

## *Yuniwa*

The shrine and surrounding forests of Okuni Jinja are considered sacred ground, described as a *yuniwa*. The word is a combination of two kanji characters, the first meaning “purification” or “worship,” and the second, “grounds,” and appears in the *Nihon shoki*, a chronicle completed in 720 CE. Within the concept of *yuniwa*, the notion of consecrated ground is combined with elements of prayer and purification to honor the deities, or kami. The idea of *yuniwa* is central to Japanese spirituality and can be found throughout Shinto.

The *yuniwa* of the gods is believed to have been the place from which the deity Ninigi no Mikoto, grandson of goddess of the sun Amaterasu Omikami, originally brought rice plants to Japan. Rice thereafter became the country’s staple crop, and is accorded great importance in the Shinto belief system. A festival is held at Okuni Jinja each autumn to thank the kami for their gift of rice.