The Refined Processions and Drum Dances of the Festivals of Suwa Jinja Shrine in Kagoshima

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One feature of the distribution of folk entertainment in the Satsuma region of Kagoshima Prefecture is the drum dance (taiko-odori), for which there is a complex and diverse range in terms of form, dance formation, the banners carried by the dancers, and the times of year these dances take place, etc. In a broad sense, the form and dance formation of these drum dances are similar to drum dances performed in the various regions of western Japan. Viewed from the perspective of the history of entertainment, it is believed that they developed from “drumming based on meaningless words in a song used for rhythm (hayashi-kotoba) that preceded folk songs” found in central regions to “drum dances in which songs from epic tales or short songs in the kumi-uta style were sung”. As has been pointed out by previous researchers, one characteristic of the drum dance in the Satsuma region is the drum dance of dedication to the Suwa (Minakata) Jinja shrine. It is believed that the origin of the drum dances of the various Suwa shrines in Satsuma lies with this drum dance that is a dedication to the Kagoshima Joka Suwa Jinja shrine. Of course, not all the drum dances of the various Suwa shrines can be said to have been directly inherited from the Joka Suwa Jinja shrine festival, and it is believed that in addition to the foundation of folk customs in the countryside which accepted the drum dance, the drum dances of today were introduced some time from the end of the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period.

This paper introduces the “Picture of the Suwa Jinja Shrine Festival Procession in Satsuma Province” (Satsuma Kuni Suwa Jinja Saishi Nerimono Zu) held in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum for the purpose of examining how the drum dances of the countryside were dedicated at the festivals of the Kagoshima Joka Suwa Jinja Shrine during the latter part of the Early Modern Period. In other words, as part of the July festivals villages in the outskirts of Kagoshima such as Taniyama and Sakurajima used to dedicate a succession of drum dances performed over a period of more than ten days, and which were called hyakusho-odori, to Suwa Jinja shrines and surrounding temples. Although the passing on of this custom ceased a long time ago, researchers have been aware in the past of two types of materials dating from the latter part of the Early Modern Period that provide pictures of this dance, which they have used in their research. By combining this research and the findings of my study of the “Picture of the Suwa Jinja Shrine Festival Procession in Satsuma Province” I suggest that processions with a Noh-type theme took the lead in these drum dances. Large drums are drawn in detail and due to the striking resemblance to the drums used in folk entertainment from Tokushige in Ijuin-cho, we may conclude that like the Tokushige drums they produced hardly any sound and were “drum dances for viewing the enormity of their size” and that the drum dances were for enjoying the “refinement of form” of the large drums and banners.