

The Urban Festival and the Function of Urban Voluntary Groups

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Abstract

In this paper I shall consider the appearance, its factor and the function of urban voluntary groups on Kokura Gion Daiko Festival, an urban festival. In the urban festival, the group of participants has come to include a number of different groups formed on the basis of religious, neighborhood, and commercial affiliations, as well as members of voluntary groups and tourists. I give attention to the voluntary groups. Because these associations are linked to the modernization of urban society.

In the process of composing the modern voluntary groups, people are conscious of "being looked at", and this is an important aspect of the festival. Currently, many of the participants in the new voluntary groups are young people who participate in order to affirm their identities. Modernization within urban society is implied in this consciousness.

At the same time, conflicts between the traditional and the modern occur. Modernization has creates a situation in which the spatial and cultural center/ periphery relationships no longer coincide.

Key words: urban society, voluntary groups, modernization, tradition, legitimacy

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I. Introduction

Urban festivals depend on the participation of many people, including spectators. The contemporary complex society is reflected in their activities. Therefore, I shall consider the characteristics of urban society through its urban festival¹. I picked up Kokura Gion Daiko Festival (小倉祇園太鼓)², an urban festival. My intension is to examine the significance of consciousness among the young generations for the social networks of urban dwellers.

The following is the composition of this paper. Firstly, I keep urban studies prior in order and hereafter clarify the position of this paper, and next, explain the background of Kokura Gion Daiko. I address the issue of the activities and position of a number of groups participating in the festival. Secondly, I analyzed the formative process of networks of "traditional" groups, such as those based in centrally located residential areas, and "modern" groups, which are voluntary groups coming from outside those areas. Specifically, I also attempt to point out not only the social factor as results of modernization-problems of decreasing and aging population but also the psychological factor of significance. Lastly, I mentioned the function of voluntary groups in urban festivals. At the same time, I indicate the conflict between the tradition and the modern.

Focusing on the common consciousness among the young, this study will be the first step to clarify the mechanism of creative process of urban culture.

II. Trend of Urban Sociology and Urban Anthropology

Urban anthropology appeared at 1960's -1970's³. Taking the initiative in it, urban sociology by Chicago school has appeared at 1930's. R.E.Park, E.W.Burgess and L.Wirth made some theories about the city; they gave influence to other fields, inclusive of urban anthropology. We can separate their theories to two approaches. One is the approach through human ecology and the other is the approach through urbanism. The term human ecology was coined by R.Park to describe how people adapt to their environment. The process of urban growth is of special interest to human ecologists. To explain how

¹ These data are based on my fieldwork at Kokura from 1993 to 2000.

² Kokura Gion Daiko Festival is held every July in Kokura, Kita Ward, Kitakyushu-City, Japan.

³ The themes of urban anthropology are the social relation among the new dwellers, their patterns of behavior and their worth [Nakamura: 1984].

cities expand, E.Burgess proposed a concentric zone model and noted that a city expands outward from its center [Park1925: Burgess1925]. L.Wirth argued that ecological conditions of size, density, permanency and social heterogeneity in a classic essay "Urbanism as a Way of Life" [Wirth1938]. These theories were criticized for its tendency to equate urbanism with the conditions of Western capitalistic cities by M.Castells[Castells1977]. Hereafter the theme of urban study has been towards various cultural phenomena. Therefore, we have to make clear the creative process of urban original culture to reconsider "urbanism" from contemporary view points. In short, we have to describe urban societies in daily various scenes. Urban society is the whole of daily lives. In the other hand, "city" is firstly defined by the space. In this paper, I discuss on urban societies which have been also discussed in urban anthropology.

There are two directions of understanding urban society in urban anthropology. One is understood that parallels can be seen in rural culture breaking and urbanization [Ledfield1941], and the other is understood that rural culture being re-strengthened in urban society by O. Lewis [Lewis1961]. They discussed on what happened to cultural phenomena in case of which different various cultures met in urban society. Further, they indicated that urban ethnicity was issued through meeting of different cultures because of people's moving between urban-rural areas [Gluckman1961; Mitchell1966; Epstein1958].

The most important thing is the appearance of new theory and new method for analyzing processes and networks. In Japan, urban anthropologists, who analyze some characteristics of urban society through urban festivals, success these new theories and methods. Japanese anthropologist, F.Nakamura contributed to the study of urban festival to take a position in urban anthropology. She pointed out that urban festival is reflected in community, and analyzed social groups not from historical viewpoint but from the social anthropological viewpoint. T.Yoneyama also described the monograph, "Gion-Matsuri" etc, and made clear the complex system in the whole of festival. They had effected on H.Wazaki, S.Morita and T.Anami's studies etc.

When they discussed on the cultural changings of urban festival, they have trend to attempt to explain the changings by the social factor like as decreasing and aging population. They pay attention to how to take influence from outside of community. Many studies as before are based on these direction. I attempt to indicate new direction,

which is psychological factor, as factor of cultural changing. I give attention to the common consciousness among the young people. As a result of my indication of new factor, I can consider the mechanism of creative process of urban culture over the frame of which urban society is discussed through the relation between the festival and social change.

Ⅲ. Historical Background of Kokura Gion Daiko

Kitakyusyu-City is located in northeastern edge of Kyusyu (see Map). To the north, it faces the sea and the northern sector of the city has consequently developed as a harbor and industrial area. In recent years, southern and western sectors of the city have developed into the city's main commercial areas.

In 1963, Kitakyusyu was designated the number six city the government-designated city system. It is made up of seven administrative wards, including Kita ward in which Kokura lies. Kokura itself grew up as a castle town, and has a history reaching back over 300 years. It resent times; Kokura has been deeply involved in Japan's industrialization. The city government offices are located in Kokura. As the center for the administration of economics, politics and transportation for all of northern Kyusyu, Kokura is a vital distinct area within the city of Kitakyusyu.

The Kokura-Gion-Daiko Festival is held for three days every July; it is not simply a shrine-related purification ceremony, but also a tourist attraction that brings up to seven hundred thousands of spectators to Kokura.

The Taiko, a kind of drum, is of central importance for this festival. The drum is played to a distinctive rhythm referred to as "seityou(正調)", which means "legitimacy". During the festival, the drum is carried on a festival car while two people beat it on each side. The drumming is accompanied by the ringing of a bell called "jangara" .

On the first day of the festival, shrine related events are conducted by groups, which are organized based on religious affiliations. The members of these groups come from the castle town area. Each groups carries a "mikoshi" , or miniature shrine, from the shrine to another sacred place during the afternoon. When night falls, group members begin to beat their group's drum, pulling it around the castle-town area on a festival cart.

On the morning of the second day, the mikoshi are returned to the shrine. From one

o'clock in the afternoon, a drum-beating competition for the castle town area residents is held. This competition was first held in 1947. At present, about seventy groups from the castle-town neighborhood participate, each pulling a festival cart.

Each team is further divided into two age groups. The first is a youth group, consisting of children of junior high school age and below. The other group is composed of adults. There is a competition for each age group. In the evening following the competition, various groups start to beat their drums and perform throughout the town.

The morning of the final day is comparatively quiet. From noon, however, a drum performance is held. Started in 1990, this performance involves setting the drums directly on the earth. This type of performance is referred to as a "suedaiko (据え太鼓)", or "set-up taiko", because the drums are placed on the ground. During the performance, the drummers demonstrate not only the "seityou" rhythm, but also newly-created ones. The groups that perform here are voluntary groups based on private networks. This performance is not a competition, but rather spectacle aimed at entertaining tourists.

Next, I indicate concretely the case of "Muromachi" as one of typical traditional groups.

IV. The Network of Traditional Group —The Case of Muromachi—

In the early days, this festival was held solely by residents of the castle-town area. The social system is such that the closer one lived to the castle, the greater one's political power. This power structure was also reflected in the festival. For example, the Muromachi (室町) was situated directly in front of the castle and therefore was the residence of many important individuals.

The residents of the castle town belonged to a groups based on religious affiliations, and they took primary responsibility during the festival. There are about 50 communities like Muromachi in the castle town. All people in the castle town associate with religious group.

Hence, the hierarchy of power was reflected in the status of the castle town dwellers in comparison to outsiders. Within the group, this dynamic was active as well. For example, representatives designated to help the shrine priest in the festival ritual were chosen from residents of the central part of the town, in other words, those with the most political power.

People from outside the castle town area could not become members of this group, and could participate in the festival as spectators. This situation made the members of the groups feel superior to the outsiders.

In the 1960's and 1970's, there were about fifty children of junior high school age or younger within Muromachi. For the three weeks prior to the festival, the adults would teach them to play the taiko. Their goal would be victory in the second day's competition. The children yearned to be chosen, as winning the competition was a cause for much pride. The dual axes of spatial relations and social relations, therefore, both manifest themselves in the old form of this festival.

Kokura station was also located there until 1958. In 1958, Kokura train station was transferred from Muromachi to its current location (see Figure 1) in accordance with a city development plan. After that, people began to pass Muromachi by. Shops were unable to remain in business, and empty lots began to appear little by little. Many residents moved to suburban areas, saking for family business in favor of working for large companies. Those who stayed behind were primarily older residents, leaving a smaller and older population in the Muromachi area.

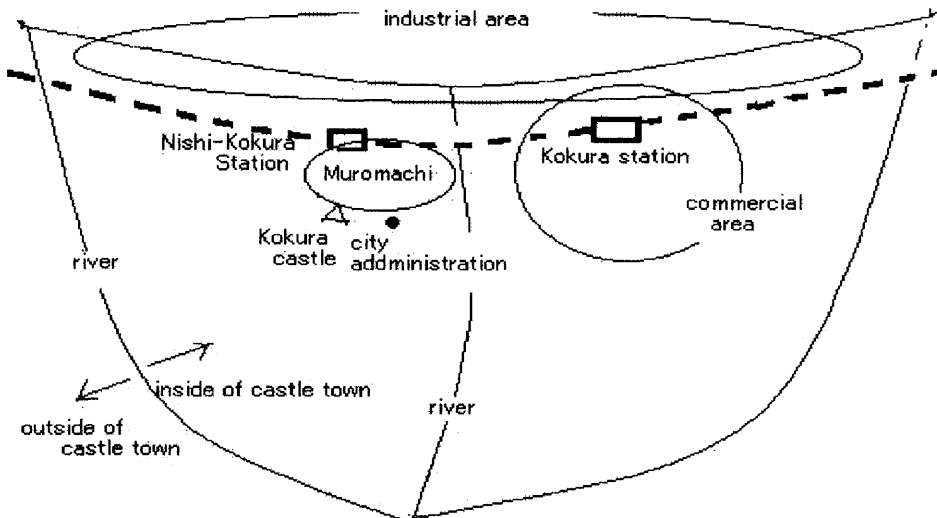


Figure 1 General Map of Kokura

The residents of Muromachi asked the city government for a new station in their neighborhood, and in 1974, Nishi-Kokura station was opened. However, this did not

solve the problem. Because the new Kokura station was surrounded by large commercial areas, people tended to pass through Nishi-Kokura instead of stopping there to shop.

Within the context of the Kokura Gion Daiko Festival, the declining number of residents available and able to participate created a problem. This was solved by including people with connections to the neighborhood in the festival (see Table1). Table 1 provides an example of how this worked in the festival as it was held in 1993. Table 1 shows the alliances built with people from outside the community to augment the number of participants of children. Note that there are fifteen children include here. Six of them live in the Muromachi area and are children of the households that traditionally participated in the festival. Five members live in other communities, but have grandparents who live in Muromachi. The remaining four members have no direct connection to Muromachi; they simply have friends with relatives who live there. First, those from households within the community; second, those from household that have moved to other communities but maintain ties with the Muromachi residents; and third, newcomers who have friends related to the original community.

	Sex	Age	Alliance
1	Man	13	Residence
2	Female	11	R
3	Female	8	R sister (2,3)
4	Female	11	R
5	Man	9	R
6	Female	5	R
7	Man	14	Grandparents in Muromachi
8	Man	12	G brother(7,8)
9	Female	11	G
10	Female	8	G sister(9,10)
11	Female	3	G
12	Female	12	Relatives of friends in Muromachi
13	Man	12	Relatives brother(13,14,15)
14	Man	10	Relatives
15	Man	9	Relatives

Table 1 Alliance of Members in Muromachi(1993)

From this, we can see that the boundary of the community is flexible. When there are sufficient resources within the original community, its boundary remains closed.

When original resources are found to be inadequate, the boundary is opened to import the assistance necessary to carry out the festival, and to insist on their “legitimacy”. Therefore it is important to make the connections to the original families explicit in order to justify the participation of outsiders.

Many other communities within the castle town area have similar problems. Elementary and junior high school have been closed or consolidated due to decreasing enrollments. They, too, are faced with the problem of participation, and they also have changed the criteria for participation consanguineous ties or friendship. Groups that are inflexible, however, are sometimes unable to gather enough participants and therefore end up not participating.

V. The Creative Process of Modern Groups—The Case of Voluntary Groups—

In contrast to the traditional groups associated with communities like the Muromachi community I have been discussing are new groups, which began to appear in the festival in the 1980’s. Many organizations, both old and new, got woven into the festival at this time. As a result, the festival participants now consist of numerous urban groups based on connection as diverse as religious affiliations, neighborhoods, commercial associations, and voluntary associations (yushi teams). Of particular interest are these voluntary associations, which numbered 13 in the 1980’s but had grown to 27 in the 2000 festival. Many of these groups are composed of young people, who are attracted to the festival from various areas far beyond the borders of Kitakyusyu because of their interest in the drums.

To what can we attribute the increase in new groups? Here is what one man who is a participant says about his own case:

“When I was a child, I lived in the neighborhood. It was natural to participate in the festival. After moving to the suburbs and becoming an adolescent, I felt ashamed to participate. I was more interested in girls, and stopped participating in the festival. But after two or three years, I got interested in the drums again, because it seemed so cool (his word in Japanese is “kakkoyoku mieru”). So I decided to join one of the new groups. In the new groups, there are lots of young people, and since they are created by groups of friends, it was easy to join.”

This informant lists his interested in girls and “coolness” (kakkoyoku mieru) of being a drummer as reasons for his first quitting and then rejoining the festival. In other words, appearance is an important factor for him in deciding to participate or not. Many young people share this outlook.

Figure 2 shows the process of development of the voluntary groups. Type1 refers to those who have made their own teams. Note, however, that some young people become employees of a certain company and then choose to join the company’s team, while others do not. Type2 refers to those members who left the community as youths and only came back with difficulty. Type3 includes members who live beyond the borders of Kokura and come to the city to participate in the festival. Formally, this group would not have been able to participate, but it has been brought in to invigorate the festival. From this data, we can see that the voluntary groups are not limited by geographic or spatial boundaries, but rather reflect a multiple plate that can adapt to the needs of people involved.

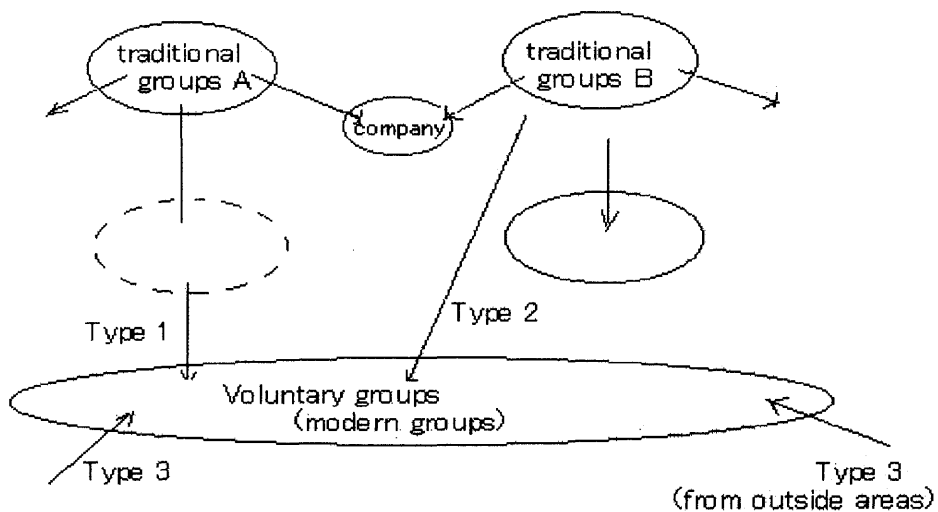


Figure 2 The process of consistence of Voluntary groups

The new group’s teams are more popular than the older teams due to their orientation toward the tourists who come to see the festival. Suedaiko, especially, aims

at entertaining the tourists, and it play a very important role in the festival. The style used in *suedaiko* by the new groups originated in the 1943 film, “*Muhomatsu no issho* (The life of Muhomatsu)”⁴, which was shown all over Japan. Although the film's story was fictional, it was set in Kokura and described the life of a rikisya driver named “Muhomatsu”. In the final scene of the film, Muhomatsu beats a large drum in the festival. The rhythm he used is not the orthodox *seityou* rhythm, but rather an original one. The final scene had a lasting effect on the audience, many of whom believed the story was factual.

The young people who are members of the new groups model themselves on the image projected in the movie, which is reflected in not only the style of drumming, but also their attitudes toward fashion and the “coolness” of drumming. The more their style of drumming becomes popular, the more initiative they can take in the festival. In this way the film has influenced the “*seityou*”, or “legitimacy”, of the rhythm. Both the new rhythm and “*seityou*” exist.

Behind the scenes of all these activities lies the city administration, which lends support to the festival. The administration nurtures the development of the central area as a commercial center, and it uses the festival as a way to promote Kokura to people from the outside. In 1971, the “Kokura Gion Daiko Preservation and Promotion Society” was established as an affiliated association of the city. The society asserts that 60 percent of its efforts go to preservation and 40 percent go to promotion of the festival. There are many requests from promoters for groups of Gion Daiko drummers to participate in various events that are non-festival events. The society selected groups and sends them to these events. In 1974, there were 55 such requests, and in 1991 there were 93. Since 1989, the society has organized the Sue Daiko Kyoenkai, or the Sue daiko Show, on the final day of the festival. The show, as I mentioned before, is purely for entertainment and not a competition; in this way it can be seen that tourism is one

⁴ This story, which was directed by H.Inagaki, is as below. This is fictional story about a rikisya driver, Muhomatsu. One day he became to make friends with the family of a chief of army. The chief of army suddenly died of illness. After his death, Muhomatsu supports the chief's wife and son. Mohumatsu loved her, but he cannot confess his love to her. Because at that time, a chief of army and his family are in high status, but rikisya driver is in low status. Finally, Muhomatsu became old, and he died. His attitude is described as “an ideal Japanese man” in the film. Additionally, there is one more point. At the last scene, he beats the big drum in the festival, Kokura Gion Daiko. He is so cool. The ideal image is mixed with the last scene. His style has an effect on today's festival.

important foundation upon which the festival stands.

VI. The Conflict between the Traditional and the Modern

On the other side of tourism, conflict between the traditional and the new groups has gradually increased. Although the traditional groups have allowed the participation of outsiders in the festival and the composition of new groups by these participants, they criticize the *suedaiko* as being “illegitimate”. New groups, for their part, insist that they are preserving tradition in their own way. Whereas they imitate the performance in “*Muhomatsu*”, (which has nothing to do with the traditional festival) members of the traditional groups are rather puzzled by the gap between fiction and reality this reflects.

The first time groups were permitted officially to perform using the “*Mohomatsu*” style was 1996. An article in the *Yomiuri* newspaper on June 26, 1996, entitled “Free style arrangements OK? Only in the *Suedaiko* Show.” It has been decided that the boundary between the “traditional” rhythm and newly arranged ones should be clearly defined and observed by drummers.

Thus participants have accepted this new bit of culture and opened the formerly firm spatial/ geographic boundaries of the festival. Thus the new participants are able to take initiative in shaping the festival. Many of these people come from other areas, and are therefore both spatially and culturally on the periphery of the festival, as I discussed earlier. But an opposite phenomenon can also be seen in that they have become central to the continuation of the festival. An important factor in determining this, of course, is tourism.

In protecting “tradition”, and continuing the festival, the festival must be reanimated, which in this case was accomplished through the integration of the creativity inspired by “*Muhomatsu*”. Only through opening the borders between the original participants and outsiders could the problems of decreasing and aging populations in the original area be overcome and the festival preserved.

VII. Conclusion

Urban festivals depend on the participation of the many people, including spectators. In the case of *Kokura Gion Daiko*, the group of participants has come to

include a number of different groups formed on the basis of religious, neighborhood, and commercial affiliations, as well as members of voluntary groups and tourists.

The principle governing alliances for the festival has expanded from those based on neighborhood and the festival and consanguineous relationships to include as well those based friendships, company networks, etc.

This process is linked to the modernization of voluntary associations. The association in the urban festival is a complex. At first it is based on neighborhoods within the castle town area, which originally formed the basis for festival organization. Next, the festival organization system moved to a new stage of association, in which people interpreted the festival in their own ways, for example, justifying the participation of outsiders to open the boundary, or using the festival as showing themselves to others, etc.

Additionally, the process of composing modern groups should be recognized. People are conscious of “being looked at”, and this is an important aspect of the festival, as I mentioned before (“The creative process of modern groups”). They know that they are being looked at, they show themselves to others, and they look at others. Currently, many of the participants in the new voluntary groups are young people who participate in order to affirm their identity. It is important to them to appeal to spectators; that is to say, they are conscious of being looked at. Modernization within urban society is implied in this consciousness.

At the same time, however, conflicts between the traditional and the modern occur. Modernization has creates a situation in which the spatial and cultural center/ periphery relationships no longer coincide. In the context of cultural development, “tradition” is dependent on a fiction (that of the “Muhomatsu” taiko drum performance), which in turn opens the borders to allow others in. The castle town area groups therefore are organized in a system whose base extends far beyond the community. The “modern” try to get “tradition” to gain “legitimacy” for new activities. The strength of its cultural position manifest in their popularity among tourists provides a basis for its ability to accomplish this. Thus the traditional and the modern are able to coexist within the context unstably.

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