



Column : Kijimun's Monologue No.11

TOm & JOrry, Ryukyuan version

Key words : cat(cats), mouse(mice)

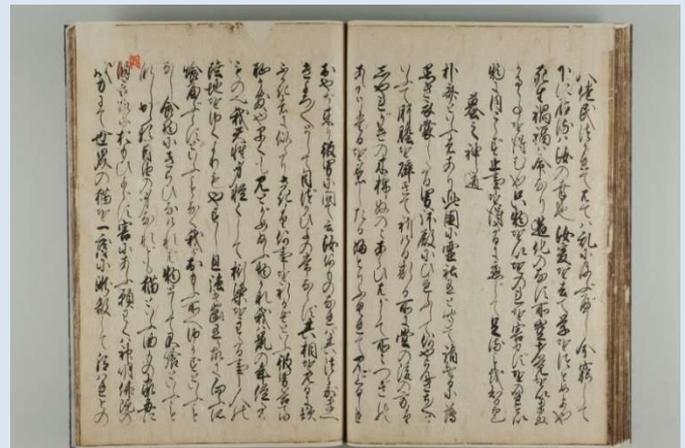
Haisai & Haitai! Kijimun yaibin.

My dear Cat-lovers in the University of the Ryukyus and in the University of Hawaii, thank you for waiting so long! In Japan, the February 22nd is the day of cat. (Why? Let's google it!) So, I am going to introduce some stories of cats in Okinawan materials. This month's column is "of the Cat-lovers, by the Cat-lovers, for the Cat-lovers", here we go!

Cats and mice are natural enemies.

In *Yorozu kakitsuke shu*, the No.7 of Miyara Dunchi/Douchi Collection, there is a story of "Hikino shindō (The Shintō of a toad)." This is a manuscript of *Inaka Sōji* which was a *Kokkeibon*(a humorous book) of Edo period. In this story, an old mouse which had transformed into a man prayed in a Shintō shrine, "Please chase cats out of this world. They steal a fish from meal of human or they transform into *Nekomata*(a mythical two-tailed cat monster), like these, they only harm others not giving any benefits." Then, there was a toad which had transformed into an old man passing and he admonished the mouse and said, "Cats are certainly useless, but they work for human being to catch you, mice, so they forgive cats even cats snatch their foods. You better stop to harm a human habitation than pray to God for impossible, and there will be no one who keeps cats in their house." This is a satirical fable which describes human stupidity like talking about the pot calling the kettle black or praying for God only when in trouble.

Well, "Fight hand-in-hand together" is not realistic, not like a cartoon X, the relationship of cats and mice is not so easy!



Yorozu kakitsuke shu, the No.7 of Miyara Dunchi/Douchi Collection

Endless battle of cats and mice : in modern times of Ryukyu

In *Si Ryukyu roku* which is a record of an envoy from China to Ryukyu, there is a description that no one keeps a dog, but "cats with peculiar color" are liked very much in Ryukyu. And Bettelheim, an English missionary asked "3 cats" for daily necessities during his stay in Ryukyu, cats were indispensable to live there.

In *Nantō zatsuwa* of Nagoya Sagenta, a material of folklore in Amami Ōshima in the last days of the Tokugawa shogunate, there is a description as "People treat cats with much care, differently from dogs, because there are venomous snakes called



A cat on campus (Photo by the writer of this column)

Habu which enter house to get mice, and the snakes hurt human too. If there is no mouse, Habu will not com. So, people keep cats to expel mice." It shows us that Ryukyuan people kept cats to remove mice so that they could avoid the damage from Habu.



It was the Habu who took a "hand" in the battle of cats and mice!