The World of Folk Customs in Ōhira, Numazu City

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This paper reports the results of investigations continuously carried out at Ōhira in Numazu City, Shizuoka Prefecture, which is one of the fixed investigation points of this research project.

The investigation was conducted with the presumption that the individuality of an area should have been strongly influenced or formed by its people's historical consciousness of the area; in other words, people's consciousness of their society should have created their history. The author aimed to approach the world of folk history, including not only history as historical facts, but also history as it exists in people's consciousness, or sometimes the fictional world of created history, from the viewpoints of both written documents and actual folklore. Fortunately, there exists at Ōhira an interesting historical document compiled by its people, which is a chronicle appropriate for clarifying the above problem. It was because this chronicle exists that Ōhira was designated for investigation. Based on the chronicle, the investigation focused on an examination of the relationship between its content and the many actual folk customs. Almost at the same time, another investigation was carried on in parallel on the folk customs of Ōhira, the results of which were compiled and published as an monographical investigation report (Shizuoka Prefectural History, Folk customs Investigation Report entitled “Folk customs of Ōhira”). In this paper efforts have been made to avoid duplicating the above report, and the content has been limited to focus on an understanding of the characteristics of the village; so the present report does not describe the folk customs of Ōhira in comprehensive detail.

The folk characteristics of Ōhira may be understood as follows; Its process of development and subsequent continued struggle against the Kano River created the folk customs which have been handed down to the present. The worship of Dōsojin (the guardian deity at the village borders) itself has developed widely from Eastern Suruga to Izu, and Ōhira is just one village within this area of distribution. The Michikiri (boundary-marking) ceremony, which has spread nationwide, is not rare, either. The custom of erecting a charm clipped between a split bamboo stalk, as seen at Ōhira, is also a normal style. Nevertheless, it is not usual for these religious services toward Dōsojin and Michikiri ceremonies to be held mainly in the summer season, as in the case in Ōhira. It can be considered that the circumstances under which Ōhira has developed and formed have created and maintained the characteristic boundary-marking folk customs described above. The weight of history may still preserve these two customs with a zeal that cannot now be seen in neighboring villages.