

### **Owari Tsushima Tenno Festival**

At first, I would like to focus on why this festival was named Tenno Festival. It is named after GozuTenno, the deity enshrined at Tsushima Shrine. GozuTenno was originally the guardian deity of the Jetavana Monastery in India who came to Japan and temporarily transformed into *Bhaisajyaguru* (the Buddha of healing and medicine), enshrined as a god that protects worshipers from epidemics. *Suijyaku* (temporary transformation) is an idea of *Shinbutsu-Shugo* (syncretism of kami and Buddhas) which involves Buddhas from Buddhism, a religion which was brought to Japan, taking the appearance of indigenous Japanese deities. With this, I would like you to know at first just how interesting Japanese festivals are. It is my hypothesis that this religious outlook of the Japanese, the syncretism of Buddhism and kami worship which serves as the foundation of their form of polytheism, worked to restrict the spread of monotheistic religions, such as Judaism, in Japan.

Next, I would like to focus on the fact that this festival is river based. The idea that water is the source of every living body has probably been existing since primitive times. This is why the deity *Seoritsu-hime* (the water god) appears in Japanese mythology. There is the Japanese saying of *mizuninagasu* (forgive and forget, lit. let flow in the water). It is thought that the idea of rebirth stems from the reconstruction of Ise Shrine, where people participating in the festival let defilement flow in the river to

make a fresh start.

The most important Shinto ritual of the Tsushima Festival is called *miyoshi* during which deities descend to sacred reeds bundles. The night ceremony for welcoming the deity is held, and after the morning ceremony for sending off the deity is completed, the *miyoshi* ritual, which places the reed bundles that took on the burden of the defilement of worshippers into the river, is conducted only by shrine staff.

The night ceremony for welcoming the deity attracts tourists. When the summer sun disappears from the evening sky, light can be seen coming from the paper lanterns found on the four *danjiribune* (festival boats). In the veil of darkness, the boats sway gracefully on the calm surface of the river. The movement of the *danjiribune* seen from a distance appeared as if it were animation, representing the perfection of “slow culture.”

Although I will talk more about the festival’s musical accompaniment when I speak about a different festival, I will just say here that there is a wide variety of accompaniment that differ according to location and festival with *hogaku* (traditional Japanese music) serving as the standard form. It is best to think of the festival’s musical accompaniment as being a type of dialect rich with diversity.

Incidentally, this festival was originally held on June 14th and 15th. However, upon changing from the lunar calendar to the solar calendar, it started to be held on the fourth Saturday and Sunday of July. I feel somewhat against this change in dates.

Although I am not bothered by the differences between the lunar and solar calendars, I object to the idea of holding the festival on Sunday. It was set forth by the Old Testament of the Holy Bible that people would work for six days and rest on the final day of the week. However, since seven is a significant number in relation to the outlook on the universe in the Orient, I decided to let go of my obstinance.

Scholar Kunio Yanagita said, “The most important change in Japanese festivals is the emergence of groups calling them spectator, namely, people among the participants that do not share any related religious faith and those who only see this event from an aesthetic point of view so to speak. The meaning of *matsuri* has evolved from “enshrine” to “pray” before becoming “festival.” The majority of festival spectators probably do not think about why the festival is being held or who is behind its management.

However, Tsushima Tenno Festival, which boasts a 600-year history, serves as proof that the faith Japanese have in ancestral worship is very strong.