

Discourses upon *Eisa* in Okinawa, as a contemporary urban fakelore

Harumichi YAMADA

Tokyo Keizai University

yamada@tku.ac.jp

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Eisa is a type of dance performance popular in Okinawa, Japan, originally rooted in Buddhist Bon Festival traditions, and believed to have a long history of several hundreds of years. Contemporary *Eisa*, however, experienced radical changes in varied ways in the latter half of the 20th century.

It is widely acknowledged that contemporary *Eisa* has developed its styles through formal competitions started after the WWII. The first “All Island *Eisa* Competition” (全島エイサーコンクール), organized in then Koza city in 1956, was a pivotal event in contemporary *Eisa* history. Since then, *Eisa* has diffused all over Okinawa prefecture, and varied new elements have flown into *Eisa* related performances. Many elements from traditional folkloric performances have been deconstructed, almost annihilating original contexts, and organized into a systematic “fakelore” performance. In such processes, bravery or gallantry is often emphasized in discourses upon *Eisa* performances.

Okinawa City authority has published “the declaration of *Eisa* town” (エイサーのまち宣言) in 2007. Since then the City more often encourages local efforts to make *Eisa* related elements visible in its urban landscape, through setting landmarks, street furniture, and other constructions decorated with *Eisa* related symbols. In the declaration, gallantry of energetic youth is praised in poetic manners.

Historical *Eisa* should have been something afar from gallantry, but a ritual of worship to ancestors based on Buddhist belief. It should have been less sophisticated, less organized, and less noisy, when compared with its modern counterpart. Orientation towards gallantry of contemporary *Eisa* might have its roots in post-WWII situations in Okinawa, where the occupational US military controlled the Ryukyus, and prevailed over Okinawan people to obey.

Festival frenzy around contemporary *Eisa* might have been a substation for resistance action of the local people against the mighty dominating power, thus the result of the occupational past, and on-going presence of US military bases.

