Oyamabayashi in Kakunodate City—A Festival in a Local City

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Due to rapid urbanization, land or blood are no longer considered to be rational means to bond people together. Because of the lost bondage, nearly every chinjyusha, or a local shrine, its organization of local people and its festival are in constant decline. At some shrines, on the other hand, their festivals are celebrated on even larger scales. Particularly, traditional festivals such as the Gion Festival in Kyoto, Tenjin Festival in Osaka, Sanja Festival in Tokyo, or Yomatsuri Festival in Chichibu are reorganized into grand-scale festivals. Oyamabayashi Festival in Kakunodate may belong to such festivals.

Unless festivals are reorganized to accommodate themselves to the changing local community, to use more concrete terms, unless they are transformed to an entertaining festival enjoyed by the local people from a religious festival supported by worshipers, they are doomed to simplification and, in the end, extinction. As for Oyamabayashi in Kakunodate, the festival is successfully designed as an intellectual game to raise a sense of rivalry, bondage, tension as well as excitement by clashing their Yama (a festival car) with each other after careful plans, negotiations, and preliminary pushing and pulling. Oyamabayashi Festival has an irresistible attraction.

According to Fumi Nakamura, a festival consists only of uncommon elements which are incompatible with ordinary life. But, one of the main topics of any meeting, whether it is a meeting of youth, a meeting of adults, or any other one in Kakunodate is always about Yama clashing, and the rivalry and competition felt in the festival are never totally lost from people’s minds until the next festival. The pent-up frustration that comes from controlled release of energy before the festival, it is believed, causes the people to give violent joy in making full release of it on the festival day.