Imokurabe Festival in Nakayama

Tsuboi Hirofumi

Japanese festivals are often based on the dualistic idea and organization, for instance, east and west, old and new, land and sea, male and female, adults and children, upper part and lower part, and so on. These were discussed by social anthropologists, folklorist and other scholars, and some hypotheses on worldview, idea of kami (deity) and idea of value of Japanese people were offered. But positive study on these festivals and organizations is very rare, so in this paper I will offer the field data of a Japanese festival based on dual organization. It is Imokurabe festival in Nakayama. The main purpose of my field work in Nakayama is to offer the ethnographic description of this village community, so this paper is a result of my fieldwork.

Nakayama is a mountain village located in Shiga prefecture, central Japan. This paper is based on my field works performed in five times from 1971 to 1980. Imokurabe festival in Nakayama changed its form in this period, so it was very urgent to make a detailed record of this festival. Nakayama has been integrated as a village at least since Edo-era, but it is divided into two section, Higashi-dani (east valley section) and Nishi-dani (west valley section) locally. Main ritual of Imokurabe festival is made of competition of length of taro grown in each section. This opposition among the two section is dissolved by exchange of each taro at the end of this festival.

In Nakayama there are some opposition between Higashi-dani and Nishi-dani for example on economic life, social structure, and idea of kami. In economic life there are paddy agriculture and field agriculture, in social structure there are principle of age class system and sex system, and in the idea of kami there are Nogami (deity in the field) and Yamanokami (deity in the mountain). For the ethnographic description of Nakayama, we must collect more data on economics, social life and folk religion in Nakayama. I write this paper to offer my data to compare the Imokurabe festival with other similar festival based on dual organization.