“Tsukurimono” in Osaka during the Early Modern Period

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This paper is an examination of “tsukuri-mono” (models, fabricated objects) in Osaka during the Early Modern Period. Though there are various definitions for tsukuri-mono, for the purposes of this paper I define them as “tsukuri-mono that are put out for display at times of festivals”.

In documents where we find mention of tsukuri-mono in Osaka from this time there is an early record from July 1647 in which “tsukuri-mono lanterns” were prohibited from the Jizo-bon festival. In Osaka, this kind of “crafted lantern” continued to be made for festivals and for other occasions throughout the Early Modern Period. As shown in a 1734 entry of the “Setsuyo Kikan” where it is written that “There were many tsukuri-mono at the Mitsu Hachiman Shosengu”, in Osaka tsukuri-mono besides “crafted lanterns” were made from early on mainly for the Shosengu, which were temporary festivals held by shrines. From historical materials such as single prints we learn that an array of craftworks that were depictions of flora, fauna and landscapes using a variety of materials decorated not only town houses in the parish of Shosengu, but also places where they were highly visible such as in busy thoroughfares and at the foot of bridges.

These tsukuri-mono that were an array of crafts reached their peak after the Kansei Era (1789-1801), especially during the decade or so of the period of reconstruction starting around 1839 following the Oshio Revolt. While these continued to be objects made at Shosengu and, as in the past, were an array of crafts made using easily obtainable materials for single use only, they became larger in scale and involved the whole town as scenes that included a background were reproduced from a single model and rooftops were also chosen as places on which to put the decorations. Merchants did not only enjoy making these tsukuri-mono, but they dressed up in various costumes and enjoyed themselves as they entered the world reproduced by the tsukuri-mono. Thus, in Osaka during the latter part of the Early Modern Period the Shosengu tsukuri-mono came to be always accompanied by what one might call “moving tsukuri-mono”, that were the fancy dress dances (“Sunamochi-odori”). This was the development of a merchant culture unique to Osaka that came into being from the tsukuri-mono linked to the “Osukui Oozarae” of 1831 and the tumult of the “Eejanaika” of 1867.