



One Festival, Three Calendars

Read the passage and answer the questions. (CEFR B1–B2)

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- 1 Few traditions show the power of a calendar better than Obon. For centuries, it was held around the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, a date shared with the Chinese Ghost Festival and Vietnam's Vu Lan. When Japan suddenly switched to the solar calendar in 1873, the government declared that Obon should follow the new date of July 15. On paper, every seasonal festival now arrived about a month earlier than before.
- 2 Farmers, however, could not stop working in the middle of July, their busiest season. Many communities quietly moved the festival one month later, to August 15, which also felt closer to the original season. Cities such as Tokyo kept July, while Okinawa stayed with the lunar date. In other words, they protected the season of the festival by giving up its official date.
- 3 The result is a national event without a national date, and a week of vacation that has never been a legal holiday. Even so, the August Obon break now shapes the economy, from train timetables to factory schedules. Companies close, highways fill with cars, and quiet hometowns suddenly feel alive again. Custom, not law, decided when Japan welcomes its dead.

Comprehension

1. What is the main idea of the passage?
 - (A) The 1873 calendar change split Obon into different dates, and custom rather than law decided when most people hold it.
 - (B) Obon became a legal holiday in 1873 when Japan changed its calendar.
 - (C) Farmers in Japan did not want to hold Obon at all.
 - (D) Obon was copied from the Chinese Ghost Festival in 1873.
2. According to the passage, what date did the government choose for Obon in 1873?
 - (A) August 15
 - (B) The fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month
 - (C) July 15
 - (D) August 13
3. Why did many communities move Obon to August?
 - (A) The government ordered them to change the date.
 - (B) Mid-July was the busiest time for farmers, and August felt closer to the original season.
 - (C) August had more national holidays than July.
 - (D) They wanted to hold Obon on the same day as Vietnam's Vu Lan.
4. What can be inferred about Obon in Okinawa?
 - (A) It is always held on July 15.
 - (B) It is held in the busiest farming season.
 - (C) It is a legal holiday only in Okinawa.
 - (D) Its date on the solar calendar changes from year to year.
5. In paragraph 3, the word "shapes" in "the August Obon break now shapes the economy" is closest in meaning to
 - (A) damages
 - (B) has a strong effect on
 - (C) cuts into pieces
 - (D) draws a picture of
6. Why does the writer end the passage with "Custom, not law, decided when Japan welcomes its dead"?
 - (A) To argue that the government should make a new law about Obon.
 - (B) To explain why Japan changed to the solar calendar.
 - (C) To stress that people's habits, not official rules, set the date most people use.
 - (D) To show that Obon is no longer important to Japanese people.



Vocabulary, Paraphrase & Summary

Match the words with the definitions. Then rewrite and summarize.

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|--------------|--|
| 1. lunar | a. allowed by or connected with the law |
| 2. switch | b. a list that shows the times when trains or buses leave and arrive |
| 3. declare | c. a way of doing something that people in a place have followed for a long time |
| 4. community | d. connected with the moon, or based on the moon's changes |
| 5. original | e. to change from one thing or system to another |
| 6. legal | f. to say something officially or in public |
| 7. timetable | g. a group of people who live in the same area |
| 8. custom | h. existing at the beginning, before any changes |

Paraphrase — say it in your own words

1. "Farmers, however, could not stop working in the middle of July, their busiest season."

Hint: Start with "But" and use "because" to explain why farmers could not stop.

2. "In other words, they protected the season of the festival by giving up its official date."

Hint: Use "kept" for "protected" and "did not follow" for "giving up".

3. "Custom, not law, decided when Japan welcomes its dead."

Hint: Use a passive form: "The date ... was decided by" and "not by".

Summary

Summarize the passage in about 50 words.



Debate & Opinion Essay

Prepare for a debate. Then write your opinion (100–150 words).

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Motion: Obon should become an official national holiday in Japan.

FOR 賛成

- Many companies already close and highways fill with cars, so a legal holiday would only match what people already do.
- Workers who cannot take time off at Obon would get a fair chance to visit their family graves and hometowns.
- A national holiday would protect an old custom that connects families with their ancestors.

Add your own reason:

AGAINST 反対

- The passage shows that Obon has three dates. Choosing one national date would ignore people in Tokyo who keep July and in Okinawa who follow the lunar date.
- Obon is a Buddhist festival, and a national holiday for one religion's event may not be fair to people of other faiths.
- Custom already works well. People and companies decide their own break, so the government does not need to step in.

Add your own reason:

Opinion	<i>I believe / I think that ...</i>
Reason 1	<i>First, ... For example, ...</i>
Reason 2	<i>Second, ... In fact, ...</i>
Counter	<i>Some people say ... However, ...</i>
Conclusion	<i>In conclusion, ...</i>