A Village Handing Down the Traditional Dance of Furyu

—A Monograph on Life in Komoya, Arao City, Kumamoto Prefecture—

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This paper is a report on a survey of life and folk customs in Komoya, Arao City, Kumamoto prefecture, where a medieval folk dance called Furyu has been handed down. Arao is located in the north west of Kumamoto Prefecture and used to be a flourishing coal-mining area until three decades ago.

Komoya is a farming village located roughly in the center of Arao City, and at present Komoya's farmers are mainly engaged in rice-farming and pear cultivation.

Furyu is an elegant dance performed by two boys, wearing beautiful handmade Kasa (hat) who beat two drums, one large and the other small. It is performed in dedication to the Nobara-Hachiman shrine at its autumn festival, held on October 15th every year. At the same time, a divine service named Settoh is held, in which a sacred infant riding on horseback worships at the shrine. It is said that the Nobara-Hachiman deities were invoked from Usa-Hachiman shrine (or Iwasimizu-Hachiman shrine) as guardian deities of the manor of Nobara-no-sho. This shrine has festival records (Nobara-Hachimang sai-jibo) (written from 1252 to 1902) dating from the mid-13th century.

The central community in Komoya is situated some one kilometer west of this shrine, and there are two other communities situated to the north and south respectively. The social organization of Komoya village, however, is divided into two areas, "Komoya-Kita" (northern Komoya) and "Komoya-minami" (southern Komoya). Similarly, the ritual organization of the Kaneshiro shrine, the guardian deity of the village, is divided into two groups (the so-called Za), that is, North and South.

The neighborhood group called Yashukuchi is the most fundamental and important organization for everyday matters, functioning as a mutual aid organization for funerals, weddings, farming labor, etc... It seems that Yashukuchi is similar to Yashiki, which was a unit supporting the divine services of the Nobara-Hachiman shrine in medieval times. This characteristic of Komoya society, to maintain this old-fashioned type of organization, (of Yashukuchi) may be considered a factor as to why Furyu has been handed down.

The development of new residential areas recently has led to an increase in the number of new inhabitants, and the method of village administration is changing: therefore, it is worth taking notice of how Komoya village will change in the future.