

# A Comparison of Annual Events and Festivals on Mainland Japan and Okinawa: Their Respective World Views

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## I. Introduction

Okinawa—When you hear this word what kind of image do you have? The selling point of Okinawa, which is Japan's southernmost resort area, is the beautiful sea. Maybe most of you have an image of the sea, the clear sky, the bright sunshine, crimson hibiscus and so on. Such colorful things make us imagine the tropical paradise.

I was born and brought up in Okinawa. The Ryukyu Islands are a group of islands which make an arc between Kyushu and Taiwan, as if to divide the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea. At the southwestern edge of these islands, dotted along the border with Taiwan, are the Yaeyama Islands, the southernmost islands of Japan. There are 31 islands in Yaeyama, and my home, Ishigaki Island, is one of

them. The map of the world shows these islands to be at nearly the same latitude as Miami and Honolulu. As a subtropical marine climate, Yaeyama Islands are warm all year round. Ishigaki is Yaeyama's center of administration, economy and transportation.

Many people don't know anything about Yaeyama, so, this paper will introduce my country, because I do love my hometown. However, when I lived on Ishigaki, I wasn't interested in my hometown at all, but once I left Ishigaki and lived in very different Niigata, I felt strange and noticed the differences; the climate, lifestyle, and expression of language, feelings, between Okinawa and mainland Japan. And I found that Okinawa has a very great culture and I have to be proud of it. Concurrently I have some doubts about the differences, and I had "culture shock", and I wondered all the time "Why are there so many different things in spite of the fact that we are the same country?"

In this paper I want to discuss culture. There are all different cultural influences from Japan; lifestyle, languages, and history in the Ryukyu Islands, and I would also like to focus on folk customs.

When we compare them, we can also see the differences of folk customs among the 47 urban and rural prefectures. Everytime I see traditional festivals in the mainland, I felt the cultural differences. I'm ashamed of my ignorance about my country-Okinawa and Japan. I want to consider the two cultures, and above all, to take up the annual events and festivals, and to compare those in Okinawa and with those in mainland Japan.

## II. The annual events

### (1) Why do people hold festivals or annual events?

For people in the world, local festivals are very important because through these they can express their own world views or their own image of the world which they cannot experience in daily life. So most festivals have put enough ideas in order so that they can find their indigeous world view, for instance, the form of the procession life. Also, the folk arts are represented in these festivals.<sup>1</sup>

There is a fundamental structure of most festivals. First we begin to prepare to communicate with the spirit of God by being clean and pure, and then the God is welcomed, and shown appreciation for holy energy or spirit. After that the God is returned to his home. Thus, people are given new energy and show their thanks to it, then people also return to their new daily lives with this energy.<sup>2</sup>

### (2) The connection with agricultural rituals.

Annual events are repeated every year and done the same way at the same time. Japanese annual events are *Shogatsu* (New Year's Day), *Setsubun* (※1),

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※1 /Setsubun refers to the day just before the start of spring. On this day people conduct a belief rite calld "*mame-maki*" (to throw away beans) in order to drive away evil spirits and disease.

*Hinamatsuri* (※2), *Bon* (or *Obon*) and so on. In this paper *Shogatsu* and *Obon* will be discussed. Both are the two high points of the Japanese festival calendar, and most Japanese annual events are closely connected with agricultural rituals and ancestor worship. Moreover, *Shogatsu* and *Bon*, have much in common with each other.<sup>3</sup>

Japanese annual events are divided into two kinds. One is to pray for the successful harvest of rice crops as a village unit, not personally. Another type are events related to personal rituals basically, and this was matched by the rituals which were influenced by Buddhist annual events. Formerly Japanese didn't pray to God personally, because Japanese tended to think if there was safety for the village as a group, then they can get a good harvest. But praying to God personally has become a part of our daily lives by the influence of Buddhism.

According to many books about festivals, most Japanese annual events are for the purpose of praying for a rich harvest, especially of rice crops. And *Shogatsu* is typical of the festivals for praying for a rich harvest.<sup>4</sup> Okinawa also has many traditional events. Okinawa has a lot of old events that have disappeared in mainland Japan, and which are strongly influenced by Chinese events.<sup>5</sup> It is said that "influence on the formation of the annual events includes, on the one hand, native AGRICULTURAL RITES and rites of communion with God and ancestors, and on the other hand traditions absorbed from the Asian continent."<sup>6</sup> And while Okinawan people have strong ancestor worship, Buddhism didn't spread in Okinawa, so Okinawan festivals differ from Japan's. The following is a comparison of *Shogatsu*.

### III. *Shogatsu*

#### (1) The typical *Shogatsu*

The following are terms used in relation to Japanese *Shogatsu* celebration.

※A / *susu harai* ~ The preparation of *Shogatsu* is begun by doing *susu-harai* the 13th of December. "*Susu*" means soot, and "*harai*" means to drive away. People are absent from their jobs to clean up inside and outside of their houses. It is a very important thing, because *susu-harai* means not only just to clean up but also to drive away impurity, and then people can invite the Toshigami.<sup>7</sup>

※B / *shimenawa* ~ *Shimenawa* is a twisted rice-straw decoration for warding off evil spirits. It is hung on over the entrance gate to a dwelling and other places, and is festooned with strips of white paper or cloth.<sup>8</sup>

※C / *kadomatsu* ~ *Kadomatsu* is a traditional *Shogatsu* decoration set up in pairs at the main entrance of a house. It is usually made of pine branches, bamboo stalks, and straw.<sup>9</sup>

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※2 / *Hinamatsuri* The 3th of March is *Hinamatsuri* (The Doll Festival or Girls Festival). People display dolls.

※D / *toshikoshi soba* ~ It is customary to eat Toshikoshi soba in the hope that one's family or fortunes will be lengthened and extended like the long noodles. It is literally written "year-crossing noodles".<sup>10</sup>

※E / *joya no kane* ~ On the night before *Shogatsu*, temples ring the watch-night bell 108 times, wishing that people may be relieved of their sufferings from the 108 earthly desires.<sup>11</sup>

※F / *o-sechi* ~ *Osechi* refers to the special dishes served on the first three days of the *Shogatsu*, and cooked in advance and beautifully arranged in a lacquer box. *Osechi* are many foods, and each of them has meanings related to happiness, long life and so on. These meanings have been handed down over many years. There are many ingredients in *osechi* such as beans, *renkon* (lotus root), and *kazunoko* (herring roe). It is said *renkon* means that the outlook of their future is good because *renkon* has many holes, and *kazunoko* symbolizes a lot of children, so it is auspicious food. Most of Japanese have a wrong interpretation about the purpose of *osechi*. They think that to cook *osechi* before *Shogatsu* is so that the mother or grandmother can take a rest for *Shogatsu*. But according to many books, *Osechi* is called "*sechi*", too, and *Sechi* is written "*fushi*" which means knot in *Kanji* (Chinese character). After all, *osechi* means the dish to tie a knot between the old year and new year, so *osechi* is the dish for *Toshigami* but also human beings. To cook *osechi* on *omisoka*, (*omisoka* is the day before *Shogatsu*) is for the *Toshigami* not for the mother or grandmother to rest.<sup>12</sup>

※G / *ozoni* ~ *Ozoni* is a soup containing one or two *mochi* (※H), *shiitake* mushrooms, chicken, fish meat, etc. It is a special dish eaten to celebrate *Shogatsu* in most Japanese households.<sup>13</sup>

※H / *mochi* ~ *Mochi* or *o-mochi*, is a kind of rice cake made from glutinous rice pounded with a wooden or stone mortar (called *usu*) and a wooden mallet (called *kine*). It is one of the typical foods eaten on *Shogatsu*. Nowadays many people buy ready-made *mochi* at the supermarket, or make it using an electric *mochi*-making machine.<sup>14</sup>

Other customs and terms:

※ *otoso* ~ People drink customary *otoso* on the morning of *Shogatsu*. It is *sake* made from rice. It is said that the drink drives away evil spirits.<sup>15</sup>

※ *otoshidama* ~ *Otoshidama* is a gift of money given to children by their elders. It has replaced *mochi*. It was customary in the northeast part of Japan for people to give their family and employees the *mochi* divided in small pieces on *Shogatsu*. If you separate the word *o-toshi-dama*, you can see *Toshi* means *Toshigami*, and *dama* (*tama*) means the spirit (spirit is called *tamashii* in Japanese). *Mochi* symbolizes the spirit of *Toshigami*, so to give *otoshidama*

means to give obligation of *Toshigami*.<sup>16</sup>

For Japanese people *Shogatsu* is an important event just as Christmas in the West. Formerly the whole month of January was called *Shogatsu* in Japan, but recently people tend to think *Shogatsu* is the first three days of January. Though customs differ by locality, at this time many homes are decorated.

When *Shogatsu* is near at hand, people prepare for the day. Preparation for *Shogatsu* is begun on the 13th of December. People usually clean their houses – this is called *susu-harai* (※A), and people decorate *shimenawa* (※B) over the main entrance, and *kadomatsu* (※C) on both sides of the gate. The night before *Shogatsu*, people eat *toshikoshi-soba* (※D) and listen to *joya-no-kane* (※E). Many mothers cook *osechi*, and people eat *ozoni* and *osechi* on *Shogatsu*.

Is *Shogatsu* really just to celebrate new year, or is there another special purpose of *Shogatsu*?

According to many books I read, I found *Shogatsu* described as the time “*Shogatsu sama*” or “*Toshigami*” comes. It seems *Toshi* means rice and *gami* (or *kami*) means God. So *Toshigami* makes possible the successful harvest (especially of rice crops). *Toshigami* comes to each home on *Shogatsu* and assures them of their rich harvest, this means people cannot get a rich harvest or do anything with their lives until *Toshigami* comes to their home.<sup>17</sup>

There seems to be “*torikoshi shogatsu*” (or *hayari shogatsu*) among some the Japanese traditional folk customs. An example of *Torikoshi Shogatsu* is, if a family had a series of bad luck and undutifulness, they used to think that such a bad year would have to be forgotten as soon as possible. So it is customary that they celebrate the new year a second time decorating *kadomatsu* and *shimenawa*, making *mochi*, etc, the same as the real *Shogatsu*. That is, *Shogatsu* is really important for people to make a fresh start.<sup>18</sup> You can see the connection with rice from these events, foods and customs. *Kagamimochi* symbolizes the connection with *Toshigami* because *mochi* is made from rice. It is suitable for *Toshigami* and human beings to eat together. Moreover there is *mochi* in *ozoni*, *Otoso* is rice wine, and the straw used for decorated *kadomatsu* and *shimenawa* are made of rice-straw. As rice was the most important food for Japanese, its cultivation was traditionally regarded as a religious act – an invoking of the *inadama* or spirit of the rice plant.<sup>19</sup>

## (2) *Shogatsu* on Okinawa

As on the mainland, Okinawa also has *Shogatsu*. The decorations are almost the same as the mainland, but the dishes are clearly different. I have never eaten *ozoni*, however *ozoni* is replaced by “*nakami jiru*” (or *nakami no osuimono*). Okinawan people eat pork; the head, ears and feet of pig. And internal organs of a pig are called *nakami*. We eat pig to the last. *Osuimono* means soup. This dish is often eaten not only at *Shogatsu* but also at *Bon* or other events.

Speaking of *Shogatsu*, one must remember *Kyushogatsu*. “*Kyu*” refers to the lunar

calendar. Originally most Okinawan festivals were held according to the lunar calendar, but the idea of adapting Japanese customs has spread through Okinawa. This is because the Ryukyu Kingdom has been absorbing Japanese culture from the 15th century. At that time the common people seemed to have been partly forced to absorb Japanese culture by government authorities. But Okinawan *Shogatsu* is held according to the lunar calendar by many.<sup>20</sup> My home holds both, but on the *Kyushogatsu* my family offers only dishes at our altar.

In January we hold *Tanetori-sai* in Ishigaki. Although Japanese are apt to think this festival is for gathering seeds (because *tane* means seed and *tori* usually means to take). Actually the festival is the opposite – it is to sow seeds. People hope that the seeds which people sow in the paddy field will grow up and produce a great harvest.<sup>21</sup> I think this festival's purpose is the same as *Shogatsu*, because people also hope for a rich harvest. There are many other festivals related to agricultural events, as *Shogatsu* and *Tanetori-sai*, in Ishigaki. It is evident that Japanese festivals are in origin and tradition, closely related to rice-centered agriculture, and Okinawa festivals are the same, as well.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover there is *Shitsu* (festival) in Ishigaki in September, in the lunar calendar. Some people say *Shitsu* is the most important festival in Yaeyama. Some Okinawans say *Shitsu* is *Shogatsu*.<sup>23</sup> What does this mean? *Shitsu* is written “*fushi*” in *kanji* (Chinese characters) and *fushi* means a knot. When we hold *Shitsu* on September (of the lunar calendar), people think it is to begin new life.<sup>24</sup> Why do people begin new life in September? It seems strange. According to my research, traditionally Japanese divide the year into two. One period is January to June, and the other is July to December.<sup>25</sup> The reason that the people on Okinawa begin their new life in September seems to be connected to the way of this dividing. There is a lag between June and September, but it seems to be influenced by the lunar calendar. The reason is because the former is the season people sow the seeds and plants grow up, so people hope for a rich harvest in January as the beginning of the season. Then the latter is the season people hope the rice will ripen well, so people pray in September before beginning the harvest.<sup>26</sup> YANAGITA KUNIO says not only *Shogatsu* but also *Bon* is actually an agricultural ritual.<sup>27</sup> So these are all the same type of festivals; *Shogatsu* (or *Kyushogatsu*) and *Tanetori-sai*, and *Bon* and *Shitsu*.

#### IV. Bon

##### (1) *Bon* on mainland Japan

*Bon* (or *Obon*) is observed from the 13th to 15th of August. This event is to honor the spirits of ancestors. As explained earlier, *Shogatsu* and *Bon* are the most important events in Japan. You can see this importance from the news broadcasts that announce that the stations, airports and roads are crowded with homecoming

people near these days.

Typically *Bon* begins by setting up the *butsudan* (the Buddhist family altar) and preparing to welcome the ancestors' spirits. Then the graves and paths around them are cleaned so the ancestors can come in purity. An offering is made to the ancestors. Offerings include vegetables, fruits, noodles, and so on. Flowers (called *bon-bana*) may also be offered on the altar.

The first day is called *Mukae-bi*. *Mukae-bi* means welcoming. *Mukae* means to invite and *bi* (*hi*) means fire. A fire is built on the evening of the first day. People make a fire at the gate in order that ancestors can find the way to the home.

The last day, we call *Okuri-bi*. *Okuri* means to send off and *bi* (*hi*) means fire as I described before, so *Okuri-bi* is to send off ancestors. The same as *mukae-bi*, people make a fire to send their ancestors off.<sup>28</sup>

Then there is *Bon-odori* not only during *Bon* but also during the middle of July or other days in August. The *bon-odori* varies in each prefecture or each area. Usually it is performed by a group of men, women and children who wear *yukata*; *yukata* are cotton summer Japanese *kimono*. The musicians, who accompany the dancers, sing, play drums, gongs, flutes, and often *shamisen*. The musicians perform on the *yagura*; the *yagura* is a temporary platform, and is set up in a broad open space. The dancers are in circles around the *yagura*.<sup>29</sup>

## (2) *Bon* on Okinawa

*Bon* or *Kyubon* (the word used in Okinawa) is held from the 13th to 15th of July of the lunar calendar. Every home which keeps this Okinawan traditional festival observes a series of more or less standard rituals. And each of the three days has a customary menu.

On the first day, which we call *unke* in the local dialect, family members tend their ancestral tombs, removing weeds and cutting off obstructive branches around the graves. Then they invite the spirit of their forebears by making a fire in the home of the *honke* - the current head of family - in the same manner as the mainland.

On their return to the *honke*'s house, the living generations pray in front of *totome*, the Buddhist style family altar (almost the same as the one on mainland). We offer *jushi*, a traditional rice dish, alongside other offerings.

On the last day, *ukui* (dialect) or *okuri-bi*, relatives gather in the evening at the home of the *honke* to bid farewell to the ancestral spirits and encourage them to return to their own world. The noise of firecrackers is thought to discourage any reluctant member of a deceased generation from becoming too attached to the material world. The evening *ukui* constitutes the climax of the Okinawan *Kyubon* ceremonies.

Speaking of *ukui*, we have a interesting custom. When we make fire for sending ancestors' spirits off, we burn some paper called *uchikabi* for ancestors. That is the

money in order for the ancestors not to be hard up in their world.

## V. Other agricultural rituals on Yaeyama

Many festivals on Yaeyama are related to agricultural rituals, and these are especially limited to the crops of rice and millet (or *awa*). We hold *Honensai* (or harvest festival) in June. *Kitsugansai* (or "rounding off the annual events") in August, *Shitsu* (or a ritual for the arriving God) in September, among others, and these are all according to the lunar calendar.<sup>30</sup> In this paper *Honensai* on Yaeyama will be discussed.

### *Honensai*

#### (1) Typical *Honensai*

*Honensai* is the harvest festival. This is held in July by the old calendar in every part of the Yaeyama Islands. Why is the *Honensai* held? Okinawa's Islands have a scant supply of water, so fields are hard to use for paddies or vegetable patches because they are made of coral. So people pray for rain, give thanks for the harvest of the year, and pray for a good harvest for the next year.<sup>31</sup>

The following is a typical form of *Honensai*. We dedicate ourselves to the god by doing *Hatagashira*. A long 10 meter length pole, which is decorated on the top, is used to do a Lion dance or other performance. There is also a parade with beating drums and dancing which goes toward each ground from various parts. They hold a lot of events there. And finally people, who are divided into a west area and an east area, play tug-of-war. This is the typical *Honensai*.

#### (2) *Honensai* on Kuroshima

On the other hand, the *Honensai* in Kuroshima is different from the typical *Honensai* clearly, because *Harree* is held. Usually *Harree* is held as a sea god festival. The rainy season comes to an end with the start of the *Harree* events on the 4th of May, but the old calendar. The main event is the *Harree* boat race by the fishermen and sea persons. They row the boat to pray for good hauls of fish. So it seems to be only a sea festival. But the main event of the Kuroshima *Honensai* is also the *Harree* boat race. It's very special. The length of the boat is about 8 meters and the width is about one and half meters. The crew is one *Uni*; who is selected as the fastest person to run, one *Tuji*; who is able to take the tiller skillfully, one *Pizo*; who manipulates the boat using a rod, and others are *Funahaku*; who row the boat. There are 22 people on the boat.

The following is the course of the festival. It is held at the beach. There are 4 parts in Kuroshima, Nakamoto, Miyazato, Hori and Agarisuji. The race is Nakamoto vs. Miyazato and Hori vs. Agarisuji. The *Harree* boat race starts when the two *Uni* receive a *sake* cup from the village's senior. Then they stand up and link their middle fingers together like *yubikiri*. (Japanese children sometimes link their little fingers to make a promise.) They are on the starting line, and as soon as they



unlink their fingers, they run on the sandy beach to the boat in the sea more than 100 meters away. The crew is on the boat waiting for the *Uni*'s arrival. Immediately the *Uni* get on the boat and the crew row the boat more than 100 meters away to get to a little buoy in the offing. And when they get to the buoy the *Uni* scoops up the buoy. Then they make a U-turn and row toward the beach again. As soon as the boat gets to the beach, the *Uni* get off the boat and run to the goal where the starting line is. People are so excited. This is the highlight. The old and the young stand up and cheer. After the 2 *Uni* come back, people rush to the side of the *Uni*. They praise the 2 *Uni* and the race. All are in a circle and sing together. The meaning of the song is "we hold the boat race next year all together." And then some performances are dedicated to the God such as the traditional ancient Okinawan dance.<sup>32</sup>

Why is there the *Harree* during Kuroshima's *Honensai*? In addition to the harvest festival, the *Harree* is held in Kuroshima. Usually *Harree* is held as a sea god festival. The following story is what I found at the library in my hometown two years ago. It seems to explain the origin of the *Harree*.

Long ago there was a fortune-teller called *Yuta* in Kuroshima. People followed her orders because whenever they followed her orders, good things happened. Especially, they were blessed with rich harvests, so they were happy, thanks to her.

But one day a King heard the rumor about *Yuta*. He was so upset because people in Kuroshima didn't admire him. So the *Yuta* was pushed over the cliff into the sea.

Then the people of Kuroshima started to have bad crops after she was gone. People wished they had managed to get just one of her bones, at least, so they could hold a memorial service. They looked for her bones in the sea. Finally a person found her clothes floating on the sea. He scooped them up and took the clothes back to the village.

After that, people worshiped the clothes (*yuta*), and they had a rich harvest again. They were all pleased.<sup>33</sup>

That is why today the clothes are symbolized by a buoy, and people in *Harree* scoop up the buoy like scooping up the *Yuta*'s clothes.

## VI. The "other" world called NIRAIKANAI

The faith of the people of Okinawa must be mentioned if we want to understand the Okinawan festivals.

The islands of Okinawa are shaped in an arc, surrounded by the sea on all sides, and it is as if there is no dividing line in the sky and the sea. So Okinawan

people used to believe there would be another world far away and many still believe this. We believe this might be a peaceful and abundant world and this world is the origin of all things – of course human beings as well. Okinawan people call this world *NIRAIKANAI*. People believe that if they die they might go to the *NIRAIKANAI*, and they could live in peace after their death. This world view is handed down even now.<sup>34</sup> And people also believe the visitors of God come to this world from *NIRAIKANAI* when it's time to begin the events of every season. And the visitors from God visit each house and they assure people of their good health, long lives, a rich harvest, good hauls and so on.<sup>35</sup>

This kind of faith is called “animism;” animism is belief that all things have spirits. All things includes human beings, animals, plants, lifeless things, weather and so on.<sup>36</sup> In Okinawa this belief still survives in many aspects of the Okinawa festivals, and because Okinawans are devout people, not only the faith of *NIRAIKANAI* but also the ancestral worship still remains. Many seem to believe that we can see the God who came from *NIRAIKANAI* during festivals. And then people can express their own world view.

(1) The visitors from another world, or *NIRAIKANAI*.

The visitors from another world regularly come to this world during one season or time. They visit each home and scold, cheer up or bless the people.

*Akamata* and *Kuromata* on Yaeyama are one of them. The group of them seems to be secretive. They appear during *Honensai* to celebrate a rich harvest ahead of time. It is said they come from *NIRAIKANAI*, so this is what is secret about them, it is even taboo to take photos of them. That's why we didn't know about *Akamata* and *Kuromata*.<sup>37</sup>

We can see such visitors of God not only in Okinawa but also in some areas on the mainland. For example, the Namahage in Akita Prefecture is an example of a famous “visitor.” Others are *Namomi* in Iwate Prefecture, *Amamehagi* in Ishikawa Prefecture and so on.<sup>38</sup> People believe they come from another world.

In Yaeyama there are many kinds of visitors of God. *Angama*, *Mayunganashi*, *Miruku* and so on. *Miruku* is the most famous God not only in Yaeyama but also in all of Okinawa. *Miruku* usually visits during *Honensai* or *Shitsu*. Most of these visitors of God such as *Miruku* appear wearing a mask and disguise, but they do not always wear such styles. For example people believe that to play tug-of-war during festivals such as *Honensai* is to tell their agricultural fortunes by God's intention.<sup>39</sup> By playing tug-of-war people seem to think their fortune depends on the God whether they get a rich harvest or not, even though they don't see the God.

(2) *Toshiura* – The reason that people play tug-of-war or *Harree* during festivals.

The tug-of-war is played during *Honensai* in Okinawa. This is one of the *Toshiura* (or *Kamiwaza*). *Toshiura* means to celebrate and soothe the God and people do many kinds of events, such as games (or matches) and traditional arts, in order

for the Gods to decide their fortunes. The tug-of-war is played not only in Okinawa but also in Kyushu. It is played on a full moon night in Kyushu. It is said this festival is also one of *Toshiura*.<sup>40</sup>

*Toshiura* is not only observed by playing tug-of-war. There are also *Sumo*, the race of rowing boat like *Harree*, the race of horses and so on.<sup>41</sup>

As explained earlier, the origin of *Harree* during *Honensai* on Kuroshima may be influenced by the legend. At the same time, there seem to be many agricultural rituals including *Toshiura* in Japan. It is thought that the *Harree* on Kuroshima is derived from this *Toshiura* ritual. Moreover, it is found not only during *Honensai* on Kuroshima but also the *Harree* race is held during *Shitsu* on Iriomote Island.<sup>42</sup> And to my surprise, both of the *Harree* races on Kuroshima and even *Kaijinsai*'s *Harree* race of the fishermen and sea persons, are connected to agricultural rituals as well, because the *Harree* boat race event includes "*Agai-barree* (harree)". This is when people row the boat from the offing to the land as fast as they can. It is said *Agai-barree* symbolizes the God from *NIRAIKANAI* who has come to the land by ship, and people want the God to award happiness, good health, rich hauls, and a beautiful harvest. So *Harree* may not be only a fisherman's festival.<sup>43</sup>

There are some people who say that not all the *Harree* boat races mean "the coming of the God" or *Toshiura*. There are many *Harree* races in Japan; there is the *Morotabune* in Shimane Prefecture, *Oshibune* in Yamaguchi Prefecture and *Kyaron* (or *Peron*) in Kyushu. And these include *Harree* which are influenced by China, so it seems impossible to investigate clearly whether these races have the meaning of *Toshiura*, or not.<sup>44</sup>

### (3) Animism in Japan

There seems to exist a way of thinking that there is another world far in the distance of the sea even among people on the mainland Japan. We can see this belief in the *Shichifukujin*. *Shichifukujin* are the Seven Gods of Good Fortune. You can often see them when it is near *Shogatsu*. They are often shown on the ship called *Takarabune* with many treasures including some straw rice-bags. The fact that they are on the ship, seems to indicate that they come from another world such as *NIRAIKANAI* by ship. So possibly mainland Japanese also believe in the existence of another world.

## VII. Conclusion

Before the use of the calendar spread throughout Japanese custom, people used to spend their time adjusting their lives according to their agricultural cycles, thus we call a year "*toshi*" (or *nen*). *Toshi* means rice, as explained earlier, so Japanese traditionally believed that a unit of year was called "*toshi*" because the agricultural cycle was applied to the time-frame of a year. In the spring there is preparation of the rice seedlings followed by transplanting, weed removal, and insect pest control;

in autumn the rice is harvested.

Additionally it used to be important to hold the annual events or festivals because they are related to the agricultural rituals which determine whether they get a rich harvest or not.

In the introduction I mentioned that I would like to write about the differences between Japanese folk customs and Okinawa. But in fact there aren't so many differences because people in the mainland Japan used to have these customs which Okinawans still have. For example, Okinawans have the faith of *NIRAIKANAI*, and Japanese have the faith of animism. It seems to be the same - that people believe in the existence of another world. It was natural to believe in another world because both Okinawa and mainland Japan are surrounded by the sea. And people fully realized the existence of another world by the advent of God, such as *Akamata* and *Kuromata*, *Miruku*, and *Nasmahage* during the annual events or festivals even today.

But the faith, which people believe in God, has changed. Some of the annual events and festivals are transformed, streamlined, and then disappear.

In ancient times, it was so hard to get a rich harvest for people, because there were no agricultural machines. So people couldn't help believing and praying to the Gods for a rich harvest. Now, the more technology progresses, the higher the standard of living becomes, thus people need not worship as they used to. It isn't too much to say that they feel they can live without the God.

As a matter of fact, the *Honensai* on Kuroshima was discontinued from 1956 to 1965, because Kuroshima is very rapidly decreasing in population. But some people, who were not local people but people who used to live in Kuroshima, or who are their descendants, hoped for the revival of *Honensai*. And they succeeded in holding the *Honensai* again in spite of the fact that it wasn't held for more than 10 years. They continue to hold the *Honensai* still. I wonder why people wanted to continue to hold the *Honensai*? Perhaps people need the festival because, as explained earlier, they can express their world view which they cannot experience in daily life. People are encouraged by festivals; they welcome the God, and cooperate with other people, and they start their new lives with spiritual energy.

I discovered that annual events and festivals which are mixed well into our daily lives have such deep meanings. My interest in this field, especially of folk customs, has increased more and more. This paper has given me an opportunity for my world view to change. I would be happy if your world view has been changed by this paper, as well.

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