Furyu Associated with Construction and Sand-Carrying

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To get a fair perspective view of Furyu, or an improvised form of culture, of the pre-modern era, one must have a standpoint of "Furyu of labor" as well as "Furyu of leisure." "Furyu of leisure," such as city festivals, plays with toys and annual events including displays of fireworks, served as the only conventional frame of reference for interpreting Furyu in the pre-modern days. There was no frame of reference for "Furyu of labor." Labor in this context only includes such activities as construction or dredging that do not presuppose routine roles for laborers at fixed time and in fixed place. It should be noted that such works as construction or dredging represent the nonrepetitive nature of Furyu more fully than annually ritualized Furyu of leisure.

There are several studies previously made on Furyu of labor such as ones connected with bell-casting, construction and transport during the Muromachi period, but there are no studies so far to point out that those examples of Furyu in the Muromachi period might have continued down to the pre-modern era.

The main theme of this article, therefore, is to examine the possible continuity of Furyu over different periods; from Furyu represented by construction works in Kyoto during the Shokuho period through to Furyu represented by sand-carrying works in Kyoto during the last days of the Tokugawa regime.

This article carries quotations from various sources to prove that there existed some cultural continuity in Furyu from construction works in the Shokuho period down to sand-carrying works in the closing days of the Tokugawa shogunate. It is more natural to suppose that the flourishing of Furyu of sand-carrying rooted in the historical background of the preceding days. There is, however, no outward evidence to prove that Furyu of sand-carrying at the end of the Tokugawa government originated in Furyu of construction in the Shokuho period. Furyu in the Shokuho period was characterized with dancing whereas Furyu in the late Tokugawa period was featured for its masquerading, processions, and performance with crafted works. The latter Furyu seems more like an atavistic inheritance of Furyu of percussion accompanied prayers in the Bon Festival during the period preceding the Shokuho period.
It is not quite meaningful, however, to try to determine continuity on the basis of the outward similarity between different types of Furyu, which is, by definition, a culture created by discarding the traditional "patterns" or practices made possible by repetitive training. What has to be sought for must be restoration of the Furyu spirit associated with labor. Furyu of construction that thrived during the Shokuho period lost its vigor by the time the Tokugawa regime was securely established. Towards the end of the Tokugawa regime, when the government's rule untightened, the liberated spirit of Furyu, it is believed, found in sand-carrying an outlet for its spontaneous expression and reinvigorated itself.