Meaning and Function of Yudate Kagura: The Reflection of Tōyama Shimotsuki Matsuri (November Festival at Tōyama Area) in Nagano Prefecture of Japan

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Yudate is the boiling water ritual dedicated to Kami (deities) and Hotoke (Buddhas) based upon the combination of sacred water and fire. This paper analyses the meaning and function of Yudate Kagura consisting of dance, music and Yudate, held at Tōyama valley in November by lunar calendar. Tōyama is located on the mountain area in the southern part of Nagano prefecture of Japan. Shinto priests or Shugenja (mountain ascetics) has conducted these rituals on the occasion of annual cerebration called Shimotsuki Matsuri (November festival) to activate the diminishing power of the sun and human body in the winter solstice. The topics to be discussed in this paper are local history, origin myth, syncretism of Shintōism & Buddhism, ritual process and status of religious practitioners. The main purpose is to make an interpretation of folk religion under the historical perspective. Yudate Kagura is conducted to express the gratitude for Kami and Hotoke to get the good harvest and make sure the future in next year. The villagers want to fulfill the vows of curing the disease, solution of unfortunate troubles and big accidents. Yudate Kagura is the spectacle to become into rebirth through the purification of the body by boiling water based upon the folk knowledge to live with the severe nature.

Key words: kagura, yudate, shimotsuki festival, cosmology, Shugendō