

City Designated Intangible Cultural Folk Property

Designated April 24, 1997

Handed down by Nakanoki Town Council

## Nakanoki no Tsujikiri

Tsujikiri is the practice of protecting a village from evil spirits and pestilence by “cutting off” (kiri) its “crossroads” (tsuji) at the village borders. It is conducted here in Nakanoki every February, on the first Day of the Horse of the old calendar.

The participants are the farmers and former farmers of Nakanoki. The east and west sides of the village each make one dragon, and it is said that the east side of the village controls the female, while the west side controls the male. The heads and torsos are made of straw, and rods of oak form the tails. The eyes are made with Japanese paper, ink and incense, and the head and torso are covered in holly, cedar leaves, oak twigs and bamboo twigs. Japanese paper is also used for exorcism seals and Shinto fortune-telling slip (done by drawing various vertical and horizontal lines in ink). These are prepared by those charged with the year’s duties. Straw dragons are also created to adorn the gates of each household.

In the morning, those charged with duty prepare at Yasaka Jinja, the village shrine. In the afternoon, people assemble and make dragons, stretching up to five and a half meters when completed. The dragons are coiled up and placed before the shrine hall, and are fed sacred wine in a ceremony called naorai. Afterwards, they move towards the southwest and northeast village borders, and the mouths of the dragons are united to bid farewell. When they arrive, the previous years’ dragons are removed from trees, and the new dragons are wrapped around the trees.

The origin of this practice is unknown, however, it is thought to have been handed down from the distant past because of the large size of the straw dragons, making this a valuable folk practice.