

# TOMIGUSUKU RYUSEN ASSOCIATION

## KING WAN-OUSO: THE FOUNDER OF DRAGON BOAT RACING IN OKINAWA

In 1393, the nephew of the king of Nanzan, Wan-ouso, went to study at Imperial University in Nanking, China. During his stay, he saw dragon boats racing on a river and was deeply moved.

After returning to Okinawa, he immediately built a castle near the waters of Naha, moved there, and named it Tomigusuku. Then, he built a dragon boat using Chinese architecture, and went for a ride on Manko River. The people around Naha saw the boat and began building boats just like it. On May 4, they raced with these boats just below the castle on Manko River and showed them to Wan-ouso.

Every year on May 4, three dragon boats, each from Naha, Kume, and Tomari, were rowed to a port just below Tomigusuku Castle. The rowers then came ashore and prayed for good fortune at a sacred place in the castle, following the prayers conducted by the shaman of Tomigusuku.

## THE ANCIENT RITUAL AT THE CASTLE

In a sacred place of Tomigusuku Castle is a god named "Kohanarino Uibe." When the three dragon boats from Naha, Kume, and Tomari were rowed to Tomigusuku Castle on May 4, the lord of Tomigusuku Castle would offer incense, flowers, rice, and water to the gods at this shrine, and the shaman of Tomigusuku would pray.

During times when rain was scarce, a Buddhist statue (god) was placed on a dragon boat from Kume. The statue was taken to the shrine for a prayer for rain in the presence of the lords and delegates from Naha, Umonogusuku, and Kume.



TOMIGUSUKU RYUSEN (DRAGON BOATS)

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Wan-ouso, the lord of Tomigusuku Castle, later to become the second Nanzan King (1401-1414), built Chinese dragon boats, and started "Hari," dragon boat racing, to pray for good harvest and peace. Following in the footsteps of the king's passion and energy, we sent a research group to Fuzhou City, Fujian, China, and requested the construction of three dragon boats (red, blue, and yellow) for Tomigusuku City. In June 2008, we took these dragon boats to Manko River, where King Wan-ouso first rode his dragon boat 600 years ago, and rowed down the river.

Tomigusuku Ryusen Association is proud that the dragon boat racing in Okinawa was born here in Tomigusuku City, and while succeeding the ancient ritual at the castle, we pass on the rich history and culture through events such as Tomigusuku Hari (dragon boat racing) to the next generation.

Moreover, by holding Hari related events we strive to bring the community together, contribute to education, sports, and business, and make communities a more active and lively place.

Translated by Tsukasa Gaja