

Column Kijimun's Monologue - Series of the Oriental Zodiac -

No.4; Saru (a monkey) A story of Ryukyuan monkey -summary-

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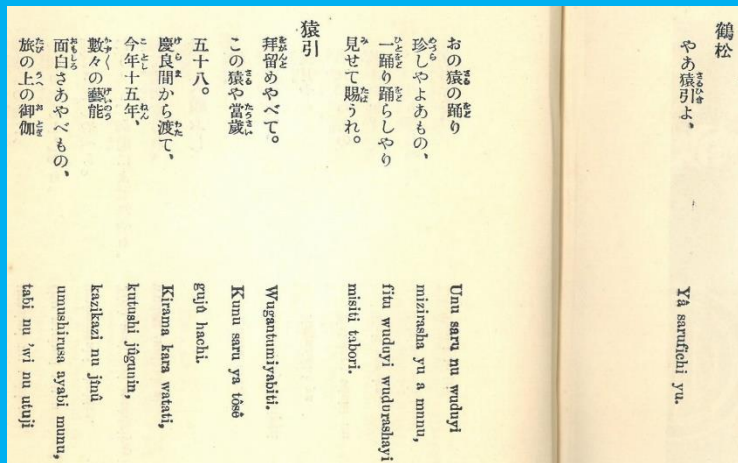
Haisai, Kijimun Yaibin! (Hi! I'm Kijimun!)

In Okinawan dialect, *Shichigwachi* means "July" or "Kyūbon." *Kyūbon* is an annual event held in Okinawa, at the time of *Kyūbon*, all ancestors of Okinawan people come back from the afterworld to meet their children! How fantastic!

In this month, I'm going to talk about *Saru* (a monkey) from the Oriental Zodiac. You know, no monkey inhabits in Okinawa, but we curiously have a lot of stories of a monkey.

According to a Ryukyuan legend, once upon a time, a deer of Kerama, Okinawa had huffed at monkey's malicious mischiefs, the deer tricked the monkey into boarding on deer's back and bucked off the monkey off the coast. And the monkey was drowned because it could not swim. Since then, monkeys in Ryukyu have disappeared. An interesting legend, isn't it?

A monkey acts in the play of "*Hanauri no en*," one of the programs of *Kumiodori*, a classical theater which was



born in the 18th century in Ryukyu.

An actor at the age of about five years old comes out wearing a monkey's mask and costume. A small and cute monkey. An owner of the monkey says, "This monkey is 58 years old, came from Kerama Islands 15 years ago, very versatile entertainer!" Then, the audience burst into laughter at the words. He is anything but a small child, after all! The monkey dances prettily to music. For this sweet scene, the spectators break into

p.591, *Hanauri no en* from "Ryukyu gikyoku shū", Iha Fuyū

applause.

A script of this *Kumiodori* is introduced in "*Ryukyu gikyoku shū*" which was written by Iha Fuyū, the founding father of Okinawan Studies. Iha wrote a pronunciation of each line in Roman character,

and it made the book innovative at that time. In our library, we own his collection of books as Iha Fuyū collection.

At the time of excavation in Shuri castle, a monkey's bones came out. Did people eat the monkey in Shuri castle? Or did they keep it as a pet? But no monkey ought to be in Ryukyu, the very mysterious story, isn't it?!

