

Kijimun's Monologue —No.5—

Topic: *Eisā* (a name of one of the Okinawan traditional performing arts)

Keywords: *Eisā*, *Nimbuchā*, *Kyōtarō*, *Chondarā*

August starts today; we are in the height of summer! Speaking of summer, *Shicihgwach* (*Obon* festival in Okinawa) is coming and speaking of *Shicihgwachi*; it is *Eisā* what you can't miss!

● *Eisā*, a feature of summer in Okinawa

Eisā is originally a religious ritual, which is performed to make offerings to ancestral spirits by doing *Michi junē* (going door-to-door in each regional area) on July 15th with the lunar calendar at the time of *Obon* festival. There are various theories about the origin of *Eisā*, one of them is “*Nimbuchā*,” “*Chondarā*” or “*Kyōtarō*.”

You know, it is heartwarming to see, during summer in Okinawa that a *Chondarā* who paints his face white, like a clown, teases small kids among the audience and the kids cry for fear.

● Who is the *Chondarā*?

Well, what is the *Chondarā*? It is said that they were originally a group of performers, called “*Nimbuchā*” who had come to Okinawa from Japan mainland, and they took around from house to house with reciting Buddhist invocation and performing. There is an opinion that their *Nembutsu odori* (Buddhist incantation using chanting and dancing) was the origin of *Eisā*, in fact, and the tradition says that *Nimbuchā* who went around attending a funeral of each family was an object of awe and contempt by local people. Besides, it is considered that *Nimbuchā* had an impact on Okinawan folk performing art too, but the detail of *Nimbuchā* is still unknown. It stirs our interest that the true identity of “*Chondarā*” who is so famous in Okinawa is still an enigma.

● *Eisā* of our time

Eisā was primarily held to exorcise wandering hungry spirits who came with spirits of ancestors in *Kyūbon* (*Obon* festival with the lunar calendar.) But it has been greatly changed in our time. *Eisā* performed with modern Okinawan pop music is very popular now. Also, it recently becomes to be well-known outside of Okinawa. Even its style is changing along with the time; it is sure that *Eisā* will remain as a feature of summer in Okinawa in the future too.

You can find many articles regarding *Eisā* through “iXio,” “BIDOM” and “Ryukyu/Okinawa Digital Archive” on the website of the University of the Ryukyus Library, using the keywords “*Kyōtarō*,” “*Chondarā*” or “*Eisā*.” Why don’t you check them out, I’m sure you’ll like them!