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・亜・亜」 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 「ばば」 was written as 「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.