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## 郷土 / *Kyōdo* / Native Soil

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*Translator's note:* This essay by Satō Kenji, taken from a collection called “Toward a New *Minzokugaku*,” treats one of the most pervasive and field-specific terms in the Japanese discipline of folklore studies. *Kyōdo* combines the Chinese characters for “native place” and “soil.” Although the characters themselves are old, their common use in this combination emerged in the context of early twentieth-century folklore studies. The word remains closely associated with the field. The collection and study of local folklore in Japan has developed as a distinct discipline largely outside of universities and, until recently, with little institutional connection either to anthropology or to folklore studies in other countries. For this reason, some scholars writing in English have translated the field name *minzokugaku* as “native ethnology.” The figure of Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) has loomed so large over this field that it is often referred to in Japanese as *Yanagita minzokugaku*. By engaging in a form of intense dialogue with Yanagita, probing behind each phrase and particle in a famous speech he delivered in 1932, Satō seeks to reawaken the living potential of a word that he regards as having been evacuated of that potential by years of unreflective misuse both within the field and among critics outside the field. In the process, he challenges the nativist reading of *minzokugaku* itself. I have chosen to leave the two words *kyōdo* and *minzokugaku* untranslated. This is not, however, a plea for ontological untranslatability. A term from another linguistic and disciplinary context, yet with intriguing correspondences to Satō's *kyōdo*, comes to mind: Jurgen Habermas' “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*). Satō is professor in the Faculty of Sociology at Tokyo University and editor of the new *Yanagita Kunio zenshū* (Chikuma shobō, 1997-). Numerical citations in the body of the text refer to volume number and page in the Chikuma *Yanagita Kunio zenshū*.

“*Kyōdo kenkyū*” (郷土研究、*kyōdo* studies) formed an important element in the composition of the neologism *kyōdo* (literally, “native soil”) in the 1910s. From there, the

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<sup>1</sup> “*Kyōdo*,” in Komatsu Kazuhiko and Seki Kazutoshi, eds., *Atarashii minzokugaku e: no no gakumon no tame no ressun* 26, Serika shobō, 2002, 311-321.

idea went on to penetrate the thinking of early Japanese *minzokugaku* (ethnology or folklore studies). In retrospect, the potential of this term lay in the way it contained two overlapping meanings, indicating not only the field that was the object of research but also the world of everyday life that configured the researching subject's conscious sensibility. However, in the 1930s, when local folklore collection under the rubric of "kyōdo kenkyū" became the pedagogical fashion inside and outside of official circles, as *kyōdo* became an object of social interest, its range of meaning also inflated confusedly.

One important source for the development of the word is the lecture "Kyōdo kenkyū to kyōdo kyōiku" (*Kyōdo* studies and *kyōdo* education), which Yanagita Kunio delivered in Yamagata in November, 1932. In this lecture, the thinker who would come to be spoken of as the founder of Japanese *minzokugaku* directed two criticisms at contemporary trends of practice in what was then known as *kyōdo* education.

His first point was that "*kyōdo*" was a methodological concept rather than merely a geographical term, which meant one could not substitute for it the name of one's hometown or of a specific existing region. For *minzokugaku* as a new historiography that took its materials from popularly transmitted stories, *kyōdo* was not a space that could be delineated by lines on a map. This assertion of Yanagita's was greatly at variance with the concept of *kyōdo* being promoted in human geography and pedagogy at the time. In the same sense as language, *kyōdo* for Yanagita was a category that operated within the internal patterns of thought of individuals who inhabited it as a space. Below, I will reread *kyōdo*'s historical interest and contemporary potential on the basis of this interpretation of Yanagita's.

Yanagita's second point concerned the tendency to confine the connotations of the new term to knowledge and information that was "unique" to a particular locale. Put simply, his target here was the kind of parochial focus on one's own culture evidenced in "local pride" campaigns. Yanagita's criticism thus dictated a comparative approach to folklore research. Yet the comparative method was no panacea. Naïve comparisons relying on dichotomous schemas can manufacture claims of local particularity that actually cloud observation rather than aiding it. Since Edward Said's *Orientalism*, it has become plain that how we frame cultural comparison is always a matter of strategy that must be engaged in consciously and with care. Yanagita's call for comparisons thus presents another reason to straighten out what sort of work is done by the word *kyōdo*.

### ***Kyōdo* is Neither a Place nor an Affiliation**

Yanagita's first point is known through the following famous and frequently quoted statement:

We were not taking *kyōdo* as our object of research. In contrast to this, many of you speak of studying the *kyōdo*. ... We weren't trying to study the *kyōdo*, we were trying to study something *in/with the kyōdo* [*kyōdo de*]. This something was the life of the Japanese, particularly the past record of this people [*minzoku*] as a group. Our plan was to seek to learn this anew in each *kyōdo*, or through the sensibilities of the *kyōdo* people [*kyōdojin no ishiki kankaku o tōshite*]. (14:145)

How should we interpret the phrase he stresses here, "*kyōdo de*"? Here is one fork in the road of interpretation.

In the simplest reading, Yanagita's remarks have been taken to emphasize the importance of research by folklore collectors in their own native places "in the

provinces,” and his encouragement of this practice. The phrase was read, in other words, as an indication of the place where research should be conducted and, by extension, of qualifications for who could engage in that research. A suggestion of privilege was born from this reading: *kyōdo* study could not be conducted merely by anyone in any place. Through an interpretation strongly tied to the phrase “in each [of our] *kyōdo*,” this reading of Yanagita’s words became bound to a prescription for affiliation, dictating that researchers living in the provinces would be the ones to bear *kyōdo* studies in the true sense.

A substantial number of people must have experienced this interpretation stressing the importance of locally-based researchers as a powerful encouragement and a form of recognition, for Japanese *minzokugaku* in its emergent era relied heavily on teachers in the provincial primary and secondary schools and part-time, non-professional researchers. However, this reading of Yanagita’s words as limiting and privileging a particular identity for the researcher is in the end insufficient.

People well read in *minzokugaku* might offer the opinion that Yanagita’s frequent emphasis on what he called *dōkyōjin* (同郷人), or local natives, is relevant here. In *Minkan denshōron* (On Popular Transmission; 1934), Yanagita wrote that studying “everyday life consciousness” or “spiritual phenomena” was an aspect of *kyōdo* studies, and added, “this could be called the collection of feelings, or collection among the natives of a place (*dōkyōjin*). With rare exceptions, outsiders cannot take part. This is why research in the provinces must develop.” (8:14). The excesses that resulted from this text subsequently being given an expanded reading as referring not simply to who can participate in the act of collecting but to the epistemological issue of who is capable of

comprehending the material collected itself is no minor problem, but I won't discuss that here. However, no new conceptions for *minzokugaku* will emerge from confining *kyōdo* within a logic of inherent belonging that treats people of the same native place as *prima facie* sharing a “*kyōdo*.” Regardless of whether one speaks of *kyōdojin* or *dōkyōjin*, the validity of a *minzokugaku* way of knowing cannot be assured without considering the actual substance of *minzokugaku* research practice.

### ***Kyōdo* as a Bodily Medium**

In contrast, if we focus instead on the expression “through the sensibilities of *kyōdo* people” in the above passage, we notice the room for a second interpretation with a different range of implications surrounding the term “*kyōdo de*.” That is, an emphasis on method.

The particle *de*, in addition to indicating place, is used to point to a mediating means or method. When Yanagita says that their research was not taking *kyōdo* as its object but “through the sensibilities [ishiki kankaku o tōshite] of *kyōdo* people,” this sense of the prepositional phrase as marking a method is clearer. If the *de* in “*kyōdo de*” is interpreted this way, the word *kyōdo* takes on the sense of a *means* for apprehending the “everyday life” and “the past” that are the objectives of study. Taking *kyōdo* as means rather than site, it becomes clear that the privilege accorded to the “provinces” (*chihō*) against the power of the centralized state in *minzokugaku*, and to the “native place” (*kokyō*), which tended to get nostalgically exaggerated as social instability increased, only held meaning to the degree that they facilitated the understanding of behaviors and sensibilities already woven into the patterns of people's bodies. In other words, *kyōdo*

means the everyday itself as a kind of given datum, the form that sensibilities, put to work and reproduced, take as practice.

This kind of phenomenological interpretation of *kyōdo* in *minzokugaku* resonates with the so-called “linguistic turn” in anthropology. Anthropologists in recent years have critiqued past ethnographic practice by focusing on the constructive and performative character of language. In this move, they have shifted the site of the problem to the process of understanding itself—in effect, to the *kyōdo* as an embodied culture that constrains the consciousness of both the ethnographer and the informant with the force of the political effects of language.

*Kyōdo* within this second frame of interpretation is neither a place nor a qualification for researchers but a device for focusing on the nature of the bodily awarenesses that are formed in people by the spaces in which they are born and raised and on which they continue to rely in the present as a method for constructing their understanding of an object. If so, this is precisely why grasping “the sensibilities of the *kyōdo* people” and the “*kyōdo*” as their collective effect becomes the most important material for Yanagita’s practice of “seeking to learn.”

### **The Relation between *Kyōdo* and *Nihon***

Most of the critics of the *minzokugaku* paradigm and of the folklore scholars who adopted the somewhat naïve localist interpretation of *kyōdo* have started by enclosing *kyōdo* within the actual, concrete village or rural district, and have gone on to read the above-quoted passage as shifting the ground toward the abstract concept of Japan. They have claimed that Yanagita replaced the small *kyōdo* as the proper object of study with

the larger “life of the Japanese” and “past of the people as a group,” and that the essence to be critiqued lies in this expansion. From this position, they can then assert that the true aim of *kyōdo* studies, while claiming to lie in recognition of the diversity of *kyōdo* and regions, actually lay in incorporating them within statist political conceptions of *Nihon* and the *minzoku* (the people or nation), mediating them through the supposition of a unitary deep stratum of national identity.

We need to note that several of the formulas seen in the trend of *minzokugaku* critique that was popular in the late 1990s—that is, the understanding of *minzokugaku* as a politics that mobilized the subjectivities of the *kyōdo* for the purpose of national citizen-making, the accusation that it exploited *kyōdojin* researchers to this end, and the interpretation of emphasis on *kyōdo* as no more than a form of expression of xenophobic nationalism—all equated *kyōdo* with the provinces (*chihō*) and the native place (*kokyō*), predicating themselves on the same simplified understanding of *kyōdo* as a physical place that was widespread within *minzokugaku*. As a result, these critiques do not take on the epistemological puzzle posed by the second interpretation of Yanagita’s statement.

Yet, if we remove “of the Japanese” and “the people as a group” from the quoted passage in Yanagita’s lecture, leaving the middle portion simply as “that something is everyday life, particularly the record of the past,” his manifesto still maintains its meaning. We should not discard its contemporary significance. Viewed in this light, the meaning of the difference between *kyōdo* as object (marked with the particle *o*) and *kyōdo* as means (marked with the particle *de*) reveals its pure methodological import. Even if much of what called itself *kyōdo* studies was in fact research on Japanese culture done by local surveyors in the countryside, making the historiographic critique of their



results correct, there is no less present-day value in daring to read the term *kyōdo* and field of *kyōdo* studies as holding the possibility of a historical method that could throw doubt even on the generalized, homogeneous framework of *Nihon* itself.

To put it in the manner of Bachelard, ignorance is not a blank sheet of pure innocence on which no knowledge is written. Rather, it is a fabric of entangled interpretations and customary habits on which knowledge has already been written back and forth and up and down, constantly being reproduced like the web of a spider or the nest of a bird. If so, the preliminary work toward understanding is the pause or break in this process, and the production of doubt should not be a one-time gesture of intervention but should have instead the character of constant, continuous and systematic breaking (or caesura; *setsudan*). Think once again of Yanagita's words: we don't study *kyōdo* as object (*kyōdo o kenkyū suru*), we study in or by means of the *kyōdo* (*kyōdo de kenkyū suru*). It is precisely the Bachelardian emphasis on the work of interpretation as something ongoing that has been overlooked in *minzokugaku* due to the diffusion of the localist, substantialist interpretation of Yanagita's subtle statement.

### **The Power of Doubt in Research and the Authority of Education**

The second point in Yanagita's lecture, on comparison, has been discussed almost exclusively in negative terms within the understanding of *kyōdo*. Yet it remains an important point. Yanagita's lecture also criticizes the hastiness with which the education establishment sought to import the results of contemporary *kyōdo* studies directly into the classroom in their respective regions. This passage is not as famous as the one I first quoted, but since it allows several variant interpretations, let me quote a minimal portion.

The other thing we did not anticipate was the optimism, or the hasty plans, with which the achievements of individual *kyōdo* studies would be taken and immediately applied in ordinary education at each place of residence, particularly for the nurturing of knowledge and virtue in young children. We never once held such bold hopes.(14:146)

It would be a mistake to take from this passage that Yanagita is adopting the intellectual elitist and anti-pragmatist position that knowledge of one's familiar *kyōdo* doesn't help in actual education. The fault, he finds, lies not in the importation of *kyōdo* studies to the classroom itself, but in hastiness and the oversimplistic direct application of "individual" results. Why did these issues demand criticism? There are two main points here.

The first concerns the authority that education possesses in a society increasingly governed by schooling (*gakkōka shakai*). One cannot look to the educational system to transmit new knowledge without questioning the authority of school education itself. In much the same way, this position of critique challenges the establishment of "correct" answers as a means of suppressing questions. *Kyōdo* studies, which sought to illuminate *kyōdo* life on the basis of the participants' own observation and experimentation, originally began from suspicion of existing history education. Yet *kyōdo* education was forced to confront the danger of innocent adherence or blind obedience from children, who might believe anything. Hurriedly connecting research to education without recognizing their difference introduces a serious deception. "*Kyōdo* education" under the direction of the Ministry of Education was built around an axis of hometown pride and national patriotism, merely amplifying moral homilies of hard work, diligence and self-improvement. Even supposing that these programs mobilized the few historical facts that Yanagita termed "the slight, provisional results" of *kyōdo* studies, what kind of aid could imposing this fragmentary knowledge provide to unraveling the concrete substance of the

social problems of any particular region in reality? If *kyōdo* education offers no more than spiritual admonition to do one's best, Yanagita writes, it will be merely a "momentary respite," postponing the "disappointment" that would come with adulthood (14: 149-151). In short, appraisals of the level of *kyōdo* studies were too facile. And further, Yanagita was targeting the social formation itself of what he termed "the various so-called studies of culture to date," which sought only to "draw some kind of conclusion." This kind of instrumental structure of knowledge was a repressive force in Yanagita's eyes that conflicted with the ideals of *kyōdo* studies. This harsh assessment of *kyōdo* studies at the time forms the background to his euphemistic statement, "We never once held such bold hopes."

### **The Importance of Comparison in *Kyōdo* Studies**

If this is the case, was there no way for *kyōdo* studies to break down the power of *kyōdo* education from the inside? Yanagita's second criticism, of the absence of comparative work, is introduced precisely in the context of this appraisal of present conditions.

For *kyōdo* studies in the true sense of the word, he asserts, the "achievements of research in individual *kyōdo*" are insufficient. Why was this so? It was both because comparisons had not been made and because the work of *kyōdo* studies did not open itself to comparison. He criticizes rapid application, for example by expressing profound doubt "whether knowledge limited to the facts gathered in individual *kyōdo* and understood by their disparate observers, without comparison or synthesis, and without mutual

enlightenment between regions, used as it is in *kyōdo* education, will yield beneficial results.” (14: 147-8).

Observers as researchers, unable to overcome their divisions, making no comparisons and offering no insights to one another, traffic in knowledge within their own regions. In the end, this was no different from the “educational enterprise of the village know-it-all” (14: 151) in the days of regional isolation when there wasn’t very great need to confront new doubts—in other words, the “old-style arbitrary logic” of village elders (14: 154). However, awareness of the internal *kyōdo* of sensibility (*ishiki kankaku*) cannot form without the work of comparison, which puts one face to face with a logic for universalizing partial and fragmentary observations. Thus, an approach that recognizes the necessity of comparison won’t be born from the diffuse and over-general understanding of *kyōdo* as distinct, individual, and diverse regional spaces.

From this standpoint, the recent criticism of so-called “one-country *minzokugaku*,” which asserts that comparison in *minzokugaku* inevitably fails to overcome the limits of the nation-state Japan, rashly leaps to its conclusion. This is little more than sloganeering. It fails to deal with what kind of comparison is in fact necessary. The everyday itself may be constructed within the powerful force field created by the political effects of language, yet there is no reason in principle that this compels the frame for comparison to be fixed within the nation state. On the contrary, the question of what form of comparison is needed, and of what scope, is a matter of the perspective demanded by narration of the object itself and the capacities of the researching subject.

## ***Kyōdo* as an Unconscious Arena**

I believe Yanagita's lecture presented in economical terms the point of *kyōdo* as a research strategy. Yet this is not to say that he sufficiently encompassed the meaning of the word. There is a broader field to measure in order to see how it has operated. We need to trace with care the assumptions behind the nuances of terms like *kyōdo butō* (kyōdo dance), *kyōdo geinō* (kyōdo performance art), and *kyōdo gangu* (kyōdo toys), which took shape in profound connection to their particular research fields, as well as the adjacent field of *kyōdoshi* (*kyōdo* history). The materials for this project remain untouched in the historiography of *minzokugaku*. As a result, the honest truth is that we are probably still not at the stage to produce a comprehensive overview.

Recognizing this situation, and at the risk of departing slightly from the present theme, let me outline a few points that deserve attention as we grope for new possibilities. To begin with, we must be prepared to reject the unspoken ideological effect of communalism that lurks in the *minzokugaku* concept of *kyōdo*. Like the term *mura* (village), *kyōdo* tends frequently to be linked to the *kyōdōtai* (共同体; communal body) and imagined as a holistic system. For this very reason, it is indispensable to analysis of its transfigurations that we hypothesize it on the contrary as a structure that encompasses contradictions and tensions, or patterns of domination, submission and competition.

It is hazardous to speak of the *kyōdo* in substantive terms as the “natural village” in opposition to the “administrative village,” corresponding to the *ōaza* in the old division of villages, in as much as this silently introduces concepts of identity and presumptions of homogeneity. True, village consolidation during the 1880s, a bureaucratic move comparable to the consolidation of Shinto shrines, generated tension between the native

place and the foreign within the *kyōdo* in its embodied sense. However, it is not accurate to understand this as the origin of the gap between the “natural village” and the “administrative village.” Conditions requiring a conceptual distinction between the village as an element of a regional system of government and the village as living group must go back further historically. We need to examine the constructedness of the supposed unity of villages that today appears “natural” as something discovered and articulated retrospectively through comparison with what had been lost or through the imagination. Even if we view the issue from the more universal perspective of the formal system versus the informal human group rather than the “administrative” and the “natural” village, the reality of a compound structure is unchanged. It would be rash to view the administrative village as merely an externally imposed legal structure without connection to a human group. To the same degree, it is a dubious projection to imagine the natural village as a harmonious group unconnected to any system. The pitfalls of the same dichotomous formula exist in posing *mura* against *ie* (ムラ、家 ; village and patrilineal house), as well as the “*ie* system” versus the *katei* (家庭、modern family home).

*Kyōdo* is an arena (*ba*) of practice that extends to the unconscious. It is an important field for observation. When, for example, the media of legal and structural systems, like the “administrative village” and the “*mura*” and the “*ie* system,” intervene and seep into the “natural village,” the “*ie*” or the “*katei*,” the arena of that contradiction and struggle is the *kyōdo*. I proposed earlier that the *kyōdo* could be redefined as what is given at the level of the body, including the unconscious, that it was the very form of awareness and sensibility used naturally as a method within each person’s everyday

existence. If we correlate this understanding with the popular contrast of *tatemae* and *honne* (appearance and inner truth), however, because of the flatness of the concept of *honne*, which includes no internal contradiction, the *kyōdo* as object will probably be distorted. I prefer rather to grasp the manifestations of *kyōdo* as object based on recognition that the unconscious itself is a construct containing repression, sublimation and rationalization, as psychoanalytic theory has made clear. Only in this way can *kyōdo* be reborn as a concept that includes fissures and struggles.

### ***Kyōdo* as a Commons of Experience and Doubt**

We must go further and actively reassemble the vision of *kyōdo* as a commons of knowledge and experience. The significance of the negative definition, that it is neither individual villages, towns and settlements, nor a space that lost its unique contours in modernization, lies here. The flip side of *kyōdo* as a commons of knowledge and experience is *kyōdo* as a common space or a process for constructing the foundations of doubt and critique.

*Kyōdo* research posed itself against text-based historiography. Its most fundamental critique lay in the ideal to be a practice of resistance against the private ownership of history. This was the strategy of the term *kyōdo* in its most profound manifestation. Yanagita's essay "Kyōdo sōsho no hanashi" (Speaking of a *Kyōdo* Library; 7: 358-385) is contained in the work *Taidokushoreki*. What this polemical piece makes clear is the fact that in its original conception, *kyōdo* studies was a critique of history. While thoroughly criticizing the elite consciousness of old families that retain written records, it doesn't stop at a simple condemnation of the private ownership of

history, but extends to a methodological critique of the text-centrist historical consciousness that established that private ownership in the first place.

For *minzokugaku* research to be the kind of *kyōdo* studies suggested here, the field will probably have to engage in a self-conscious reconstruction of the standards of method. As I said earlier, regional affiliation or other inherent qualifications for the agent of research cannot be a standard. Instead, I think, we need to ask what kind of process for the production of knowledge each active research practice demands as a methodological standard of research focused on *kyōdo*. *Kyōdo* is the everyday that is not clearly articulated in language, the unconscious elements, the body, the basis of knowledge and experience. How can we speak from contemporary everyday life to articulate its still unexpressed significance? Here lies the frontier of contemporary *minzokugaku*.