

A study tour on Noto's agricultural ritual "Aenokoto" was conducted on December 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. 11 participants included researchers and graduate students of Kanazawa University and ALTs of Ishikawa from America, Germany and China as well as auditors. The aim was to understand Noto's spiritual climate and festive culture through actually observing "Aenokoto" which was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage and one of the critical factors of Noto's Satoyama Satoumi's being recognized as FAO's Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems.

(Organizer: Fumio Uno, Professor of Kanazawa University Center for Regional Collaboration)

## UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Study Tour on Agricultural Ritual "Aenokoto"

Conducted : December 4<sup>th</sup> • 5th 2016

### Day 1 December 4th

International Students, Researchers, 6 ALTs, 5 Auditors took part

A workshop on "Aenokoto" was held in Kanazawa University's Noto Gakusha in Suzu City's Misaki town, at the tip of Noto Peninsula, with 11 participants. Fumio Uno explained the aim of the tour by emphasizing the uniqueness of this agricultural ritual even in Japan as it was registered in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage as well as played a crucial role in the recognition of Noto's Satoyama Satoumi as a GIAHS by FAO. "Aenokoto", which is said to date back a thousand years, offers hospitality to a "deity of the paddy fields" who are said to be visually impaired. Along with the feast "Gottso", this ritual is said to have nurtured the festive culture of the people of Noto who are known for their hospitality.



Caroline Watanabe giving a lecture on Aenokoto



## The Agricultural Ritual which nurtured the Spiritual Climate of Noto such as Festive Culture

### Workshop



Participants asking questions

We watched a 10-minute video introducing "Aenokoto" which was made by Noto Town's Board of Education, "Oku Noto's Aenokoto: A folk Culture Originating from Japan's Rice Growing Agriculture". Afterwards, Ms. Caroline Watanabe, an American ceramic artist who has lived in Suzu City for 26 years, gave a lecture titled "What I experienced through performing Aenokoto". She said, "In Suzu's Satoyama, all residents take part in organizing Aenokoto as a local event. Through such activities, the bonds of the local community are strengthened and we were also able to promote our self sufficient lifestyle." She added, "We uploaded our Aenokoto Ceremony on You Tube which attracted lots of attentions resulting in a broadcasting team visiting to cover the ritual. We were able to convey the precious Japanese agricultural ritual as well as our local community." She closed her talk by raising a question on looking for ways on how we could pass on this ritual which is highly acknowledged internationally by UNESCO and FAO.

## "Aenokoto Cuisine" made from produces of Noto's Satoyama Satoumi

### Culinary Experience



Dishes served on red Wajima Lacquerware

We moved to a folk house restaurant "Tenzo" in Misaki Town and actually tasted the dishes served in Aenokoto. This shop's building is 160 years old with a hearth. A two-legged Daikon resembling the rice paddy deity was decorated under the home shrine. The owner, Mr. Ichiro Sakamoto explained each dish. Amazake (sweet sake), which is said to be a favorite of the rice field deity, was served along with a simmered dish including flowering fern, mushroom, taro, and fried tofu. We also enjoyed raw fish sashimi of squid, yellow tail, and sweet shrimp as well as sea bream grilled with salt and deep fried barracuda. We finished the meal with adzuki red bean rice and clear soup. The tableware is mainly red and used in festivals in Noto. The ingredients are all gathered from the local mountains and sea. This is slow food literally putting local production for local consumption into practice.

We observed 'Aenokoto' being practiced at the home of Mr Yoshinori Kawaguchi in Shirayone Town, Wajima City. Shirayone town is where a tourist spot, Senmaida thousand rice terraces, is located. At 9 am, Mr Kawaguchi made his way to his rice terraces close by, wearing formal Japanese attire. After sprinkling sacred sake, rice, and salt and hoeing the rice paddies a few times, he greeted the deities of rice paddies saying "Thank you for protecting our rice paddies this year. I have come to pick you up." Then he guided the blind deities who are husband and wife to his home. After giving deities a bath and having them relaxed, Mr Kawaguchi guided them to a Japanese-style drawing room. He served them a meal full of blessings from Satoyama and Satoumi, including a rice cake covered with sweetened red beans, sweet sake, simmered vegetables, and a fish called sea bream, on small dining tables of Wajima lacquerware. Mr Kawaguchi spoke words of appreciation to the deities, "Although we had very hot days in June and July this year, we received good rice thanks to you."



After the ritual, Mr Kawaguchi told the tour participants, "From old days, it has been said that the deities of rice paddies like fun things. Since I was a child, it has been a fun event for me too and I have always looked forward to this day every year." He also said "I want to continue this ritual as long as we make rice in our rice paddies."



### 'Aenokoto' to be cherished by local communities and passed on to the next generations

Gourokuan,  
Noto Town

At 11 am, we observed Aenokoto being practiced at an old farmhouse 'Gourokuan' in Yanagida Park, Noto Town. People such as local residences including 40 children from local nurseries and university researchers watched the ritual. Children were watching Mr Masamichi Naka bowing to and treating invisible deities of rice paddies with fascination. Tour participants were able to get a feel of this region-wide event involving local children. Mr Naka explained that "Aenokoto has become less popular since the rice price dropped and it has become common that a master of a family, who takes a leading role in the ritual, to find winter job elsewhere." He emphasized that "In order to protect and pass on this cultural heritage to the future generations, I want to show its value to children."



### Views of tour participants

Tour participants visited Noto Wine Co., Ltd. in Anamizu Town in the afternoon. We had a look around the winery and exchanged general opinions and views about the Study Tour.

◇William Westerman (ALT from USA, living in Nanao City) "I think Aenokoto has an important role in nature conservation effort and agriculture in Noto. It makes people to get a better sense of traditional food and sustainability. By carrying out Aenokoto together in a community, not just by farmers carrying it out privately in their homes, I think it can provide a good opportunity for people to think about agriculture and food."

◇Timo Thelen (Research student from Germany, living in Kanazawa City) "Until today, I thought Aenokoto was a religious tradition. I thought so because the word Kami (god) is used, but I learnt that it is not directly connected to a certain religion. Although it is inscribed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO, I think it would be good if it can be changed through time, for example adopting it to be carried out in a community to fit in with the situation in modern times."

◇Karen Yoshida (English teacher from USA, living in Tsubata Town, Ishikawa Pref.) "Both of the rituals we watched today were a ceremony carried out by one person. I think the future of this is to be more interactive with people including kids. I think Aenokoto has a great potential in conservation of Satoyama and Satoumi and in social economy."

