Chōja, Tabisho, and Mandokoro
—Aspects of the Establishment of the Shinkō Festival—

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In some festivals of ancient shrines in and around Kyōto, the otabisho (resting place for a portable shrine) for shinkō (divine passage) is called ōmandokoro or mandokoro. The ōmandokoro or mandokoro is the local base for religious worship, where the otabisho priests, the chōja (patriarch), or persons in the guise of the chōja, welcomed the gods and held religious services, as head of a miyaza (organization for religious worship)-type religious service group. The ōmandokoro or mandokoro could mean a permanent location, as seen in the case of the Gion Ōmandokoro, or a temporary meeting place used only at festival time. The name may be derived from the mandokoro meaning an organization that dealt with the general business of influential temples or shrines, however, this cannot be stated absolutely.

In some Engi (legend) regarding the enshrinement of gods, otabisho is described as a temporary place of sojourn for the gods on their way to the site of worship. In these cases, the festival means the reproduction or repetition of the enshrinement of the gods in mutual agreement with the legend (myth). In other cases, the otabisho has a meaning inseparable from the origin of the god, and has an important connection with the manifestation of the god. The otabisho priest or chōja was the central figure in the local festival as the priest, or as the chief appointed by the head shrine. In the Kinki District, there is an example of chōja who monopolized the position of priest for religious services and succeeded hereditarily to it in the occupation of priesthood, and monopolized the post of chōja and succeeded hereditarily to it, thus controlling both religious and secular matters in the village. The otabisho priest and chōja should be understood, not only as priest and developer, but also in the light of the medieval ritualistic world which maintained the chōja in being.

In Kyōto and Shiga prefectures, spring shinkō festivals are well established as village ritual. The festivals of the Hiyoshi, Ōyamazaki, Inari, Uji, Matsuo, and Mukō shrines which are dealt with in this paper, are spring festivals held around April. The form of these festivals was established from the Heian Period to the Middle Ages. In addition to those festivals discussed in this paper, there are many other spring festivals held at ancient shrines in Kyōto and Shiga. The shinkō festivals of villages in and around Kyōto and Shiga are considered to have come from the festival procedures of ancient shrines in the capital, transmitted either directly or indirectly. Also, the form of ritual services by the honjo (lord) might have been transmitted as the rites for the guardian god of a manor owned by a temple or a shrine. These ritual services took root locally, and the form of the festival became diversified by the addition of local meaning, and thus changed into folk customs.