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Behind the gallantry of Eisa  
in Okinawa:  
Discourses upon a  
contemporary urban fakelore

Harumichi YAMADA

10<sup>th</sup> CJK Geography: 2015-Shanghai

# Apology, *a.k.a.* disclaimer

In this presentation, proper names of Japanese institutions, *etc.* are given in English as explanatory translation. Some of them may have official English names, but many do not have one. Please take into account that those names in English are **NOT** fully official ones.

# Related papers in Japanese

山田晴通 (2016): (編集集中)

都市的フェイクロアとしてのエイサーの意義.

神谷浩夫・山本健太・和田 崇 共編

『ライブパフォーマンスと地域(仮)』

ナカニシヤ出版(京都).

# Related papers in Japanese

Yamada (2016 forthcoming):  
Connotations of Eisa as an urban fabelore.

in KAMIYA, H., YAMAMOTO, K. and  
WADA, T. (eds.)

*Live Performances and Areas*  
Nakanishiya Press (Kyoto)

# Fakelore ?

- Behind the gallantry of *Eisa* in Okinawa:  
Discourses upon a contemporary urban  
fakelore
- Fake + folklore
- Richard Mercer Dorson (1916-1981)  
coined the term in 1950

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Fakelore** or **pseudo-folklore** is inauthentic, manufactured [folklore](#) presented as if it were genuinely [traditional](#). Over the last several decades the term has generally fallen out of favor in the academic study of folklore because it places an unnecessary emphasis on origin (instead of ongoing practice) to determine authenticity. The term can refer to new stories or songs made up, or to folklore that is reworked and modified for modern tastes. The element of misrepresentation is central; artists who draw on traditional stories in their work are not producing fakelore unless they claim that their creations are real folklore.<sup>[1]</sup>

The term *fakelore* was coined in 1950 by American folklorist [Richard M. Dorson](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Dorson's examples included the fictional [cowboy Pecos Bill](#), who was presented as a folk hero of the [American West](#) but was actually invented by the writer [Edward S. O'Reilly](#) in 1908. Dorson also

# From Wikipedia, English version

Eisa (dance) – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



https en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eisa\_(dance)



リーダー



## Eisa (dance)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Eisa** (**Okinawan**: エイサー *Eisaa*) is a form of **folk dance** originating from the **Okinawa Islands**, **Japan**. In origin, it is a **Bon** dance that is performed by young people of each community during the Bon festival to honor the spirits of their ancestors. It underwent drastic changes in the 20th century and is today seen as a vital part of Okinawan culture.

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Eisa by the Seragaki Youths from Onna Village



It underwent drastic changes in the 20th century and is today seen as a vital part of Okinawan culture.

**Popular style** [\[edit\]](#)

# What is *Eisa* ?

- From the All Island *Eisa* Festival organizing committee web site:

(my translation)

One of traditional performances in Okinawa, equivalent to bon dance in other part of Japan. Each local community, or youth group has its own unique style of Eisa, and perform it in the bon nights, dancing and marching.

Some patterns may be found among varied styles, and almost all youth groups performs in the style of “taiko (drum) Eisa” using O-daiko, and Shime-daiko drums, which is said to be most prevailing in Chubu (central) area of Okinawa island. Eisa performed in former municipalities of Yonashiro and Katsuren is quite unique in the use of Paranku, small one-sided tumbalin like instrument, and atmosphere of the performance is quite different from other performances using Shime-daiko.

In some other styles of Eisa, no drum is used in performance, that is, “hand-dance only Eisa”, which are found in Hokubu (northern) part of Okinawa island, and it is said to be the oldest form of Eisa possibly.

In recent years, many “Sosaku-daiko” (creative drum performance) groups using essence of Eisa styles, and combine them to popular music, performing in unique outfits.

# Traditional aspects of *Eisa*

- Performance during *bon* period, based on Buddhism and ancestry worship
- Hand dancing (without drums)
- Clown roles originally have their roots in travelling bonze/preacher

## Drums in *Eisa*

- Witnesses, or discourses upon pre-war day Eisa have quite limited degree of references to drums.
- Drums are traditionally included in Eisa performances, but their volume or relative importance was not as much as today's.

# Okinawa city

- Population: 133,000+ (estimation May 2015)
- Although the local economy is relatively slow, the population is slowly increasing in recent years.
- Historically, local economy had been largely dependent upon US military personnels' private spending until 1970s.

# Okinawa city

- The area has been named *Koza* under US occupation after 1945.
- 1956: **Koza** city
- All Island Eisa Competition started under the initiative of then Koza city, this year
- 1972: The end of US occupation
- 1974: City renamed as **Okinawa** city
- 1977: The Competition was renamed to All Island Eisa Festival

# Declaration of *Eisa* town

- Okinawa City authority has published “the declaration of Eisa town” (エイサーのまち宣言) in 2007.
- Being a poetical expression of homage to Eisa, the declaration praised gallantry of energetic youth.

大地をゆるがす太鼓の音 天まで響く歌三  
線の声

太鼓は人々の魂をゆるがし 歌三線は悠久  
の歴史と平和を謳う

夏の夜の勇壮華麗な演技に 青年たちは珠  
玉の汗をとばす

ドンドンドン魂の太鼓 トウントウンテン癒しの三線

ピューイピューイと指笛がなり スリサーサーと声  
が弾む

エイサーのリズムは宇宙の波長と調和して 人々  
の心をときはなす

青年たちの愛郷心は エイサーによって育まれた  
エイサーを踊る喜びが 島を愛する心を育てた

沖縄全島エイサーまつりは 戦後の混乱した沖縄  
でウマンチュに勇気と活力を与えた

郷土の芸能文化をこよなく愛する沖縄の中でも沖  
縄全島エイサーまつりは

島人の魂を駆り立て 人々を興奮の渦に巻き込み  
人々を魅了し続けた

そしてエイサー文化は 強固なものへと継承発展  
される

私たち沖縄市民は エイサーを通して育んできた 心優しい精神と

先人たちが築きあげた偉大なる文化遺産エイサーを

迎恩の心に満ちたわがまちの誇りとするとともに

たくましい生命力と文化の薫り高い住みよいまちづくりに努めることを決意し

ここにエイサーのまち沖縄市を宣言する

# With my stress and explanation

大地をゆるがす太鼓の音 天まで響く歌三  
線の声 (drums)

太鼓は人々の魂をゆるがし 歌三線は悠久  
の歴史と平和を謳う

(gallant and gorgeous)

夏の夜の勇壮華麗な演技に 青年たちは珠  
玉の汗をとばす

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ピューイピューイと指笛がなり スリサーサーと声  
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エイサーのリズムは宇宙の波長と調和して 人々  
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郷土の芸能文化をこよなく愛する沖縄の中でも沖  
縄全島エイサーまつりは

(All Island Eisa Festival)

島人の魂を駆り立て 人々を興奮の渦に巻き込み  
人々を魅了し続けた (excitement)

そしてエイサー文化は 強固なものへと継承発展  
される

沖縄全島エイサーまつりは 戦後の混乱した沖縄  
でウマンチュに勇気と活力を与えた

All Island Eisa Festival gave the Uchinanchu  
(Okinawan) people bravery and vitality, when  
Okinawa was in post-war confusion

私たち沖縄市民は エイサーを通して育んできた 心優しい精神と

先人たちが築きあげた偉大なる文化遺産エイサーを (Eisa as cultural heritage)

迎恩の心に満ちたわがまちの誇りとするとともに

(strong vitality and rich culture)

たくましい生命力と文化の薫り高い住みよいまちづくりに努めることを決意し

ここにエイサーのまち沖縄市を宣言する

# After the declaration

- After the declaration, the city authority 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.

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- After the declaration, the city authority 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.
- Original Eisa characters become in use after 2011.





## In conclusion

- 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.

## In conclusion

- 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.

## In conclusion

- 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.

Thank you for your attention !

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Please join Sapporo conference next year !

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