The Separating Process of the Portable Shrine Parade and the Float Parade in an Urban Festival during the Modern Period: on the Case of the Suwa-Festival in Shinjuku of Sawara City, Chiba

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This paper traces in detail the separating process of the portable shrine parade and the float parade of the Suwa Festival held in the Shinjuku district of Sawara City in Chiba Prefecture. This is done largely through describing the changes in the methods of operation of the festival and the changes in the content of the individual rituals that made up the festival.

First, the paper sets out the method of operation and the content of rituals of the Suwa Festival during the Tenpo period (1830–1843). It confirms that for the return parade of the portable shrine in the Suwa Festival at that time a procession comprising mainly of floats from the various machi in Shinjuku led the parade, so that together the two formed a single continuous festival procession. It also concludes that direction of the festival was carried out exclusively every year by a machi called Sekido-chou.

This is followed by an examination of a record called the “Heidai Ksoku Narabini Warai Chou” that was passed around the machi in Shinjuku to write in turns. (This record is cited at the end of this paper as an appendix.) According to this record, during early Meiji period Sekido-chou’s monopoly over direction of the festival ended, and a system was established whereby each of the machi took turns annually to direct the portable shrine parade and the float parade. Because at around that time the bulk of the procession comprised of floats, the procession had come to specialize in floats, and it became so large that the parade came to take too much time, which made it difficult to lead the portable shrine parade.

As a result, various efforts and innovations were made to fulfill the contradictory goals of finishing the float parade within the festival period while trying to lead the portable shrine parade in each of the machi as with as much discipline as possible. Most of the changes that occurred in the Suwa Festival during the Modern period arose as a result of these efforts and innovations. Ultimately, in the festival held in 1950 the earlier float parade had been scrapped so that the floats from each machi had been completely separated from the portable shrine parade. Rather than being an urban characteristic or a characteristic of the festival’s operators, it was the various factors that gave birth to the festival itself that separated the float parade from the portable shrine parade.