive acts and linguistic practices have spread to society at large. A classic example of this

is "place-making" (*machizukuri*), which entails discovering touristic value in previously non-self-referential folk beliefs or ceremonies and enthusiastically making local tourist attractions out of them. Next, I will provide an example where the participants themselves have come to attempt the act of knowledge production by ascribing the meta-level explanations that used to be the sole claim of folklore studies.

3. Reflexive local communities

Yutaka SUGA states that the way of practicing reflexive knowledge production, such as members of a community surveying their own community, is key to understanding the methods of the local people's scholarly practice—the so-called "field discipline." The era when universities were the sole province of knowledge production has passed, and as Suga writes, "people outside of academia" are now actors with "the ability to discover problems in the 'field' of their surroundings; to acquire, transmit, and act on information about those problems; and to form organizations and acquire capital—that is, literacy and ambition." To illustrate this, Suga cites citizen-led *satoyama* studies and environmental conservation movements as examples of the movements of people who compile surveys on the customs and history of their own communities. He writes:

> We can see that those who engage in the act of field research have made it into an end unto itself. Through the act of *surveying*, a surveyor not only discovers the *culture* and *history* that has been preserved by their *neighbors* and others in their *community*, but also engages in reflexively discovering their *Self* in the creation of new human relationships, in coming to understand others (discovering their *neighbors*), and within the community. It is understood that this has become the objective of surveying. Unlike a study of folk culture phenomena in and of themselves, this implies that through the practice of *surveying* the longtime residents of a community, people who are new to that community deepen their understanding of them and strengthen their connections (including emotional ones) with them. It would not be an overstatement to regard this as one aspect of a "new field discipline." In thinking about "new field disciplines," it must be understood that people outside of academia have their own objective in conducting surveys, learning, and applying (objectifying) their findings, and that they maintain a high level of ability to realize this objective (Suga 2013: 2014–15).

What Suga discusses here is the public folklore argument. That is, while the representation of a local community has historically been the work of the researcher, with its residents only existing to be *represented* unilaterally, this is currently being reexamined and the act of representation is being democratized. With the "new field discipline" developing at the citizen level, it is also important for pre-existing folklore studies not to sequester itself in an ivory tower and to facilitate collaborative work.

What is important here is the meaning of the reflexive act of researching and writing about one's own community. Research on communities by residents themselves has a history of being conducted as a kind of cultural movement, as in the "Life Experience

Writing Movement" (*Seikatsu Tsuzurikata Undō*) of the 1950s (Kokuni 2001). While its reflexive perspective is something that it has in common with *Heimatkunde* (homeland studies), which originated in Germany, the movement was a transient trend that ultimately lacked continuity. In contrast, contemporary reflexive cultural movements are survey activities rooted in participatory community development or place-making, as Suga shows.

Where "new field disciplines" and recent citizen-led, place-making initiatives differ from previous cultural movements is in the fact that the former does not limit its practitioners to "natives of the land" in question. In contemporary Japan, one cannot assume that local communities consist only of people who were born and raised there. With residential development in suburban areas causing them to become more mixed, and increasing numbers of urban residents leaving the cities to become "I-turn residents" in rural areas, the "static" inhabitants once imagined in folklore studies have become a minority. Increased social mobility has made one's place to live a matter of individual choice as well[4].

If that is the case, it goes without saying that research methods that attempt to highlight the indigenous knowledge (folk knowledge) embedded in the land are no longer effective. This is because unlike the folk culture surveys of the past, which were intended to solicit from a successor the collective knowledge rooted in the land, locals' own reflexive process of knowledge production places more emphasis on confirming their relationship to the land and forging human relationships through surveying than on conducting research on folk culture as such. In other words, as they survey their land, they discover what their unique place is and who they are as someone who lives there. In this sense, citizen-led community surveys and place-making can be understood as a kind of reflexive search for self-identity.

V. Toward a new folklore studies

Sociologist Kensuke SUZUKI writes that, instead of something that originates in the geographical categories or fixed social groups of the past, contemporary communities should be understood as communalities that are "fluid" yet emerge from "people's reflexive sense of belonging." That is, he posits that communality, whereby a large number of people bound together through the recollection of something they have in common, is community—like civic pride, which emerges through events, or an attachment to one's hometown. Community events and place-making are thus processes through which a community tries to reflexively establish its own identity as a place in order to create this communality (Suzuki 2013: 195–196).

As is evident from this, reflexivity in contemporary local communities is similar in structure to reflexivity in individuals. That is to say, in contemporary society, there is a question of what kind of image to craft for a community/one's Self, which leads to the discovery of elements that make it distinctive. Connecting those individual elements together with intention creates a coherent community image/self-image to be used as a resource for living in the future. The reason that Giddens' rather old theory of self still has validity is because

he stated that reflexivity, which emerged as a trend in society as a whole, has also emerged at the level of the individual. Giddens called the nature of the individual "the reflexive project of the self," which suggests that our very way of living is diverging greatly from what early folklore studies thought it was. It is therefore necessary to find a new perspective from which to understand human life.

The ideal successors of folklore studies have been modest characters who are not particularly self-referential, and the findings of these studies have been constructed from information provided by them. However, the farther real people step outside the bounds of that traditional research methodology, the more they narrate their own experiences and use various tools to outwardly project their Selves. That can also be said of stories told in interviews, which means that it is impossible to divide transcribed data into "necessary, objective information" and "unnecessary, subjective information" and believe that folk knowledge rooted in the land can be found by eliminating informants' pet topics.

If we suppose that a subject and object are inseparable in storytelling, it means it is necessary for us to accept the entire life experience of another, including their interpretation of it and the meanings they ascribe to it. Likewise, it is now necessary to (1) emancipate folklore studies from fairy tales and other literary content and bring it into the domain of experiential narration, whose setting is everyday life; and (2) further the dialogue between folklore studies and interdisciplinary research on life stories, oral histories, and other narratives in the broader sense of the word [5].

Next, it is necessary to comprehend the fact that various things in our lives are now a matter of choice—an extremely basic fact, yet one that has thus far been overlooked by folklore studies. The proliferation of self-narratives is proof that people are continuously searching for and developing who they are; as such, if folklore studies is to include narration, its practitioners must write at the microscopic level about what kind of narratives people present and to whom, as well as how that feeds back into the Self[6].

Only then will it be possible for us to discuss the merits and limits of the methods of seeking to understand the world through narrative and language, which could also be called the supremacy of language in folklore studies. With many phenomena now being subject to reflexive relativization, and "facts" and "reality" being generated as a result of dialogue and communication between people, there is a high degree of latent potential in the folklore studies that adopt storytelling as their principal method[7].

At the same time, we must return to the question of whether it is ever possible for us to describe and understand the world, or people, through language alone. For example, there are dimensions within humans that refuse to be captured in words such as *mind*, *body*, and *soul*, like reciprocal acts such as gestures and facial expressions; embodied skills and traditions, which are called tacit knowledge; suppressed traumas and memories; and the un-self-referenceable interiority, which Judith Butler has called "my opacity" (Butler 2008: 72). Furthermore, we live our everyday lives in relation to objects, science, infrastructure, and various other non-human entities. Measuring how far it can step (or not) inside these dimensions is the only way to refine folklore studies for the 21st century[8].

Notes:

1. In folklore studies, the act of *storytelling* has been understood as belonging to the same category as various media for *expressing* and *conveying* and not just to the category of orality. Recent research on oral traditions has attempted to make the diversity of communicative acts clear by positioning the broader sense of "storytelling," in which a narrator suffuses text and objects with an intent, on the same level as orality (Kawashima 2006).
2. As an example of this, the Deutsches Tagebucharchiv (German Diary Archive) in the suburbs of Freiburg, Germany, was founded in 1998 as a non-profit organization. To date, it has collected diaries from over 3,000 writers in the German-speaking world. Those writers are ordinary citizens who have made their diaries available to researchers and the general public to contribute to research on the history of everyday life and of mentalities (Deutsches Tagebucharchiv 2013).
3. In sociology of religion, the word "secularization" has been used to refer to the process where a religion that formerly affected all aspects of society ceases to have influence on politics, the economy, and other systems. While the idea that modernization is a consequence of the decline of religion was a basic theory of sociology (Weber 1989), this theory of secularization is being reexamined in light of the "resacralization," or religious revival movements happening around the world in recent years (Okamoto 2012).
4. What must be noted here is that even though the choice of where to live is now up to the individual, it does not necessarily mean that everyone can make that choice *freely*, as they wish. "Freedom of movement" is unavoidably influenced by factors such as work, education, income, and family relationships, which means that spatial divisions emerge between those who can move freely and those who cannot (Castells 1999).
5. This is already being attempted in a subfield of folklore studies called "oral history studies," which is a substantially updated version of what used to be "oral literature studies" (Koike 2008). There is also some interaction with research on orality in Volkskunde (Iwamoto, Hokkyō, and Oikawa [eds.] 2011).
6. With developments in research on people's everyday communication (everyday narration) emerging in Chinese folklore studies in recent years (Liu 2013), folklore studies in Japan are also expected to forge a connection with research on gossip.
7. For example, as mentioned in the previous section, place-making and other participatory development activities are also processes of shaping space through interactive communication and thus can be understood from the perspective of narrative research in folklore studies (Kadota 2020).
8. Attempts to expand the possibilities both within and beyond language were once very popular within folklore studies as well. With regard to the former and latter respectively, Seki, ed. (1998) and Fukushima, ed. (1995) have value that cannot be lost to the history of academia.

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Additional Information

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