SANCTITY AND SANCTION IN COMMUNAL RITUAL: A RECONSIDERATION OF SHINTÔ FESTIVAL PROCESSIONS[1]

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Japanese society is characterized by an emphasis on harmony and self-restraint as guiding principles of daily interaction. As a consequence, alcohol is often considered a necessary catalyst for promoting the open expression of alternative viewpoints, though only in certain culturally prescribed contexts. A Shintô festival procession provides one such context. The bearers of a large, sanctified object "purify" themselves with liberal amounts of sake, and their intoxicated condition combines with the sheer bulk of the object to lend an ominous uncertainty to its movement. Since the object is perceived as being controlled by the will of the deity, however, no one can be held responsible for any damages incurred during the procession. This type of ritual may thus be considered an instrument of social sanction, affording the people a means of enforcing compliance with accepted norms or seeking retribution for perceived injustices. (Japan, Shintô festival processions, *matsuri,* alcohol consumption, informal social sanctions, ritual liminality)

Small-scale, highly integrated communities employ a variety of informal social control mechanisms that function in the absence of, in addition to, or in conjunction with formal legal institutions. Well-known examples include gossip, ridicule, and social ostracism, all of which rely upon the weight of public opinion to influence personal behavior. Often some form of supernatural power is invoked, as in the use of sorcery, witchcraft, and curse, which threaten the errant party with physical harm or misfortune. While such beliefs and practices convey a generally negative image, they have nonetheless been recognized as conferring certain social benefits. Fear of being labeled a practitioner of such dubious arts—generally associated with a despicable or avaricious personality—encourages people to reaffirm their good faith through periodic acts of kindness and generosity. Perhaps more significantly, uncertainty as to who is capable of generating the malevolent power and fear of it being directed against oneself lead people to avoid offending others in any way that might invite retribution. The overall result is the promotion of harmonious social relations and a more equitable distribution of wealth (Norbeck 1961:202-04; Mair 1969:105-06; Mbiti 1989:206).

It is within this context that I propose a reconsideration of the Japanese *matsuri*, or Shintô shrine festival, which has figured prominently in much of the recent literature on the anthropology of Japan (see for example Bestor 1989; Robertson 1991; Ashkenazi 1993). Matsuri are communal celebrations generally performed as annual events. They are dedicated to the local tutelary deities that Smith (1974:3) describes as "defenders and protectors of the people who live within the compass of their power, whether or not those people are bound by ties of kinship." Part of the significance of these celebrations lies in their ability to encapsulate the values,

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ideology, and accepted patterns of interaction that identify the local population as a cohesive social unit. In fact, community festivals of this type serve as excellent examples of what Singer (1955:23-26), Geertz (1973:113), and Ortner (1978:1) describe as cultural performances; physical expressions of a people's world view presented in a succinct and readily observable manner. Indeed, previous characterizations of matsuri have focused almost exclusively on their role in reaffirming the social order and instilling a sense of territorial identity (Bestor 1985; Littleton 1986; Ashkenazi 1988, 1993; Ben-Ari 1991). This article, however, addresses an entirely different aspect, that of the intoxication and general unruliness the occasion of matsuri almost inevitably entails.

The core of the matsuri as a religious event is a public procession in which some type of large, sanctified object (typically a palanquin-like vehicle containing the spirit of the local tutelary deity) is borne shoulder-high through the streets, in order to revitalize the community with its supernatural presence. Such processions are invariably explained as a means of marking territorial boundaries, symbolically identifying the community as a cohesive social unit (Bestor 1989:240, 1992:35; Ashkenazi 1993:53). While this undoubtedly is an important function, equally significant is the fact that the sacred object passes in front of every constituent home or workplace. The intoxicated condition of the bearers (who must "purify" themselves by ingesting liberal amounts of sake) combines with the sheer bulk of the object itself to add an element of uncertainty to its movement. At times it may "uncontrollably" lurch to one side, crashing into the home of a greedy merchant, acrimonious neighbor, or exacting public official. Since the object's movement is perceived as being guided by the will of the deity, however, no one can be held responsible for any damages incurred.

I suggest that the festival procession constitutes a covert form of social sanction, a means of redressing perceived injustices ostensibly administered through a supernatural agent. Fear of retribution during the annual matsuri ultimately promotes an active, if somewhat insincere, concern for others throughout the rest of the year, often affirmed through periodic displays of generosity. In this respect the bearing of massive sacred objects in Japanese festival processions is not unlike the use of witchcraft or curse in other societies.

LIMINALITY AND OPPOSITION

Ritual affirmation of the social order is only one aspect of the total matsuri performance. Equally significant is a breakdown of order and relaxation of social restraints. Sonoda (1975, 1988) describes the matsuri in terms of a basic experiential dichotomy:

> On the one hand are highly dignified rites of seclusion and purification, tedious rites in which one's emotions and responses are trained and focused through bodily actions and behavior of the most restrained and solemn kind. But on the other hand, there is also generally an expectation of a thorough liberation of mind and body, a destruction of the existing order. Festival days involve a kind of public

license for the casting away of everyday restraints and for the kind of behavior which in normal common sense would be disdainfully dismissed as vulgar. (Sonoda 1988:36)

The latter condition is highly reminiscent of Turner's (1967, 1969, 1974) concept of ritual liminality, a transitional interlude in which hierarchical social relationships are temporarily abandoned or even reversed, and thereby offering subordinates a momentary immunity for engaging in subversive behavior. The liminal phase is significant in terms of social process, as it represents an opportunity for expressing alternative points of view. Such an opportunity may hold special importance for politically subordinated groups, for whom any expression of opposition might under ordinary circumstances result in punitive action by the authorities. Scott (1990) has coined the term "hidden transcript" in referring to the subversive sentiments that subordinates generally keep to themselves, and which therefore seldom find their way into the public record. Glimpses of the hidden transcript may be revealed, however, during events or activities which confer some form of disguise or anonymity, shielding the identity of the actors. The carnival, common to various European and Latin American cultures, is such an occasion:

[W]hat is most interesting about carnival is the way it allows certain things to be said, certain forms of social power to be exercised that are muted or suppressed outside this ritual sphere. The anonymity of the setting, for example, allows the social sanctions of the small community normally exercised through gossip to assume a more full-throated voice. . . . Disapproval that would be dangerous or socially costly to vent at other times is sanctioned during carnival. It is the time and place to settle, verbally at least, personal and social scores. (Scott 1990:173)

In Japan, the risks of expressing disapproval are compounded by a social ethic that places great emphasis on harmony and self-restraint as guiding principles of daily interaction.[2] Under these conditions, alcohol is often considered a necessary catalyst in promoting the open expression of personal opinions. It is customary in Japan for an individual not to be held responsible for abusive words or actions while under the influence of alcohol; "whatever is said in drink is excused and should be forgotten" (Nakane 1970:125). Drinking thus confers a temporary immunity for engaging in unusual behavior, as illustrated by the following ethnographic observations:

I soon discovered that it was during drinking sessions that my informants shifted from . . . "public" to "private" language. There appeared to be no taboos concerning subject-matter and, as the evenings wore on and the *sake* flowed faster, so I found myself listening to men talking about subjects which, during daylight hours, they had either refused to discuss or had evaded with an embarrassed laugh. At the same time, I discovered that some of the answers which I had received during the normal course of interviews were directly contradicted by these same informants as we drank together. (Moeran 1984:84-85)

How people behave when they are drunk is overlooked because, it is believed, drink changes behavior, and drunken behavior should not be judged by the usual standards. The Western praise for those who "can hold their liquor well" misses the point in Japan, where many drink to achieve the freedom and the chance to act irresponsibly that come with drunkenness. (Allison 1994:46)

Drinking may therefore provide a useful medium for airing concerns or grievances. Bailey (1991:36, 68), for example, tells of a rural community whose residents opposed a government proposal to amalgamate them with a neighboring village, but who felt such strong pressure from higher government officials to accede to the plan that they could not bring themselves to openly voice their objections. At a formal gathering intended to celebrate the successful conclusion of the merger negotiations, however, the local mayor got roaring drunk, and, acting as a mouthpiece for the collective sentiments of his fellow villagers, issued forth with a tirade of insults directed at the government officials, the neighboring village, and the merger plan itself. The plan was abruptly halted at this point. Bailey (1991:99) describes such use of alcohol as "an ultimate form of resistance to pressure from higher authority." The mayor had conveyed his message "in a context that provided a socially effective outlet for complaint and resistance when more formal structures had proven inadequate" (Bailey 1991:99).

FESTIVAL PROCESSION AND SOCIAL SANCTION

These examples demonstrate that the expression of alternative viewpoints is acceptable in certain contexts, typically involving the consumption of alcohol. The matsuri is one of these special contexts. Alcohol and the air of permissiveness which surrounds the event create a situation conducive to unusual or aggressive behavior. It is no wonder, then, that quarrelling and even physical violence are also accepted as inevitable correlates of the matsuri experience (Sadler 1972:106).

But the violence is far from random. Anyone with a grudge or a score to settle may wait for the occasion of the local matsuri, when acts of vengeance will generally be overlooked or forgiven. The focus in this article, however, is not on aggression motivated by personal vendetta, but that resulting from shared public indignation. This relates to the custom of bearing sacred objects in festival processions. As mentioned earlier, the core of the matsuri as a religious observance consists of an annual visit by the local tutelary deity to the community under its protection. During a ceremony conducted by a Shintô priest at the main shrine, the deity is ritually transferred from its usual place of enshrinement to a palanquin-like vehicle (*mikoshi*). It is then carried through the community, eventually completing a circuit of its entire territory.

This often takes the form of a raucous procession, the mikoshi being rhythmically jostled up and down by the bearers as they advance through the streets. The attitude here is that the deity is not only being welcomed by its constituency, but entertained as well. The bearers are frequently described as achieving a trance-like state of ecstasy induced by the consumption of alcohol, rhythmic movement combined with the chant-like utterance "*wasshoi, wasshoi!*" and the physical exertion of bearing a heavy object (Yanagawa 1988:17-18; Sadler 1972:98). All this lends the mikoshi an eerie appearance of being self-animated.

Once the priest sanctifies a mikoshi and installs the deity in it, the mikoshi is said to be under the deity's control, not the bearers'. And indeed the mikoshi appears to take on a life of its own and becomes a bucking, pitching, careening force beyond the control or influence of any single bearer. (Bestor 1989:239)

Sadler (1972:90) alludes to a similar description, quoting Maraini (1962:85): "The palanquin advanced, now slowly, now quickly, lunging and swerving to right or left, or turning completely in its tracks, or sometimes spinning like a top. 'It goes where the gods want it to,' an old man explained to me." Sadler (1972) characterizes the palanquin bearers as being possessed by the deity residing within it, a condition enhanced by the consumption of alcohol, and notes that the bearers take periodic rests when they drink more sake, then rejoin their comrades with renewed vigor. "By the time evening comes, every member of the team has benefitted by these periodic pauses to refresh, and . . . the *mikoshi* goes more and more 'where the gods want it to'" (Sadler 1972:100). It is important to note in this regard that the deity is attributed with a dual personality. Its ordinary condition is referred to as *nigimitama*, a calm or gentle spirit. At times, however, it reveals its vengeful nature in the form of *aramitama*, a rough or violent spirit. The latter is key to understanding the symbolism inherent in using the festival procession as a sanctioning mechanism. In a sense, the bearers become the deity, enabled to act out either its benevolent or vengeful tendencies.

Writing around the turn of the century, Hearn (1904:116) provides the following explanation of the mikoshi's erratic movements:

[A]ll this pushing and pulling and swaying signifies only the deity's inspection of the dwellings on either hand. He is looking about to see whether the hearts of his worshippers are pure, and is deciding whether it will be necessary to give a warning, or to inflict a penalty. His bearers will carry him whithersoever he chooses to go—through solid walls if necessary. If the shrine strike against any house,—even against an awning only,—that is a sign that the god is not pleased with the dwellers in that house. If the shrine breaks part of the house, that is a serious warning. But it may happen that the god wills to enter a house,—breaking his way. Then woe to the inmates, unless they flee at once through the back-door; and the wild procession, thundering in, will wreck and rend and smash and splinter everything on the premises before the god consents to proceed upon his round.

But there is more to the story than mere supernatural impulse:

Upon enquiring into the reasons of two wreckings of which I witnessed the results, I learned enough to assure me that from the communal point of view, both aggressions were morally justifiable. In one case a fraud had been practised; in the other, help had been refused to the family of a drowned resident. Thus one offence had been legal; the other only moral. (Hearn 1904:116)

In the latter instance the mikoshi was used to punish an offense not covered by formal law, yet considered a violation of local mores. This distinction between local tradition and an official codified law imposed by an outside authority is typical of small neighborhood and village studies in Japan. Smith (1961), in a classic article on the use of social ostracism in a Japanese hamlet, describes a distinct reluctance by

hamlet members to take internal matters to the authorities, preferring instead to administer their own form of justice by severing ties with the offending household.

Smith also observed the use of a local festival procession as a form of social sanction. This is evident in the following excerpt from his field notes made in a Shikoku village, dated 1951 (pers. comm. 1994):

> In former years the procession went from the main Hachiman Shrine building down the long steps to the entrance of the shrine grounds, from where the god surveys the rice crop, and then returned. Recently, however, it has been the practice of the *mikoshi* to enter the shopkeepers' [hamlet] of Chûtoku, where it is set down before the houses of five or six wealthy merchants in turn. This is said to insure the best possible fortune for the house during the coming year, and also earn for the bearers a *shô* [roughly 1.8 liters] of *sake*, for that is the appropriate gift. The *sake* is usually drunk on the spot, and by the time the god is carried back to the shrine, his progress is boisterous and somewhat unsteady.
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> This year, I was told, all the target houses provided the *sake*, lest the *aramitama* nature of the god be roused and the *mikoshi* "accidentally" crash into the store-front. No one is sure when the practice of entering Chûtoku began, but it seems to have been the practice long enough for the shopkeepers to take precautions.

The mikoshi bearers were looking for a donation, the implication being that they would damage the merchant's house if no gift of sake was forthcoming. It suggests an expectation that the affluent play the role of benefactors, returning some of their surplus wealth back to the community whose patronage had ensured their success. Any display of stinginess could invite social sanction. This was particularly significant during the immediate postwar period, when merchants began to enjoy the benefits of economic prosperity well before the other households. Those enlisted to bear the mikoshi generally belonged to the lower socioeconomic categories, lending a certain class-consciousness to their actions.

Mikoshi processions reveal an important generational distinction that relates to the fact that the bearers consist mostly of younger men; those with the stamina to shoulder a heavy object for an extended time. Younger residents, having yet to assume positions of real authority, generally have less vested interest in maintaining the sociopolitical status quo, and are thus more inclined toward disharmonious or subversive behavior. Sadler (1972:99) provides the following example from an urban setting, the Asakusa district in Tokyo:

> I saw one immense *mikoshi* round a corner, careen down the street, and then bash into a seven-foot-high wooden garden fence. The owner peeped out of his second floor window just in time to see one well-intentioned elder prop up a shattered fence post as best he could, shrug his shoulders and amble off to catch up with the *mikoshi*. (The man, I was told, was a bit of a grouch, and therefore not too popular with the youth of the neighborhood.)

Both attributes, economic and generational, place the bearers lower in the hierarchy of authority, with little or no political voice. The festival procession represents one of the few avenues available to them to publicly express their dissatisfactions.[3]

Informal social control mechanisms rely upon the collective weight of public opinion to achieve the desired effect. The use of sacred objects to administer a social

sanction during festival processions is a collective social act, largely due to the sheer weight and bulk of the objects themselves, as Bestor (1992:35) observed: "Ideally, many people told me, a *mikoshi* should be so heavy that no single person's actions could affect or even be noticeable in its movements." Any attempt to crash the structure into a targeted household would thus require a concerted effort; the sanctioning action must of necessity derive from widely shared opinion.

Bestor also alludes to the sociopolitical implications of mikoshi-bearing in an incident that took place during the shrine festival in his Tokyo neighborhood field site. A crew of rowdy day-laborers had been recruited to build a new mikoshi, despite the objections of "respectable" citizens who opposed their involvement. During the festival, the laborers assumed the role of bearing the mikoshi in a raucous manner, in keeping with what they saw as the traditional spirit of the event. When the neighborhood leaders decided to postpone the procession due to rain, the laborers became very upset and demanded that the mikoshi be brought out in spite of the weather.

> Suddenly, an argument broke out between a neighborhood leader, a merchant, and the local labor boss. Within seconds the merchant was jumped by half a dozen laborers who stomped him as he lay in the gutter, his festival garb covered with mud. . . . Eventually the rain broke, and the mikoshi made its rounds. The workmen were allowed to carry it, but they were surrounded by the burliest men the respectable leadership could muster; and when the procession passed the shopfront of the festival leader who had been beaten to the ground, a phalanx of "respectable" leaders formed a conspicuous but passive human shield in front of the shop's plate glass windows to guard against a sudden lurch of the heavy mikoshi. (Bestor 1992:42-43)

Though in this instance no property damage was actually incurred, the immediate reaction of the neighborhood officials in rushing to guard the storefront reveals an obvious recognition of the inherent possibility. This aspect of the matsuri performance is not readily publicized due to an emphasis on these events as celebrations of communal solidarity, but the number of similar tales from acquaintances all over Japan indicates that the practice is fairly widespread, or was at one time.

The following example is from my field site of Furukawa, a small town located in northern Gifu Prefecture in central Japan. The local matsuri, which begins on April 19, is similar to other shrine festivals in centering around the annual visit of the resident tutelary deity. Elsewhere (Schnell 1995) I have described the emergence of this ritual as a symbolic expression of opposition to centralized authority. Here the focus is on its role as a form of social sanction, similar to the use of the mikoshi in the examples cited above. In Furukawa, the mikoshi procession is a slow, dignified affair conducted during the daytime and largely corresponding to the standard interpretation of acknowledging territorial boundaries and reaffirming the solidarity of the community. At night, however, an entirely different kind of procession takes place. A large drum is borne through the narrow streets atop a massive rectangular platform made of overlapping wooden beams. Prominent members of the community are obliged to ride upon the platform, while teams of young men armed with stout poles lie in wait at strategic intersections to rush out at it from behind. Firmly

attached to the middle of each pole is a somewhat smaller drum bearing the insignia of the neighborhood team it represents. Team members use the poles to vie with one another as they drive forward, attempting to occupy the esteemed position directly behind the platform as it advances down the street.

Like the mikoshi, the drum platform is considered a sacred object. Prior to the ritual, a Shintô priest performs a ceremony in front of the structure, ascribing to it a special purifying or expiatory quality. The structure itself is quite massive, requiring over 200 individuals to lug it shoulder-high through the streets. As with the previous descriptions of matsuri, the event is characterized by drinking and rowdy behavior, further encouraged in this case by the cover of darkness.[4]

The drum ritual was traditionally performed in the predawn hours; an unusual time for people to be running about in the streets. The sense of transgressing the bounds of normal behavior, combined with the mass assembly of people and obligatory sake-drinking, contributed toward an atmosphere conducive to deviant behavior. During that night, malicious acts could be carried out with relative impunity, and the ritual was widely recognized as an opportunity for venting grievances and settling old scores (Furukawa-chô Kankô Kyôkai 1984:84; Furukawa-chô Kyôiku Iinkai 1987:474).

Much in the manner of a mikoshi, the drum platform was known to swerve on occasion, crashing into an adjacent house or storefront. Since the drum structure was itself considered a sacred object, this could be interpreted as a form of divine retribution, absolving the bearers of any complicity. In this particular matsuri, however, there was an added threat posed by the numerous small drums wielded by the neighborhood teams. The stout poles to which these drums were attached, each measuring about 3.5 meters in length, could easily be used as battering rams, running wide of the mark in their rush toward the drum platform and crashing into adjacent buildings. This, too, could appear to be accidental. In any case, complaints about damages would not be met with a great deal of sympathy, as such things are to be expected during a matsuri. Stories abound of violence at matsuri time, often targeting unscrupulous merchants, usurious landlords, and meddlesome administrative officials (Kaba 1984:36). The most famous incidents, however, were directed against the police.

Up until the end of the Second World War, the police in Japan had an image of being strict and intimidating. Having been appointed from outside the local area, they were seen as outsiders, and were often resented by the local people for their rigid enforcement of seemingly trivial regulations. Older informants recall that only on the night of the drum ritual were the police not to be feared. Any police officer caught outside at that time would likely be accosted, and the police in general tended to steer clear of the event (Kuwatani 1969:25). Particularly unpopular officers had their residences ransacked and vandalized.

On two separate occasions the ritual escalated into a genuine attack on the police headquarters, an imposing building located just at the entrance to the central part of town. The first incident took place in 1906, just after the end of the Russo-Japanese

War, allegedly in retaliation for abuses suffered by the townspeople at the hands of the police while the local men were off serving in the military (Kuwatani 1969:26-27). The second incident occurred in 1929 as a result of mounting hostility toward the abusive nature of the police, culminating in the arrest of several members of the local fire brigade during a raid on a gambling party (Kuwatani 1969:28).[5] On both occasions the drums were used to smash through the front of the station building while a crowd of spectators outside proceeded to pelt it with rocks (Kuwatani 1969:26-30). Old-timers in Furukawa recall these incidents with great relish.

Instances of the drum platform crashing into buildings continued well after the Second World War. These were usually directed at merchant households. As merchants were the first to reap the benefits of economic recovery, they were therefore the objects of considerable resentment. Many of them resorted to erecting wooden barricades in front of their storefront windows on the night of the drum festival, later to be replaced by metal shutters.

Economic conditions have steadily improved in recent decades. This has helped to ease some of the old animosities and erase the prewar class distinctions. In addition, the matsuri itself has become an important economic resource and is now being marketed to outsiders as a tourist attraction. Though it is still characterized by drunkenness and occasional fighting, the rowdy behavior has been subdued so as not to frighten the tourists. An escort of burly men now runs alongside the main drum as it proceeds down the street, their function being to warn spectators out of the way and guard against property damage. Significantly, the escort is composed of members of the local fire brigade; the police continue to maintain a respectful distance.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion shows that, in addition to their widely acknowledged role of marking territorial boundaries and reaffirming the social order, festival processions having mikoshi or similarly bulky objects constitute an effective means of encouraging compliance with accepted norms or seeking retribution for perceived injustices. These processions present a latent form of social sanction, applied not through the exercise of formal legal institutions but rather through the informal agency of communal ritual. The context of a matsuri is particularly conducive to the public airing of grievances and animosities. Participants can rely on the anonymity conferred by a mass assembly of people and the impunity associated with both the liberal consumption of alcohol and the atmosphere of permissiveness surrounding the event. A matsuri is at its core a sacred performance ostensibly controlled by the will of the local tutelary deity. Whatever happens during a matsuri is thus considered an "act of god" which could not have been foreseen or prevented (Moriya and Nakamaki 1991:54). The sense of impunity is enhanced by a reluctance on the part of the targeted households to draw attention to their having been victimized. This is again ostensibly due to the belief that since the movement of the sacred object is being controlled by the will of the deity, crashing into adjacent buildings is a sign of

the deity's displeasure with those dwelling therein.[6] But the power of the social sanction depends not so much on genuine fear of supernatural disfavor as the influence of public opinion. Getting injured or having one's property damaged could be taken as evidence of ill will or resentment against oneself; the community at large would automatically assume the victim had done something to deserve it. This helps ensure the matter will not be taken before the official authorities; the sanction remains an internal affair.

There is an interesting parallel here between the religious symbolism being employed and the force of social sentiment. The idea that the deity is angered represents the hostility of public opinion, enacted through the movements of the sacred object. Again, it is highly significant that any intentional movement on the part of the bearers must originate in the form of a co-operative effort backed by widespread public disapproval. Likewise, people are said to be fearful of incurring the deity's wrath, reflecting their concern that public censure might be directed against themselves.

Undoubtedly, the heavy object will occasionally hit a building by pure accident, applying the sanction unjustifiably. But this element of uncertainty merely adds to the effectiveness of the social control mechanism; it causes the victims to ponder whether they had alienated anyone and to be even more vigilant against doing so in the future. It also serves as an example to others, demonstrating that the "deity's anger" is indeed periodically aroused.

The use of large, portable objects as instruments of social sanction in no way negates the status of the matsuri as a "cultural performance"; it merely assigns it a more instrumental role in promoting communal mindedness. The deity's annual visit enforces an attitude of humility and mutual concern, even as it traces territorial boundaries and reaffirms the solidarity of the neighborhood. Those who feel themselves superior to others or fail to demonstrate the proper communal attitude may be singled out and punished. It is in this sense that the community as a social construction is truly revitalized.

NOTES

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2. However, conflict is not an insubstantial aspect. Several recent studies (Sugimoto 1981; Krauss, Rohlen, and Steinhoff 1984; Apter and Sawa 1984; Field 1991) have drawn attention to social protest and conflict in contemporary Japan.

3. Alluding to this political dimension, Robertson (1991:69) notes that "[a]s early as the eighth century, palanquin shrine bearing has been associated with protest riots, and in recent history '*wasshoi, wasshoi*' has been adopted as the chant of student and labor demonstrators"; and Yanagawa (1988:3-4) suggests interesting similarities between the matsuri experience and participation in a political demonstration.

4. Sonoda (1988:58-59) notes that the abandonment of restraint during matsuri is especially prevalent after nightfall, a fact he attributes to ancient religious beliefs in which night was perceived as the realm of the mysterious and supernatural.

5. Unlike the police, the fire brigade consisted exclusively of local men. There has been a traditional animosity between the two groups in rural Japan.

6. The practice of legitimizing political action by acting through a figurehead or venerated effigy has deep historical roots in Japan. Perhaps the most obvious example lies in treatment of the emperor, who, as Reischauer (1988:240) observes, has long been the object of both "awed respect" and "callous manipulation."

One of the most common examples cross-culturally involves the use of supernatural authority to gain leverage for the oppressed, as in the widespread use of spirit possession to negotiate a better position for the victims (see, for example, Lewis 1989:67-71). As noted previously, the mikoshi bearers become "possessed" through a combination of the consumption of alcohol, physical exertion, and rhythmic movement.

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