

Regional Characteristics and Relationships Observed in the Jizo-bon Ritual

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To reveal local characteristics of Kyoto, Obama and Maizuru cities in carrying out the Jizo-bon ritual — a festival to thank Jizo as the guardian of children — that commonly takes place in the Kinki region like many other annual events, unique features and differences of those cities were examined and compared in 2010 and 2011. The observation and comparison suggest that the ritual originated in Kyoto and spread to other areas and that parts of it were unique to each city.

There is concern over the future of the ritual. Particularly, rural farming and fishing villages are facing the loss of the tradition of performing religious rituals and the challenges of low birth rates and aging populations. These issues have also been seen in urban areas. Even though the Jizo-bon ritual is intended for children, it is turning into a gathering for elderly people in Momonomoto, in Kita Ward, Kyoto City. Hiyokecho in Nishizu Shinkomatsubara Ward, in the Nishitsu area of Obama City in Fukui had the last child to participate in the festival. The town will continue the ritual without any children. Likewise, there is no child to take part in the ritual in the Kitatanabe area of Maizuru City. This is the reality surrounding the Jizo-bon ritual.

Since it has been passed down orally, it will likely go through changes in response to the background and mentality of the time and eventually be obscured by the waves of time. The survey found that having gone through a period of rapid economic growth, local residents no longer feel a need to carry it out. This is one of the main reasons for the decline of the custom. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the ritual, an annual festival held at the end of August, will remain in urban areas in different forms but disappear in rural areas.

This is a conclusion drawn from previous studies, fieldwork and valuable information provided by local residents. The previous research did not include their voices but they have told us about the reality of the ritual without exaggerating the situation. Of course, findings presented here are also based on careful examination of reference materials.