

## **Ondo Kiyomori Festival**

The Ondo Kiyomori Festival is held every five years on Kurahashi Island. The festival commemorates general Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181), head of the powerful Taira clan for many years before its destruction at the end of the Genpei War (1180–1185). Kiyomori was said to have played a key role in the opening of the Ondo-no-seto Channel in 1165.

The festival was first held in 1834 during Obon, a period in mid-July when the dead are honored. In the beginning, the festival consisted mainly of *nenbutsu odori*, Buddhist chanting accompanied by drumming and dancing. From 1858 onwards, a reenactment of the procession of a daimyo and attendants traveling to and from Edo (now Tokyo) became the central focus of the festival.

The original processions of traveling daimyo took place under the alternate attendance system (*sankin-kōtai*) introduced by the shogunate in the early Edo period (1603–1867). Under this system, daimyo were required to travel to Edo (now Tokyo) every two years, and they were accompanied by large retinues and traveled in extravagant fashion. The late Edo period was marked by a decline in the wealth and influence of the samurai class, making these processions obsolete and compelling the once-wealthy daimyo families to dispose of the clothing and objects once used by their retinues. These discarded items came to be repurposed in reenactments of the processions performed at regional festivals.

The Ondo Kiyomori Festival procession involves over 500 performers divided into 77 groups, who are arranged and outfitted according to Edo-period protocol. Wearing traditional clothing and carrying historically appropriate props, they vividly evoke the atmosphere of a daimyo procession. Known throughout the country, the Ondo Kiyomori Festival was designated an Intangible Cultural Property by the city of Kure in 1979.