

## Hounenmatsuri in Suko - Sumo, Keiroukai and Hachigatsuodori

On September 17th, 2023 the harvest festival in Suko was finally being celebrated again after a 4-year long break due to the pandemic. While the number of participants are dwindling, the locals in Suko work together to create a festive day, that is about showing gratitude to the gods, respect to the elderly and coming together as a community.



While most of the work had been finished the day before, final preparations were under way the morning of the festival. Setting up speakers, making onigiri (plain and the celebratory sekihan ones) and giving the sumo ring a final sweep to make it look perfect. At 2pm the first visitors started showing up, expressing their gratitude to the festival with a monetary donation and receiving a lunch box and towel in return.

The sumo wrestlers entered the Suko dohyou only dressed in Mawashi while shouting „Yoi-ya“ and spreading purifying salt on their path. After welcoming everyone, the douhyou was ceremoniously unveiled by two of the sumo wrestlers performing symbolic sumo acts together with local babies and toddlers, who were attending the festival for the first time. This ceremony was followed by several sumo matches. For two of our students, Chen-san and Luo-san, it was their first time doing sumo, but they still did their best in the matches. As Suko is a smaller village, there are not that many sumo wrestlers, so the people appreciated their efforts and cheered them on.



After the sumo matches Suko has another special celebration, the keiroukai. During this celebration the elder people of the village are celebrated. In the community center they hang the name plates of all local people aged 70 years or older, showing how important it is to them to respect and appreciate their older community members. Currently the oldest member is 101 years old and Suko's Mayor Shigeyama just joined the ranks after turning 70 this year. After the speeches held by several of the elders, the 83-year old Nobori Kiyoko, the number one Shima Uta musician in Japan, and her young student Toioka Yurika performed a celebratory song on the Jamisen. As Shima Uta has only been passed on orally, Nobori-san works hard to teach her students all the songs she remembers, so the cultural heritage does not get lost. Mori-san, one of the elders from the Suko village, also mentioned how hard it is to find successors, so that their cultural heritage does not get lost. He is

one of the few members in the community, that can sing each of the six songs of Suko, play

the taiko and dance all at the same time. „Not many young people can do this, so I always do it.“



Nobori-san's performance was followed by further entertainment like dances performed by local children, as well as two of our student groups, one performing a traditional dance from Ghana and another the Disneyland Jamboree. During the entertainment, everyone was being served lunch boxes, the onigiri prepared in the morning, as well as drinks and snacks. The community came together to show their gratitude to their elders and celebrate them for their accomplishments.



After the celebration, the Hachigatsuodori started. While the name indicates that the dance takes place in the 8th month, it refers to the lunar calendar as for farming communities, their work has been planned according to the moon for a long time. During the Hachigatsuodori, the men and women dance around the dohyou, lead by usually three to four people playing the taiko and at least two singers - one for the men and one for the women, who sing the songs of Suko, usually in a call-and-response-style. The songs of Suko are distinctly

different from the closeby Yuwan, as during the 1600s Suko belonged to the Ryukyu jurisdiction, while Yuwan was governed by Satsumaban. Due to the long history of the orally passed on songs, nowadays the direct translation of these songs are unknown, only the meaning of freedom and love remain. Efforts have been made to preserve these songs, but it has proven difficult, as the Japanese alphabet does not have all the sounds that are being used in the songs.

The most valuable lesson we learned during these celebrations was the strong ties of the community in Suko. The people rely on each other, work hard to organise and create such beautiful celebrations and make you feel welcome. Due to their strong ties with each other, they are more independent from higher levels of government, as they split all their bills and the labour among each other, starting with young local High School Students and ending with people in their 80's.

We are very grateful for the warm welcome we experienced and the opportunity to celebrate according to local tradition. We hope that in the next years, more people will be able to experience the harvest festival in Suko, Uken-son, and that the traditions will be kept alive, as they have left a lasting impression on us.

## 須古の豊年祭 - 相撲と敬老会と八月踊り

2023年9月17日、須古の豊年祭がパンデミックの影響で4年ぶりに復活した。参加者が減少する一方で、須古の地元の人々は、神々への感謝、高齢者への敬意、そして地域社会としての団結を示すために、一丸となって祭りの日を作り上げている。

ほとんどの作業は前日に終わっていたが、祭り当日の朝には最終準備が進められていた。スピーカーの設置、おにぎり作り（プレーンなものとお祝いの赤飯）、土俵を完璧に見せるための最後の掃除などだ。午後2時、最初の来場者が現れ始め、お賽銭で感謝の気持ちを伝え、お返しにお弁当とタオルを受け取った。

力士たちは「よいしょ」と掛け声をかけながら、まわし姿のまま須古土俵に入り、清めの塩を撒いた。お出迎えの後、力士2人が初参加の地元の乳幼児と一緒に象徴的な相撲をとり、土俵のお披露目が行われた。このセレモニーの後、いくつかの相撲が行われた。私たちの生徒の上官さんと駱さんにとって、相撲を取るのは初めてだったが、それでも彼らは全力で試合に臨んだ。須古は小さな村なので、力士はそれほど多くなく、人々は彼らの努力を評価し、声援を送った。

大相撲の後、須古にはもうひとつの特別な祝賀行事、敬老会がある。この祝賀会では、村の年長者が祝われる。公民館には70歳以上の村民のネームプレートが掲げられており、年配の村民を敬い、感謝することがいかに大切かを示している。現在、最高齢者は101歳で、須古の重山区長も今年70歳になったばかりだ。何人かの年長者によるスピーチの後、日本一の唄者である83歳の昇喜代子さんと、彼女の若い弟子である戸井岡百合香がジャミセンでお祝いの唄を披露した。シマ唄は口伝でしか伝えられていないため、昇さんは自分が覚えている唄をすべて弟子たちに教え、文化遺産が失われないように努めている。須古の長老の一人である森さんも、自分たちの文化遺産が失われないように、後継者を見つけるのがいかに大変かを語っていた。彼は、須古の六歌仙を歌い、太鼓を打ち、踊りを踊れる数少ないメンバーの一人だ。「こんなことができる若者はあまりいないから、いつもやっているんだ」。

昇さんのパフォーマンスの後は、地元の子供たちによるダンスや、本校の学生グループ2組によるガーナの伝統舞踊、ディズニeland・ジャンボリーなどの余興が続いた。余興の間、みんなにはお弁当と朝用意したおにぎり、飲み物やスナックが振る舞われた。コミュニティは年長者への感謝の気持ちを表し、彼らの功績を祝うために集まった。

お祝いの後、八月踊りが始まった。八月踊りとは、旧暦の8月に行われる踊りのことだが、農村では昔から月の満ち欠けに合わせて仕事の計画を立ててきた。八月踊りでは、男女が土俵を囲んで踊り、太鼓を演奏する3~4人と、須古の唄をコール・アンド・レスポンスで歌う少なくとも2人の唄い手（男女各1人ずつ）が先導する。1600年代、須古は琉球管区に

属し、玉湾は薩摩藩に統治されていたからだ。口承で歌い継がれてきた長い歴史のため、現在ではこれらの歌の直訳はわからず、自由と愛の意味だけが残っている。これらの歌を保存する努力はなされているが、日本語のアルファベットには歌に使われているすべての音が含まれていないため、困難であることが判明している。

この祝賀会で私たちが学んだ最も貴重な教訓は、須古のコミュニティーの強い絆だった。人々は互いに頼り合い、このような美しい祭典を組織し、創り上げるために懸命に働き、歓迎してくれる。地元の若い高校生から 80 代の人々まで、すべての請求書と労働力をお互いに分担しているのだ。

私たちが経験した温かい歓迎と、地元の伝統に従ってお祝いをする機会にとっても感謝しています。今後数年のうちに、より多くの人々が宇検村須古の収穫祭を体験できるようになり、私たちの心に残った伝統が守られることを願っています。