"Transfer" – The Process of the Acceptance of the Hakata Gion Yamakasa in the Ashibetsu Kenka Yamakasa in Hokkaido

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Yamakasa are festival floats that are tsukuri-mono mounted with splendid decorative images. They are to be found mainly in northern Kyushu. Of these, the centripetal force of the Hakata Gion Yamakasa, which is backed by 762 years of tradition, has greatly influenced festivals in regions throughout the country. The folk term “Hakata utushi” represents the relationships between these various festivals. The Ashibetsu Kenka Yamakasa in Hokkaido is a festival of this type that is found in a region the furthest distance from Hakata. It is a contemporary festival that was established 18 years ago. And it was a television program that mediated the relationship between the two. The Ashibetsu festival is a good example of what the author calls “densho”, which is the passing on of folk customs through electronic media.

In the beginning the impetus for the Ashibetsu Yamakasa came from the Hakata Yamakasa and was nothing more than a copy that was transformed into a local festival. However, with the passage of time the acceptance of the Hakata Yamakasa in Ashibetsu gained momentum so that ultimately it transcended the framework of “tsukuri-mono” as it became a pursuit for the folk culture of Hakata itself. In this process there were a number of stages of acceptance that involved television, personal experiences, commodities, and the exchange of local identities, from which we may derive an overview of the process by which Hakata folk culture was transmitted and accepted on multiple levels in Ashibetsu. This was accompanied by a growing awareness of a genealogical relationship with the Hakata Yamakasa, which gave rise to a variety of statements that asserted authority. This is essentially the construction of “Hakata” in Ashibetsu and is a reproduction of the image of “Hakata”.

The aim of this paper is to discover from the relationship between the two as described above the fundamental nature and process of the transmission and acceptance of folk customs. It pays particular attention to differences in acceptance resulting from the electronic media, “being trendy”, collective consciousness and group characteristics. Based on the comments of people in the regions concerned and newspaper articles, the paper attempts to describe and analyze what sort of effects these differences brought to the actual site of the acceptance of folk culture while including the perspectives of the involvement of those questioned for this study. In the course of writing about this example the author has come to the conclusion that the question of the peripheral matter of “old customs” articulated in folklore studies up to the present has not been a matter of survival so much as a matter of construction.