Tsukurimono of the Daijyo-e Festival

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The hyo-no-yama (shime-no-yama) erected when the Daijyo-e Festival takes place is believed to be related to the origins of tsukuri-mono (models, fabricated things) in Japan and attention has been paid to its significance mainly in the field of folklore studies. However, there are many facts about its history that remain unknown. This paper confirms that in the early Heian Period hyo-no-yama were large-scale copies of Chinese style decorations and I also suggest that the hyo-no-yama of the Shinjo-e that is mentioned in a collection of poems from the mid 8th century that appear in the Man'yoshu (Anthology of Poems) were the same kind of tsukuri-mono made in the Chinese style. The Daijyo-e Festival was originally the same festival as the Shinjo-e and it is thought that they diverged and came to have their own meanings around the end of the 7th century. Viewed from the perspective of these circumstances one may easily conjecture that from the beginning this kind of tsukuri-mono was imbued with a strong Chinese flavor. This is corroborated by the circumstances of the Daijyo-e that took place in 708 AD which are mentioned in a 736 entry in the Shoku Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan) that shows that fabricated mandarin oranges were used together with decorations of gold and silver jewels. Consequently, given that the hyo-no-yama of the Daijyo-e Festival possessed a Chinese character at a point near the establishment of the Daijyo-e, this characteristic is most likely to date back to the time when the Daijyo-e Festival was established. This calls into question the accepted theory that holds that since hyo-no-yama were erected as a medium or symbol for the spirit of kami (yori-shiro) they were originally a simple Japanese style object that took on a Chinese flavor as they gradually became more and more decorative. Considering the character of the hyo-no-yama in this new light we may conclude that as has been articulated in some quarters even prior to the Edo Era, they were signs that were erected owing to the necessities of the progression of rituals, which developed independently.

Although materials that provide a description of the form of the hyo-no-yama in the Daijyo-e Festivals are limited, there is a clear description of the hyo-no-yama prepared for the Sumai-no-Sechie held in 882 in the writings of Sugawara-no-Michizane, from which we learn that in terms of size and decoration they resembled those used in Daijyo-e Festivals. Because previous readings of this text contain a number of insufficiencies, reference was made to it in this instance by providing a Japanese reading of the text.