Necessity and Freedom in the Tradition Process

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It is a great honor to be asked to speak to you today, and I would like to thank the University of Tokyo, the Folklore Society of Japan, and the Society of Living Folklore for sponsoring my visit. I'd like to give special thanks to Professor Suga Yutaka, Dr. Hirayama Miyuki, and Dr. Konagaya Hideyo, for making my visit possible, translating my remarks, and hosting me so generously. I also thank Dr. Michael Dylan Foster for his help with our conversation today. And I thank all of you for coming today.

I would also like to convey to you all the greetings and the good wishes of the American Folklore Society. It has been very exciting to us to hear about the renewed vitality of Japanese folklore studies. We are eager to learn more about the work our Japanese colleagues are doing: we were very glad to have a panel of Japanese folklorists at our annual meeting last year, and we hope that more of you will be able to attend our next meeting this coming October in Nashville, the home of country music.

Folklorists around the world find it difficult to defend the idea of a "living folklore." In the West, the very concept of folklore was shaped in the modern period to declare certain practices pre-modern or obsolete. If anthropology addressed the so-called "primitive," the remote Other of Europe's colonies, the study of folklore claimed to describe the intimate Other, the Other within: peasants and lower classes, minority populations, non-Western peoples, women, and children. Folklore itself was described as cultural leftovers, maybe charming, maybe dangerous, but doomed in any case to slow death. The idea of folklore as survival gave modernizers--state officials, factory owners, educators, clergy, and others--the authority to suppress or transform any practices that

seemed to interfere with the modernization process, and to exercise control over the people described as "folk."

But we can now see the limitations of the modernizers' gaze. In the twentieth century, innumerable world crises revealed both the fragility of modernity and the ongoing vitality of tradition and “traditional” actors. In politics, we have seen the fall of fascist and communist regimes, the rise of civil rights movements in liberal societies and of anticolonial movements in empires, and more recently the resurgence of nationalisms and populisms and the flowering of globalized youth cultures and social movements. Technology has also surprised us, creating unpredictability instead of predictability and fostering opportunities for participation instead of turning us all into passive recipients of mass culture. Japanese popular culture and Japanese youth culture, which have influenced the whole world, offer ample evidence that economic globalization and technological modernization do not lead to homogeneity.

In the United States, folklorists trying to adjust the field's ideas to these unexpected developments began to talk in the 1960s about the creativity in folklore: Dan Ben-Amos famously declared that folklore was not inert survival, but "artistic communication in small groups." Ever since the 1960s we have been talking about the importance of individual artists and their active revisions of both folk tradition and mass culture. We have talked about how new media and channels of communication, from the telephone to Facebook, help folklore to circulate. We have talked about the emergence of new folklore forms. We have talked about the past as a conscious selection and re-creation in the present. We have worked very hard to show that the people who get called "folk" have dignity, intelligence, and agency. We have changed our methods of study to privilege not the movement of cultural forms, but their use and meaning to actors in a specific context, turning from comparison to ethnography. We have also worked to create active connections among university professors, professionals in museums, archives, and nonprofit organizations who create public presentations for general audiences, and community scholars--those people who work to document and interpret their own traditions. All of these kinds of people come together in the American Folklore Society, and this is both rewarding and difficult.

These changes have been of great importance in reviving a field of study that once seemed to be doomed to disappear along with its object. And they find support from a broad social interest in popular creativity. As the imperfections of modern institutions continue to reveal themselves, everyone is eager to explore alternative sources of social knowledge, whether these are called "indigenous," "traditional," "grassroots," "open-source," "community-based," "peer to peer," "sustainable," or something else. Chroniclers of contemporary culture such as Yochai Benkler argue that new networking technologies have allowed the emergence of a "new folk culture" in which ordinary individuals can communicate freely with one another and participate in collective cultural creation across vast social differences.

Folklorists clearly have a vast field before them for ethnographic exploration. We need to study the cultural forms developed in these new social networks, which become communities of affiliation with their own conventions of communication, badges of identity, and characteristic genres of expression. You in Japan have perhaps the best field site in the world for this kind of research. You can study cultural invention in the context of a wealthy and well-educated society with both strong, rich native traditions and well-informed access to the cultures of the world. So I hope that all of you are out doing ethnographies on the streets of Tokyo.

But based on my American experience of our discipline, I would suggest to you that studying new folklore forms is only one third of the work that folklorists need to be doing. Our turn towards the new in the United States has been affected by certain American habits of thought, deeply rooted in our political and economic tradition of liberalism. Many of you may know from hearing the speeches of our presidents that "freedom" and "choice" are two of the most powerfully emotional words in American public discourse, so powerful that they can be used to justify war and economic aggression. They are associated strongly with individualism, and the liberal idea of the individual as a rational actor motivated by self-interest.

In asserting the dignity of the folk, American folklorists have been eager to show women, children, minorities, and lower classes as rational actors who exercise freedom in making conscious choices and individual decisions. This is not surprising, since we have often participated in liberation struggles. When people sang old African American

spirituals in the Civil Rights movement, they were singing for freedom. When people in difficult circumstances tell stories they are imagining a free space of fantasy and sometimes arguing for a free space of action in reality.

But we have to be careful not to imagine away the constraints of reality. No one, however educated or wealthy, is a wholly conscious rational actor making completely independent decisions and communicating them with perfect clarity. All of us speak through inherited languages and work with limited material resources. All of us learn how to behave inside a social world and respond to social influences and pressures. All of us often act without thinking, act irresponsibly, tell lies, repeat old habits. We are all traditional. Our freedom and our energy have limits. Like other Americans, American folklorists sometimes fail to recognize the burden of necessity.

There are two other paths for folklore research to take that can balance an overemphasis on new cultural creation in our wealthy consumer societies. The second is one I will not discuss today, because I and many other people have written a great deal about it. Folklorists have much to say about the history of how cultures and people get categorized. How did the label of "traditional" get attached to some practices, and "modern" to others? What happens when we imagine that some people are more traditional than others? What happens to practices that get labelled as "folklore" or "intangible cultural heritage" and begin to receive special attention and regulation? Because we have carefully studied the role of folklorists in encouraging and popularizing nationalist movements in the past, we are in a good position to understand how concepts of culture are being manipulated in contemporary economic initiatives and political conflicts.

The third path is the one I wish to discuss today. It is the most difficult part to investigate, the most tied up with our contaminated disciplinary history, and the easiest to forget. Instead of abandoning the materials we used to study, we need to return to them with a different kind of attention. How can we talk about cultural creation that does not happen under conditions of free choice, material abundance, and technological enhancement? What do we do with those old peasant cultures, premodern cultures, everything we call tradition? Can we still learn anything from them or do we just put them in a glass case and call them heritage?

I want to suggest that we go back and re-study the things we call folklore: the old stories, songs, artifacts, and rituals, as they were practiced historically and as they are practiced today, and that we not forget marginal and rural and impoverished communities in our new enthusiasm for the creativity of the metropolis. Instead, let's remember that what middle-class people in rich democratic societies think of as normal--that individuals have many available options about their lives, and social and political freedom to choose among those options--is in fact historically and sociologically exceptional. Most people in most parts of the world in most periods of history, including today, feel their lives guided by necessity into certain paths with limited forks to them. Within those constraints, what kind of creative freedom can they exercise?

Let me first give you a very brief account of a very complicated example. The tradition that I have studied in fullest detail is a civic festival in Catalonia, the northeastern region of Spain around Barcelona. It is called the Patum, from the sound of the big drum that plays throughout its five days, and it has been performed once a year without interruption in an industrial mountain town called Berga since the early seventeenth century. The core of the festival is a series of dances performed in the town's main square several times in the course of five days. The dances feature different masked and sculpted figures:

- a combat of Turks and Christian knights on horseback
- a combat of angels and devils
- two wild mules with firecrackers in their mouths, which chase people and challenge authority
- a crowned eagle that bows to the church and bows to the city hall before performing a solemn dance
- giants dressed like kings and queens that waltz together
- two sets of dwarves, dressed like the lower classes but dancing to the same melodies as the giants
- a massive dance of devils wearing firecrackers on their heads and tails
- and a final dance of the entire public, with the mule and the giants participating.

Today the festival has a designation from UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity; it is regulated by a board appointed by the city, and official presentations explain that it is a Catalan tradition with pre-Christian historical roots, instituted formally in the Middle Ages, unique to the town of Berga, maintained by popular passion, and a symbol of Berguedan identity shared by all its people.

That story is a partial truth, masking something far more complex. It cannot be proven that the festival masks existed in pre-Christian times, the medieval document they cite is a fake, and different elements were added to the festival at different times, with key periods of creation and revitalization in the early seventeenth century, the 1890s, and the 1960s. Some dances have disappeared from the festival and others, like the mule and the devils, have multiplied because they were popular. Music has been added or replaced.

Although the combination of dances is unique to the town of Berga, and several features of the figures are distinctive, both the different figures and the general festival type are common across Catalonia. Only the eagle is unique to Catalonia; all the other figures are found with variations in many parts of Europe, the Mediterranean, and beyond. The dances migrated along with people, and provincial towns like Berga copied prestigious figures like the eagle from more important cities. The festival was not always maintained by popular enthusiasm: during the Franco regime the city had to work hard to find enough dancers, whereas since the 1970s there have been many more volunteers than opportunities. In Berga, as everywhere else, the idea of a unique, ancient, autochthonous folk tradition is a fantasy.

The Patum is shared by all the people of Berga: this is true, at least until heavy immigration complicated the picture in the 1990s. But it does not mean what you might think. Some people like the giants, and some people like the mule; some people will follow one mule but not the other. Some people spend the whole festival looking down from a balcony, wearing their best clothes, while others want to be in the middle of the plaza, wearing jeans and a sweaty flannel shirt to protect themselves from falling sparks. A few people are concerned with the symbolism, while for more it is important to get very drunk and very tired.

The Patum began as a religious celebration on the Catholic holiday of Corpus Christi, but the Catholic framework is important only to a small minority, and even the

priests disagree about whether it is a Christian festival or not. The official story of what the Patum means changes with every political moment. The figures of the Patum are flexible enough to have been interpreted as the submission of nature to the Holy Sacrament, the triumph of traditionalism against liberalism, the triumph of liberalism against traditionalism, Berga's joyful submission to the king, the free Catalan soul defeating the closed and oppressive spirit of Castilian Spain, Spanish fidelity rejecting immoral Communism, and the rebirth of a people from a long oppression. One says what is necessary for the festival to be permitted to continue, and even under the Franco regime the Patum was not only tolerated but encouraged.

The Patum does not have a fixed meaning. A civic festival has to be inclusive, and Berga contains manufacturers and factory workers, peasants and shopkeepers, republicans and royalists, Catalan regionalists and Spanish nationalist, natives and immigrants, men and women, young people and old people. No single interpretation could ever be acceptable to all of these social positions. The Patum also has no single author or source: it is not a top-down invention of the powerful and it is not a spontaneous expression of resistance from below. The Patum has had thousands of creators over its four centuries of existence. The Church encouraged it, then tried to repress it. The city paid for the masks and the dancers, but the miners and peasants and adolescents who danced changed the emphasis of the dances, so that devils far outnumber the angels. Manufacturers put in money to make new dwarves and giants. Lawyers wrote histories and priests wrote poems to explain what the festival meant. In the 1930s different political parties created new mules, each with a different focus for its aggressive behavior. One band played the dances slowly and solemnly; another played them fast and wild. All of these contributions provoked arguments. All of them shaped the complex organism of the festival.

So there is no "natural" community underneath traditional festival. Festivals result from the mutual accommodation of social actors through continuous and difficult negotiation. The great festivals--think of Carnival in Brazil--come out of conflictive societies in political frameworks that are not liberal. People converse in symbolic performance because free speech is not available. And they must develop forms in common--shared genres like festival or epic--because they have no choice but to find a

way of living together. A harmonious society does not need festival. A conflictive society uses festival to rehearse and reflect on social coexistence.

The Patum has many masks because Berga has many differences. Political, economic, and social tensions have accumulated in the symbolism of the Patum as it stabilized itself over time. Some of the Patum elements are aligned, like the elegant upper-class giants and the middle-class dwarves that imitate them. Some of the elements are polar opposites, like the violent plebeian mule and the lordly eagle. Some of the dances are choreographed, with fixed music and a defined space of performance; others move freely through the crowd to the sound of a drum. There is order and there is transgression. Everyone has a point of entry into the festival; everyone is represented. The Patum offers a symbolic combat among the diverse elements that make up the community. But it is a fight in which nobody dies. When the Christians beat the Turks there is always one who escapes, and the devils who are killed by the angels in the second dance return in much larger numbers at the end of the evening. The Patum educates not through words but through the body. The dances are endlessly repeated in the course of five days, during which no one sleeps or stops dancing. Fired by drink and drumbeats, the crowding of bodies, and the thick falling sparks of slow-burning firecrackers, townspeople begin to feel pain as pleasure, and their ideological divisions dissolve in common bodily experience. The Patum teaches Berguedans that they will never love one another, but also that no one is ever going away. Or as they say, "No morirem units, però morirem reunits." We won't die united, but we'll die together. Drunken and wild, beautiful and ecstatic, the Patum looks like freedom. But the Patum is about necessity.

Now I want to give you a more detailed example of how folklore is created in situations of constraint. We can see the process of traditional communities in the microcosm of the prison. Although enclosed environments such as prisons and refugee camps are hardly intended to foster collective cultural innovation, their conditions are often favorable to it. People of different backgrounds with diverse knowledge are thrust together in a situation of scarce resources, existential desperation, and enforced leisure.

In the harshest cases, human ingenuity must be devoted exclusively to the challenge of physical survival. But in many cases where basic subsistence is provided for,

displaced persons face other challenges. They must salvage what they can of their individual and collective past. They must find an immediate occupation in the present, and a way out of confinement. And they must learn to imagine a future without guarantees.

These common problems routinely foster the rapid spread of religious, political, and self-education movements inside prisons. They also inspire more specifically cultural kinds of expression. Some, like the musical performances in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, were imposed by the captors but simultaneously used by the prisoners to cultivate hope and express resistance. Others, like the reinvention of the Irish language among political prisoners in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, were unsuccessfully repressed by the prison authorities. Some cultural expressions were responses to genocide: in Thai refugee camps in the 1970s, performers of Cambodian court dance taught their elite art to a wider population in order to save it from disappearance. In refugee camps in Jordan in the 1980s, Palestinians collected photographs, maps and oral histories to create "village books" commemorating the villages that had been taken over by Israeli settlers in 1948. In the 1920s, Chinese immigrants awaiting hearings for entry into California wrote poems on the walls of the prison of Angel Island expressing their frustration and homesickness.

My colleague William Westerman has studied a more recent case of artistic creation among Chinese refugees awaiting immigration hearings in the US.[1] In June 1993, a dilapidated steamer ship called the Golden Venture was wrecked in a storm off of New York Harbor after a journey of many months from China, along the African coast, and across the Atlantic. The nearly three hundred passengers were Chinese, mostly from Fujian province, seeking entry into the United States. Many made claims for legal asylum based on persecution in China because of Christianity or violations of the one-child policy. Ninety-five of these men were placed in the minimum-security wing of a prison in York, Pennsylvania, where they spent the next three years awaiting appeal hearings after

[1] My account of the prison art is taken from his *Fly to Freedom: The Art of the Golden Venture Refugees* (New York: Museum of Chinese in the Americas, 1996). See also the short film of the same title, produced by Barry Dornfeld.

their initial applications for asylum were denied. While in prison they began to make sculptures out of folded paper.

The supposed founder of this prison tradition is as shadowy a figure as the poet Homer: it is said that he was a man who was later moved to another prison, but no one can give his name. The story is that other men noticed him folding torn sheets of paper into triangles, stacking the triangles together, and shaping them into a simple bird according to a craft technique called *zhizha*, used in China primarily to make funerary objects.[2] Out of boredom, they began to imitate him, using waste paper in the prison to make birds and other forms they had seen in China, such as good-luck pineapples.

Soon the men, few of whom could speak any English, realized that the paper-folding could become a means of communicating more fully with the prison guards and thanking their court-appointed lawyers. The next form they taught themselves to make was an American eagle, its wings and tail made from folded paper, its body of papier-mâché made from toilet paper. Then, by rolling paper into tubes instead of folding it into triangles, they learned how to make bird cages, complete with movable doors—sometimes with the word "China" inscribed on the cage. The eagles, inside the cages, were joined by Chinese-language poems and such mottos as "Fly to Freedom." With plastic spoons they learned how to add texture to toilet papier-mâché, sculpting feathers on their eagles and eventually shaping a Statue of Liberty. The cardboard boxes from instant ramen noodles provided stronger material for larger architectural constructions such as pagodas and towers. The men were not permitted scissors, so they cut paper with the edges of the stiff subscription forms stapled into the magazines.

The prison chaplain and, later, the prison authorities were supportive of this activity, which kept the men occupied and in tolerable spirits as their detention prolonged itself. With the aid of a church-based support movement, the chaplain supplied them with magazines, glue, and colored pens. Eventually, the prison authorities permitted the supervised use of children's plastic safety scissors. The church support group began to market the art outside the prison to raise money for the men's defense.

The art developed through teaching and mutual observation inside the prison. The prison wing was divided into "pods," each containing several cells. Individuals worked in

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[2] I thank OSU graduate student Levi Gibbs for investigating the Chinese context for me.

the common space of the pod, while other men stood by and watched them. New creations were displayed in the windows of the pods, so that men in other pods could look across the corridor and see them. Pods developed distinctive specialties in competition with one another. As a new technique was created, some individuals set themselves to perfecting it, while others continued to experiment. Boredom, internal rivalry, and the desire to communicate with and please the audience outside the prison encouraged the proliferation of different designs through the two and a half years in which the art was practiced. The large Chinese architectural forms like pagodas were found to take up take up too much time and material for the need at hand, and to be too big for the aesthetic scale of the medium, which favored miniatures. More playful or purely decorative animals and plants replaced them. The magazines that were the source of paper also provided new design ideas: the men looked at advertisements for decorative vases and figurines and copied them in their papier-mâché designs. From 1993 to 1996 the men created as many as 10,000 paper sculptures, with a dozen men as the principal artists in the community.

"On a small scale," notes longtime observer Bill Westerman, "village life in the prison became a map of human creativity and folk tradition." But, he adds, that should not delude us into thinking that the men were at ease or happy: the art was also a way of struggling with severe depression. "The development and complexity of the art are extracted from the utter waste of lives needlessly on hold." The US Immigration and Naturalization Service was then, and is still today, woefully understaffed and inefficient, and political conflict over immigration policy made the Golden Venture an especially controversial case. By the end of 1996 all but two of the men, separated from their families, hopeless of release or resolution to their cases, had stopped making art.

The Golden Venture art emphasized the desire for freedom: the men dramatized their own situation by designing caged eagles. And making the art was itself an exercise of freedom within the severe constraints of necessity, including the men's own psychological limitations. The Golden Venture case shows us in microcosm how vernacular creativity works. Traditional knowledge is applied to new materials in a new situation. The form develops through mutual observation, innovation, and competition. Inclusion and prestige within the tradition result from a commitment to participation and

then from skill. Technical innovations respond to the challenges posed by the specific materials, their limitations, and their scarcity. Aesthetic and symbolic innovation are born out of playfulness that arises from boredom and frustration and from the powerful need to communicate by any means available, since the official channel was both severely restricted and ineffective. These conditions--scarcity, frustration, and constraint--are highly concentrated in prison life, but they are also characteristic of what we call "traditional communities." They generate poems, stories, music, pottery, textiles, festivals, and everything else that we call folklore.

The Golden Venture case also shows us what happens to traditional art once it begins to circulate in a liberal consumer society. The men's case received a great deal of publicity in the mid-1990s, and, unusually for the United States, their predicament excited sympathy among people of widely different political persuasions. Because some were Christian and some claimed persecution for refusing abortion, conservative Protestant church groups rallied to their cause. On the left, they received attention from activists for refugee rights and public folklorists interested in traditional art as a tool of social justice. Their art and their story were featured in an article in *Life* magazine and in news stories on the prestigious television programs Sixty Minutes and The MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour. An exhibition of the art was mounted at the Museum of Chinese in the Americas in New York City in 1996, and later shown at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. A selection of the art was also taken to the Pacific Coast Origami Conference in San Francisco in Autumn 1997. Much later, in 2006, a documentary, "Golden Venture," played at several US film festivals, and the trial of one of the Chinese-American traffickers brought the case renewed attention.

What were the results of all this publicity? It was of limited use in easing the prisoners' situation. Through the sale of the sculptures, about $100,000 was raised for the men's legal defense. 38 of the 286 Golden Venture passengers eventually were granted asylum, based on proof of forced abortion or sterilizations, and some juveniles were released to foster homes. Exceptionally, thanks to efforts by the folklorist Bill Westerman and a volunteer legal team, five of the principal paper artists were granted green cards under a special legal provision for "artists of extraordinary ability," designed originally for elite performers like Mikhail Baryshnikov and Yo-Yo Ma. A judge later overturned

one of these rulings, claiming that folk art was collective and did not demand extraordinary ability.

The rest of the men had less satisfactory outcomes. Ten died in the shipwreck. At least 99 gave up their appeal attempts and submitted to deportation. A dozen went to countries in Latin America. Many more disappeared into the population while awaiting trial. In February 1997, a week after an embarrassing front-page story in the New York Times and the sending of two paper sculptures to President Clinton, the Clinton administration finally pardoned the fifty-three men remaining in prison, an ambiguous legal position that allowed them temporary work permits but still left them subject to arbitrary deportation. Today, sixteen years later, many of these men have formed families and own successful businesses (including two restaurants in my own city of Columbus, Ohio) but their legal cases are still unresolved. One or two kept making art for a few years after release in the hope of selling it, but the tradition essentially disappeared among the men once they dispersed and there was no more use for it.

But that is not the whole story. If you google "Golden Venture Folding," you will find more than 8000 hits. The Origami Resource Center, Wikipedia, and other websites will give you photographs and technical instructions for making your own folded-paper figures like those made in the Pennsylvania prison. It seems that when the art was shown in 1997 at the West Coast origami show, it awoke an enthusiastic response among amateurs of paper-folding. Within a year, three picture books had been published in Japan and one in the US, where the practice became known as 3-D (three-dimensional) origami. Kits for making it were also being sold. In this decade, Golden Venture folding has become popular in Romania, where several websites feature the technique. It appears on other sites in Brazil. In 2007, a Japanese art student at Iowa State University used to the technique to make a working chair out of 35,000 pieces of paper, in order to show the use of recycled materials and also to get into the Guinness Book of World Records. Some of the older sites mention that the technique was developed by illegal Chinese immigrants in prison seeking to raise funds for their defense, but in most cases the phrase "Golden Venture" appears without any explanation. The names of Yan You-Yi, Wu Luo Zhong, Zheng Xin Bin, Chen Fen Hou, and the other prison artists have long since disappeared in the transmission of the practice.

In short, in contemporary society art forms can circulate much more freely than human beings can, and they can circulate independently of binding social relationships. This kind of freedom is not inherently good or bad, but it seems to me that it changes the nature of folklore. Often it encourages the flowering of art forms. Origami enthusiasts are making paper creations that would never have been tried by the Golden Venture prisoners. Popular music poses a more conspicuous example: Japanese musicians have made major contributions to musical forms developed in places like Harlem or Jamaica. Many art forms are now cultivated not by communities of necessity but by communities of choice, people from around the world who love the tradition, who devote their skills to it freely, and who bring a diverse range of knowledge and cultural influences to its practice. The traditions are valued as such, without having to be attached to social purposes.

The new communities of necessity do not have much time for making art: poor people today are migrants working long hours in factories in Mexico or China. The few people who remain in the traditional communities of necessity--rural areas and indigenous communities around the world--are encouraged to "preserve" their traditions in order to attract tourists, allowed to be curators rather than creators of "intangible cultural heritage."

Individuals in any of these situations have a different relationship to their art than the traditional one. (Of course I am here drawing an ideal distinction for the sake of clarity.) It is worthwhile here, from my European perspective, to remember the original definition of tradition in Roman law. *Traditio* comes from the verb *tradere,* to pass, and it referred to a means of transferring property between individuals. *Traditio* was distinct from inheritance, based on descent, and distinct from abandonment, which allowed the property to go to anyone. In *traditio*, the owner designated his successor by a physical transfer from hand to hand. He passed the property or a symbol of it, such as the key to a warehouse, to the new owner. The transfer had to be a conscious and deliberate act on both sides.

This to me is a useful image for the transmission of folklore in a traditional situation. The hand-to-hand transfer marks a personal relationship of mutual obligation between giver and receiver. We can take the touch of hands as a metaphor for all of the

contextual knowledge that comes with folklore: how it is to be performed, how it is to be used, what it is for. The conscious transfer involves responsibility on both sides. The receiver agrees to take responsibility for the practice. Just as importantly, the giver agrees to let it go, to give up control. So tradition is not static, but moves forward in time, remembering at the same time where it came from.

Of course I am not saying that cultural transmission in the context of social obligation has disappeared entirely, or that it can only happen in the real space of premodern communities. But it is less common and less easy in conditions of mobility and abundant choice. And it is easy for those of us brought up to cherish our freedom to forget that there is value in knowing how to live under constraint: knowing how to share social forms with people we do not like in circumstances that we did not ask for.

It is important, though, for humanity not to lose this knowledge. We are now learning in frightening ways that consumption has ecological limits. We are also learning that a society fragmented into communities of choice can fall apart into violence. Because folklorists have long studied the kind of people who learn how to live with necessity, we have an important role in helping contemporary society to use its freedoms wisely and conserve them for the future.

I have spoken to you today, as you see clearly, out of my own Euro-American intellectual tradition. I hope that the activities in the Folklore Society of Japan and the Society for Living Folklore will make it possible for me and my colleagues to enrich our understanding of folklore through the long tradition of Japanese thinking about art and aesthetics. I look forward to learning from you all.