Hyōgo Kenritsu Rekishi Hakubutsukan Hyōgo Rekishi Kenkyūshitsu (ed.) *Harima no Kuni Fudoki no Kodai Shi*. Kobe: Kōbe Shimbun Sōgō Shuppan Centre, 2021, pp. 220–225.

The value of *Harima no Kuni Fudoki* as source material: The world of orality

Wataru SAKAE (trans. Edwina Palmer)

Orality in *Fudoki*

It is thought that many of the place name explanation myths in the various extant *Fudoki* texts were originally collected from stories transmitted orally in their respective localities. The vestiges of orality can be directly seen in *fudoki* other than that for Harima Province. For example, there are place names introduced with repetitive words and phrases such as '*Kuni ko, Kuni ko*' (Come land! Come land!') or '*kawabune no mosoro, mosoro*' ('The river boatmen's "Haul away! Haul Away!"')[1] mentioned in the preamble to the Ou *Kōri* section in *Izumo Fudoki*. And in *Hitachi Fudoki* we see place names introduced by their *kuniburi no kotoba*—a type of *makura kotoba,* 'pillow' word, evocative of that place—such as '*Komomakura Taka no Kuni*' ('the land of Taka, land of straw pillows') and '*Nigiriii*, Tsukuba no Kuni' ('the land of Tsukuba, land of rice balls'). So saying, we see hardly any such direct evidence of orality in *Harima no Kuni Fudoki* apart from a few such as the description that Iwa no Ōkami said '*Owa*!' ('Done!') after finishing making the land (Iwa *Mura,* Shisawa *Kōri*). Perhaps on account of that, little interest has been shown in orality in *Harima Fudoki* hitherto.

Edwina Palmer's Theory of Orality

In recent years, however, some research has appeared that scholars of Japanese literature should take note of. Edwina Palmer, a researcher living in New Zealand, has spent more than a decade writing about orality in the place name origin myths in *Harima Fudoki*. In 2016 she published the world's first English translation of *Harima Fudoki* as a monograph.[2]

Palmer, citing examples from overseas, points out that in 'literature' there are two categories: (1) works based on the written word and texts, and (2) those which are transmitted not by the written word but by the spoken word. The latter are called 'orality' or 'oral literature.' Palmer says that the transmission of events and information among peoples who have no writing is carried out by means of the voice, facial expressions and gestures, songs and musical accompaniments, etc. In place of the written word, the narrator's use of language and the structure of narration are all the more complex. She notes that 'word play'—which she dubs *kuchiwaza* in Japanese—is used extensively in order to make a vivid impression on the minds of the audience and to create a strong impact. The concrete examples Palmer presents include repetition, rhythm, puns, panegyrics, and chiastic reversal. She finds several such vestiges of orality in *Harima Fudoki*.

The tale of Asauchiyama

For example, in *Harima Fudoki* there is the following passage about the place name Asauchiyama in Ihibo *Kōri*, which is putatively in the vicinity of present-day Uchiyama, Honda-chō, Tatsuno-shi:

> Asauchiyama. Long ago, Izushi no Kimi Marahi, a man from Tajima Province, lived in a house on this hill. When two women in his family wove hemp one night, they died, just

---

[1] Translator's note: A call among river boatmen while some of the crew pulled their boats upstream along the towpath using ropes. They chanted in time to, and mimetic of, the plop of the oars in the water. Uegaki Setsuya, *Fudoki*, Shinpen Nihon Koten Bungaku Zenshū 5, Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1997; p. 137, n. 9). Cf. the refrains of many English sea shanties.

[2] Translator's note: another translation appears in a collection of *fudoki* translations: *Records of Wind and Earth: A Translation of Fudoki, with Introduction and Commentaries*, Michiko Y. Aoki (trans), Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, Inc., 1997, 163–261.

like that, with the hemp on their chests. Hence it is called Asauchiyama. Even now the people of the neighbourhood never weave hemp at night.'

In the first half of this, it says that the place name Asauchiyama is so called on account of the two Marahi women dying while weaving hemp. Then in the second half it records that there is a custom in this vicinity of not weaving at night. If this is read only as written text, its meaning remains obscure.

However, Palmer argues that once this is read as one act of orality linking the second part to the first part, a holistic storyline emerges. She points out that *asa* 'morning' is an unspoken or hidden play on *asa* 'hemp or flax'. In other words, 'If hemp is not woven at night, when is it?'—'In the morning.' So the place name story for Asauchiyama is actually founded on the logic of 'the hill where hemp is woven in the morning.'

Palmer deduces that both the narrators and audience understood each other through this kind of orality. She says that place name origin stories and myths were originally recounted using such word play. This is an interesting way of looking at it.

The tale of 'Mikata' and 'Katami'

Another example of what Palmer observes appears in the place name explanation for Mikata *Sato* in Shisawa *Kōri*, which she regards as an oral device similar to one in the orality of ancient Greece. At the end of that tale a version appears that differs from the version given at the beginning: 'In one version, the Great Deity planted his staff in this village as a keepsake [*katami*]. That is why it is called Mikata.'

Until now it has been accepted that the *kata* of *katami* was a straightforward pun on the *kata* of *Mikata*. But according to Palmer, this is an example of the oral device of reversing elements of a word—here *kata* and *mi*—known as chiastic reversal or inversion.

Chi refers to the letter *x* of the the Greek alphabet; so chiastic reversal means crossing or swapping elements of the word. Even in modern Japanese we sometimes call *yado* (lodgings) *doya; tane* (seed) becomes *neta* (ingredient*,* topic, gadget, magic trick, etc); and *shirōto* (amateur) becomes *tōshirō*, for example, as *tōgo*, a kind of argot. She points out that chiastic reversal is just such word play.

The value of *Harima no Kuni Fudoki* as a source of orality

Moreover, she believes that when people in ancient Japan heard such oral devices as these, they aroused a sense of humour and elements of comedy, and through them the place name origin tales were impressed on their memories. And because devices of orality in ancient Japan, including chiastic reversal, were as complex as those seen in ancient Greek stories, *Harima Fudoki* should likewise be evaluated as 'world cultural heritage'. The UNESCO world heritage designation is limited to geographical sites, so properly we should say that it has value as 'intangible world heritage'.[3]

At any rate, hitherto *Harima Fudoki* has not been paid as much attention as *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, but when we shine the torch on it and see it in the light of international comparisons in orality, Palmer's view is that it contains oral techniques comparable to those of Greek literature, and that that in itself makes it valuable as 'world heritage': this opens up a whole new frontier for future research into *fudoki*. The standing of *Harima Fudoki* as source material has been raised by a foreign researcher, and one aspect of the cultural idiosyncrasies of ancient Harima has become clearer.

Once we have started looking at it in this way, what we should consider further are things like where such oral narrations (as outlined above) took place, and what their purpose was. We should do this because the fact that there were storytellers intentionally using such oral techniques, and that there were people who listened to them, suggests that this was not done in a workaday context but that they were performed in a special *hare no ba*, or sacred space. And as for its purpose, we cannot explain it away as simply in order to reinforce the transmission of information. In the following I would like to present my own thoughts on the subject.

The rites and rituals of orality

---

[3] Translator's note: In Japan, items designated as 'important cultural properties' are divided into 'tangible' (*jūyō yūkei bunkazai*), such as physical works of art, and 'intangible' (*jūyō mukei bunkazai*). By analogy, Japan's ancient orality may be regarded as 'intangible.'

First, there is the question of location. I think this was at the purification rituals carried out periodically in villages all over the country: in short, the festivals of spring and autumn. Unlike nowadays, festivals in ancient times extended over several days and comprised a number of sacred prayer services and magic, including communal eating and drinking and *utagaki* merrymaking. One of these was the oral ritual that attempted to demonstrate the origins of the various events held during the festivities.

For the period of the festival, the locally powerful family that temporarily took on a priestly role appointed those among their sons and daughters who excelled at narration and word play as *katarite* (raconteurs) and *miko* (shrine priestesses); and then had them recount the traditional stories about the various events of the festival. This was not done during the daytime but at night. The audience comprised everyone in the village, who participated in the festivities regardless of age or gender. Immediately before the festivities commenced, the village people would listen to: [1] the lineage of the deity/deities to whom prayers were offered and the story of their enshrinement; [2] the formation of the local landscape (the *kunizukuri* 'land-making' myths); [3] the origin myth of why this place was superior to any other (*kunihome*, myths 'in praise of the land'); [4] traditional tales about agricultural rites and communal feasting to ratify *kunishime*, 'occupation of the land'; [5] the origins of why a particular presiding family was designated as officiants (ancestral tales); and [6] myths of the origins of the place name(s). All sorts of sacred services and activities followed.

In other words, the orality of *Harima Fudoki* as propounded by Palmer was deeply connected with the beliefs and religious practices of the time. They formed, so to speak, one part of the myths (*kami katari*).[4] This had the practical purpose of recounting the origins of the festival and the justification for it, and increasing the village inhabitants' sense of belonging to the community. The purpose being wrapped up like this, it was the devices of orality that conveyed the content of the narrations more effectively, and they were used to make it all the more memorable.

In the lives of people who have no written word, rites and rituals that contain such oral devices are indivisibly bound up with the reinforcement of power on the part of locally powerful families, who aim to unite the community and temporarily control the proceedings of the village festivals.

---

[4] Translator's note: *kami katari* means both the recounting of tales about the deities and the concept of a deity entering into (possessing) a human who speaks for the deity in question.