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What is Komonjo(古文書: an ancient document)?

About a character used in Komonjo.

Haisai! Kijimun yaibi'in! (Hi! I'm Kijimun!) To introduce characteristics of the Okinawa Materials, we issue this column once a month. I'm Kijimun, unofficial mascot of the library of the Ryukyus University. Nice to meet you, everyone!

We are going to introduce *Komonjo* of Ryukyu/Okinawa in this fiscal year 2017. This will be mainly for beginners of *Komonjo* who are interested in it but do not know how to approach it. We will explain a type, a content, a form and a paper of *Komonjo* of Ryukyu/Okinawa in a simple and amusing way.

In this month, let's talk about a character used in *Komonjo*. *Man'yō gana* (万葉仮名: a Chinese character used as a phonetic symbol) was basically used in *Komonjo* of Ryukyu/Okinawa. For example, when you want to write 「あ」 (a letter of Hiragana(ひらがな), Japanese syllabary), which is pronounced as "a", you need to write a letter of Kanji (漢字:Chinese character) pronounced as "a", like 「安・阿・愛・垂・悪」 using the cursive or the semi-cursive style. These Kanji are all pronounced as "a". It does not matter the meaning of Kanji.

In Japan or in Ryukyu, the main style of handwriting was *Oieryū*(御家流). That style was used as a standard style throughout Japan after Edo period. Besides, there were a character font for writing a letter to a Chinese Emperor, or a big character font for writing on a hanging scroll, the people of those days properly used many fonts of handwriting.

Among *Komonjo* of Ryukyu, the most beautiful character was used in *Omorosōshi* (an anthology of ancient songs for religious service in Ryukyu. Completed in 1531.) This is the record of prayers which *Kikoe ōkimi* (the chief priestess) and *Noro* (priestess) gave.

In Ryukyuan dialect, there are only three vowels as "a i u". Therefore, "a i u e o" are pronounced as "a i u i u". For example, "*Kome* (米:rice)" is pronounced as "*Kumi*". The sonant mark was not used in those days, therefore, 「ぼぼ」 was written as 「ははは」. You can read for the most part of *Komonjo* written in Hiragana with knowing this theory.

Let's take a walk together in a world of *Komonjo* for this fiscal year 2017.