

## Changes in rituals to drive away diseases and continuation of such rituals in modern society:

— A close look at Yabuneri, a Shinto bamboo bundle parade ritual  
in Shiratsuka Town, Mie Prefecture —

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As local communities have become modernized and urbanized, rituals have undergone significant changes. Traditionally, academics have valued historical traditions and consistency in rituals and criticized changes in line with the modernization of society. However, do organizers and performers of rituals have the same view on such changes?

A great majority of studies on rituals have examined changes and their causes. Researchers claim that many aspects of rituals, from content to organization, have changed, and offer advice on continuing rituals by analyzing the social and local causes of those changes. Surely, they do not consider the perspective of those involved in rituals. Not many studies are conducted from their viewpoint, even though they are the ones who organize and perform local rituals. Such a study would offer significant insight on local folk beliefs in the domain of folklore.

The author of this paper participated in and closely observed the Yabuneri Shinto ritual in Shiratsuka Town, Mie Prefecture, to find out the perspective of ritual organizers and performers. Yabuneri is a traditional ritual with a 350-year history. This ceremony to drive away diseases presumably originates from the myth of Susano, in which the deity slays a giant serpent with eight heads and eight tails. Tsu City in the prefecture started to move toward modernization and urbanization in the mid-1950s. During this process, the organization and structure of rites and rituals have drastically changed. This paper will reveal how recent changes in Shinto rituals are viewed by those involved based on interviews with shrine parishioners in the Shiratsuka area who organize and carry out the Yabuneri ritual.