

Cultural differences seen in the German and Japanese version of the folk song “Kogitsune”

Kaho Umeda Ririko Furukawa

Riku Matsunaga Mirei Oshima Mariko Ototake

1. Introduction

It is thought that folk songs express both national character and peoples' lifestyles. Many folk songs from overseas are well-known in Japan, such as “Torna a Surrient” from Italy, “Froschgesang” from Germany, and “J'ai perdu le do” from France. Interestingly, there is a big difference between the original lyrics of the folk song “Kogitsune” and the lyrics once translated into Japanese. By comparing and studying the original song and Japanese version, it might be possible to understand the living conditions and thoughts of the people at the time the song was made.

2. Method

An Internet search for the lyrics for the Japanese version of the song “Kogitsune” and the lyrics of the original German version was conducted. The historical background and lyrics were explored to understand the purpose for which each version of this folk song was made.

3. Results

• German version of “Kogitsune”

(Fuchs, du hast die Gans gestohlen)
Fuchs, du hast die Gans gestohlen,
Gib sie wieder her!
Sonst wird dich der Jäger holen
Mit dem Schießgewehr.
Seine große, lange Flinte,
Schießt auf dich den Schrot,
Daß dich färbt die rote Tinte,
Und dann bist du tot.
Liebes Füchlein, laß dir raten:
Sei doch nur kein Dieb,
Nimm, du brauchst nicht Gänsebraten,
Mit der Maus vorlieb.

(Fox, You've Stolen The Goose)
Fox, you've stolen the goose.
Give it back!
Or the hunter will get you
with his gun.
His big, long gun,
takes a little shot at you,
so, you're tinged with red
and then you're dead.
Dear little fox, let me advise you:
don't be a thief,
don't take the roast goose,
be content with the mouse.

Ernst Anschütz, a German educator and organist, published this song for the first time in 1824. The lyrics describe the hero, a huntsman who threatens to shoot a fox for trying to steal a goose. The fox is warned to be happy eating a rat and not to steal. At that time, in Europe there was a sport called “Fox crushing”, in which a fox was flicked high in the air with a rope. This activity was sponsored by the Royal court. In the early 18th century, Europe restricted free economic activity, and “the Vienna system” which was trying to return to a social system from before the French Revolution was under way. As free economic activity was limited, a form of culture called Biedermeier, or trying not to be extravagant, but to look at daily and simple things among the citizens spread and influenced literature, clothing, and painting. This more modest way of living is reflected in the original German lyrics of Kogitsune. However, this theme is not mirrored by the Japanese translation.

• Japanese version of “Kogitsune”

こぎつねコンコン 山の中 山の中
草の実つぶしてお化粧したり もみじのかんざし つげのくし

こぎつねコンコン 冬の中 冬の中
枯葉の着物じゃ縫うにも縫えず きれいな模様の花もなし

こぎつねコンコン 穴の中 穴の中
大きなしっぽは邪魔にはなるし 小首をかしげて考える

Yoshio Katsu who was a poet in Japan published this song in a music textbook for the third grade of elementary school in 1947. A little fox making up or sawing in a mountain is depicted like a human in that lyrics and they are much different from those in the German version. In Japan, The fox is said to be the divine messenger from the God of Rich Harvest, enshrined in Inari Taisha shrines throughout Japan. When this song was first published, Japan was a post-war society, so daily necessities such as clothes and food were lacking. At the same time, the Japanese national government enacted the fundamental law of education. This tried to organize the education systems to improve children's independence, creativity, and critical thinking. One part of that policy included publishing educational materials including songs. According to this new educational policy developed by the Ministry of Education, songs that were militaristic, ultra-nationalistic, or related to Shintoism were excluded, and foreign songs were rewritten to Japanese versions. In

addition, the Ministry of Education published a new educational policy that changed the focus of education for post-war Japan. In this policy, individuality was heightened while the militarism and ultra-nationalism of the previous system was repressed.

4. Discussion

Foxes are thought to be a sneaky creature in Germany and are looked down on as a creature inferior to humans. The German version of “Kogitsune” was inspired by Biedermeier’s thoughts and has lyrics that reflect the idea that luxury, represented by the goose, was not good at the time. The lyrics also included a lesson that thieves are bad. .

In Inari Taisha Shrines, foxes have long been a messenger from God, so in Japan foxes are creatures to be respected. The Japanese version of “Kogitsune” avoided the use of violent expressions seen in the German version. Instead of them, the Japanese version used lyrics which give a peaceful image, and made listeners think in various ways. In addition, since Japan was poor after the war, it appears to match the simple life of common Japanese citizens in those days.

5. Conclusion

When a song is transmitted from abroad, the lyrics may change depending on the culture of the country, and are not often a literal translation. Folk songs like “Kogitsune” are good representations of the life and philosophy in the country of origin, so knowing about folk songs can help you better understand the country they come from. By accepting cultural differences, a reader could learn to respect and understand other cultures and use that understanding to help build good international relations.

6. References

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