

Kijimun's Monologue —No.3—

Topic: *Hārī*

Keywords: *Hārī*, *Haryūsen* (*Hārī* boat,) a legend of Kutsugen, *Kyōsō* (a boat race)

Hārī is an event of boat race held in Okinawa on May 4th of the lunar calendar, to pray a rich haul and marine safety. It is very appealing that its rowers are competing among many teams for victory in a dynamic way.

It is found from East Asia to Southeast Asia (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Okinawa, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, North Borneo and Viet Nam.) Especially, the one of Viet Nam is very similar to the one of Okinawa; it suggests the linkage among Asian countries. *Péron* in Nagasaki and *Ryūsen* in Amakusa are also the dragon boat race.

It is said that its origin has some relationship with a Chinese legend of Kutsugen (a Chinese statesman and poet,) although there are several theories. According to Ryukyuan legend, it was *Binjin 36 sei* (a group of Chinese immigrants lived in Kuninda, Naha) who introduced *Hārī* in the 14th century or it was Nagahama *Taifu* (a Ryukyuan official) who made a *Hārī* boat on copying a *Haryūsen* of Nanjing, China. Now we can see *Hārī* events held on a grand scale in Naha and Itoman, but, it is also very tasteful the *Hārī* events which are held as a religious service with small groups in every region of Okinawa. We thoroughly recommend you to go and see those events.

In the old days, at the time of *Hārī*, children could have some toys like a doll only once in a year. *Hariko* (papier-mache) of *Hārī* boat was very popular because it floated on water. And there was also a doll riding a horse which worked by string and clicked. Both adults and children were looking forward to the *Hārī* events.

The legend of *Hārī* ~ What is the most delicious in the world? ~

One day, King of Ryukyu asked his servants, "What is the most delicious food in the world?". Then one of them replied, "The most delicious food is salt." The King got angry and exiled him to Yaeyama Islands. Later, continual rain caused a severe famine, and many people died from starving. There was not enough provisions in the palace either; the King noticed that the servant had been right at last. The King ordered him home. The servant asked to pick him up with three *Hārī* boats, and the King sent the *Hārī* boats which had been made in Naha, Tomari, and Kume to Yaeyama Islands. However, the servant went missing near Miegusuku on May 4th. From then, people started to hold *Hārī* event for the repose of his soul on that day.

(An extract of *Handbook Okinawa no nenchū gyōji*, P79, Sakihara Kōshin)

Hārī of *Ōfu* era from Digital Archives

In "*Monjo tsuzuri*" (completed in 1860) from Miyara Douchi/Dunchi collection, there is a lively description about going sight-seeing *Hārī* of *Ōfu* era. It is a valuable material which shows us the

social situation of the time.

According to that, *Hārī* of Naha was held with three *Hārī* boats from early morning, and the teams bravely vied with each other, and many spectators watched it in a tent or from balcony seats. Besides, there were also sightseeing boats on which young men and gorgeous ladies (like *Geisha*) gathered and spectacularly enjoyed playing musical instruments like a bell, a drum, or *Sanshin* (Okinawan traditional three-stringed instrument.) At the event, merchants sold confectionery and a lot of toys, ladies brilliantly beautified themselves, it was something worth seeing once in a lifetime.