

Hello Dustin (January 1, 2018): “Winter Memories”

by Dustin Gauci (Iwakura City CIR)

Happy New Year!! Is everyone enjoying the New Years holidays? I’ve mostly just been relaxing in my *kotatsu* (a Japanese table with space-heater). Although Japan’s winter is much warmer than Canada’s, this is strange, isn’t it? (haha!)

Last fall, I took part in *inekari* (rice-harvesting) with children from Minami Elementary School, and it was a great experience for me. I learned that the process for the rice that we usually eat to get to our dinner table takes so much hard work, so I was surprised and, at the same time, I felt that we have to be thankful to everyone who produces our food.

In the past, I also had the experience of using the rice straw left over after harvesting rice to make *shimenawa* to display at New Years. I think that the Japanese tradition of making decorations to welcome in the New Year and the coming of the gods, while also showing our thanks for the fall harvest, is very wonderful. Each of these events has meaning in itself, and they are all connected with each other.

During Japanese New Years, there are many enjoyable things like *osechi-ryori* (New Years’ feasts), *hatsu-mode* (the first visit of the year to a shrine) and *otoshi-dama* (giving money as a gift to children). However in Canada, Christmas is the most important event of the winter, even more important than New Years. After Christmas, the next thing that we most look forward to is the festival in February called “Winterlude”.

This festival takes place every year in February in the capital city, Ottawa, and at it there are large snow sculptures like Sapporo’s Snow Festival, a large slide made out of snow, the world’s largest skating rink and more! There are so many attractions and events at the festival for enjoying the outdoors during the long, cold winter, so it gets very crowded with people.

At Winterlude there are also displays of large ice sculptures, but actually this tradition started because of four Japanese people who visited in 1985. It is thanks to them for teaching about their beautiful and fine Japanese craft that today the hearts of people in Canada are touched by these sculptures.

So, it always makes me happy when I find links like this between Canada and Japan.

Now that I could remember about winters in Canada, I’m finally ready to leave my *kotatsu* and go out and enjoy Japan’s winter too! And when I go do *hatsu-mode* I’ll pray that we can all have a happy year in 2018. See you!