The System of Turns by Chous and the Method to Collect Festival Funds in Chous for Hakata Gion-Yamakasa During the Edo Period

UNO Kouiti

Using the Gion-Yamakasa festival held in Hakata during the Edo period as an example, this paper brings to light the increase in the cost of festival and the subsequent changes to the method of collecting festival funds and the broadening of the group that provided these funds. The study centers on two chous (administrative districts), Gyou-no-chou and Katadoi-machi.

There were two parts to taking turns for the Gion-Yamakasa—one that involved the Yamakasa and the other Noh. This paper looks at turns for the Yamakasa, the more important and more costly of the two. Turns were circulated among the chous so that each chou took a turn only once every several to ten years or so, which enabled them to put together the huge amount needed during the interim period. This is responsible for the gradually increasing elegance of the festival.

However, the cost of staging the Yamakasa skyrocketed at the late of the Edo period, making it very difficult for chous that were not very well off to gather the funds required using their traditional methods of collection. It was in response to this situation that the method employed for collecting funds was changed and the group of people called on to provide such funds was broadened.

A study of the two chous shows that the group of people providing the funds and the group of people who ran the festival when it was their turn was expanded to include all households in the chou. This expansion reached particularly extreme proportions in Katadoi-machi at the end of the Edo period. The same levy was placed on each household in the chou, and with regard to running the festival as well, it appears that in principle each household head played an equal role. Though of a different nature, both chous managed to raise some of the funds required by using houses and land owned by their Choujuu (body that administered the chou).