

# The Danjiri Festival

Mr. Jun Suzuki, living in the Gomon area of Kumatori town

What is the Danjiri Festival?

It is one of the many festivals held between summer and autumn throughout Japan to offer thanks for the grain harvested that year, and to pray for a rich harvest in the years ahead. In Kumatori town, there remains a written record showing that the Danjiri festival was held in 1800s. In the Senshu region, the southern part of Osaka Prefecture, Kishiwada city leads off by holding their Danjiri festival in the middle of September of each year, and then the surrounding cities and towns follow in the middle of October.

Children and adults, both male and female, wearing Happi coat (a costume for the festival) join in the festival to pull together the Danjiri along the road. People on board the Danjiri play festive tunes on the flute, drums, and bells, and on top of its roof, a brave man called Daiku-gata(\*1) jumps up and down, and gives directional instruction to those pulling the Danjiri. It is a breathtaking spectacle!

In Kumatori town, their Danjiri festival is held on Saturday and Sunday just before the second Monday of October each year.

Saturday: In the morning, the Danjiri traverses the area of which it is a part, and in the afternoon, it makes its way to Omori Shrine in the center of the Kumatori town, awaiting its turn of worship at the shrine to be purified.

Sunday: In the morning, the Danjiri is pulled around the area of which it is a part, and in the afternoon, joins in the parade in front of Kumatori train station. All of the town's Danjiri participate. At night, the Danjiri, lit with many lanterns, are slowly towed around. Sightseers are truly amazed at the spectacle!



with other members of the festival organization



(\*1) Daiku-gata (Carpenters): A man who is on the roof of Danjiri directing the course of movement. The sight of his jumping up and down with a fan in one hand and dancing in a graceful manner keeps the visitors' eyes glued to the spectacle.

## The Danjiri

The Danjiri is a four-wheeled vehicle, greater than 3.6 meters in height and weighing about 4 tons, with an enshrined "house structure" made of zelkova wood. It is walled with minute wooden carvings of historical scenes well-known to the local people and equipped with a drum and bell for playing festival tunes. Construction of the body of a new Danjiri is said to cost more than 100 million yen.

In Kumatori town, 11 areas out of 36 areas in total have their own Danjiri, with the oldest one constructed in the latter half of the 1800s. Since then, the construction of Danjiri has continued throughout the 1900s and 2000s. A look at the works of the Danjiri and its wooden carvings in chronological order shows the transitions of the workmanship and art work.

At the Kumatori Community Center "RENGAKAN (Brick House)", the oldest Danjiri constructed in 1880s is on permanent display after having been retired from commission.



At the front, a carving of a famous scene of a local battle

← The Danjiri of Odani Area

# Towing the Danjiri

The Danjiri is towed by about 200 young people, both male and female, with two ropes of 50 meters to 100 meters in length.

## Yari-mawashi (Towing round the corner)

The highlight of the Danjiri festival is the Yari-mawashi. The Danjiri is towed at nonstop running speed while navigating 90 degree corners. Its powerful and thrilling towing attracts a multitude of spectators.



## Entering the Shrine precinct for worshipping, and the parade in front of the train station

After entering Omori Shrine, the Danjiri are towed round at high speed in the precinct. The Danjiri are towed around the area surrounding the station, and each has its own special enjoyable entertainment which is displayed in front of the station.



Miya-iri, entering the Omori Shrine precinct



Yari-mawashi, towing round the corner in front of the station



Enjoyable entertainment during the parade in front of the station

## Danjiri lit with many lanterns being towed around.

At night, the Danjiri are slowly towed around lit with many vermeil lanterns, thus producing a mood of fantasy, quite a contrast to that of the daytime.



# Group organization for the Festival

The Danjiri festival group people are independently involved in not only the towing of the Danjiri but also traffic control and act as security guards around the Danjiri. The Danjiri festival group is well-organized and the roles of group members are assigned depending on age.

Elementary school pupils tow at the lead.

Junior high school students tow in the middle.

The Youth Group of high school students, and older tow closest to the Danjiri.

The Kumi Group of late twenties and thirties of age is in charge of navigating with a lever at the back of the Danjiri, and the role of Daiku-gata on the roof.

The Waka-gashira Group in their forties is in charge of security around the Danjiri, and in braking with the lever in front.

The Sewa-nin Group in their fifties is in charge of traffic control along the route of the Danjiri and administration of the festival.

# One-year schedule until the festival

The duration of the Danjiri festival is only two days in October. However, preparation needs to be done throughout a year.

October (the second Monday): The following day after the year's festival, suffering from muscle pain, the festival group members get together to clean up the litter on the street, take down the decorations, wipe clean the dirt off the Danjiri, and inspect any damage it might have incurred. Then, the Danjiri gets covered with a sheet and is housed in the Danjiri barn. Festival reviewing meetings are held later. By repeatedly watching the videos of the festival, improvements for the following year are addressed.

November: A report on the festival of the year, any improvements required, expenses incurred and so on are noted for reference for the following year.

April: The new festival organizations of all Danjiri owned areas get ready to start, and their administrative members join together to pay a greeting visit to the police department, the bus companies, other companies, groups and organizations that extend cooperation to them.

May ~ July: In the past, the Danjiri housing barns were opened only before the festival. These days, however, the number of Danjiri owned areas which hold Danjiri hands on events in order to have young children become interested in the festival is increasing.

August: Organization members are busy fund raising and making applications to the police department for Danjiri routes.

September: Meetings among the Danjiri owned organizations are held almost every day to discuss practicing towing and Yari-mawashi, towing round the corner. Towards the evening, the children gather at the Danjiri housing barn, practicing drumming in harmony with festival tunes played by The Youth Group. Some of the children go up on the Danjiri roof and practicing dancing. Toward the end of the month, the festival members start preparations for setting their stations and decorating the Danjiri towing routes with red and white striped cloth, thus putting the whole of the town in a festive mood.

October (The first Sunday): A trial towing of the Danjiri, and if any points are found unsatisfactory, repeat practices are done to correct them before the actual towing.

October (The second Saturday and Sunday): The actual towing starts! The Danjiri is worshipped at Omori Shrine and gets purified for safe towing, and then departs to the front! After this, the two days of the festival pass as if but a dream!

----- Then, new preparations start for the following year! -----

