Changes in the Participation of Portable Shrines in Float Festivals: The Example of the Gion Festival in Honjuku, Sawara City

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This paper examines how the portable shrine parade in float festivals of the present day is managed, using the Gion Festival of Yasaka Shrine in Honjuku, Sawara City as an example. It also examines how various changes took place, based on “Yasaka Jinja Monjo” (“Documents of Yasaka Shrine”). The Gion Festival is a festival of floats in which one portable shrine and ten large floats form a parade. The floats of the machi are viewed as a festival that is added onto the portable shrine parade. Documents belonging to the town association as well as others frequently stress this add-on festival and the perception that the portable shrines of Yasaka Shrine — the tutelary deity of the Honjuku machi association, took precedence over the floats of the various machi was at the very least emphasized as the publicly accepted view.

However, a look at the actual changes that occurred in the portable shrine parade raises dimensions that are substantially at odds from this publicly accepted view.

One such dimension is the simplification of the portable shrine parade that continued up until the late 1960s. Here, changes in the position of the portable shrine parade of the Gion Festival become invisible from time to time.

Meanwhile, in the Shimonaka district, which I have chosen to represent the small machi, when it became the machi association’s turn they organized a young people’s association by bringing in resources from outside. This saw them hold a portable shrine parade and other events, resulting in the creation of new developments in the Gion Festival.

As illustrated by the simplification of the portable shrine parade on the one hand and then managing a festival that incorporated outside resources on the other, the Gion Festival of Honjuku in Sawara City has faced new dimensions.