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DOLLS, PUPPETS AND  
MODEL FIGURES OF JAPAN

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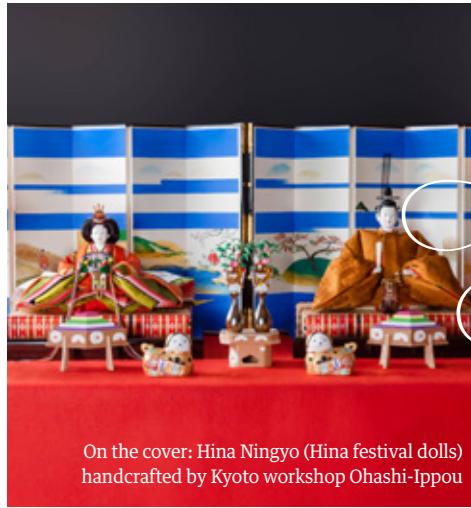




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Kasuisai temple in Fukuroi City, Shizuoka Prefecture, hosts a magnificent Hina Matsuri festival from January 1 to March 31.



On the cover: Hina Ningyo (Hina festival dolls) handcrafted by Kyoto workshop Ohashi-Ippou

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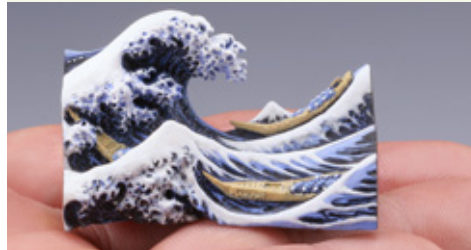
Introducing the company that pioneered the “model figure” industry.



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The Iida Puppet Festa is Japan’s largest and one of the world’s best-known puppetry events.



THEME FOR **MARCH**:

**DOLLS, PUPPETS AND MODEL FIGURES OF JAPAN**

Japanese people have cherished *ningyo* (dolls) since ancient times and continue to do so for reasons ceremonial, recreational and artistic. We introduce some of the best known traditional and modern types of *ningyo*, from the Hina Ningyo after which the age-old Doll Festival is named to *ningyo joruri* puppets and the “model figures” of today loved by young and old alike.

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**JAPAN CULTURAL ENVOY**

Sharing the Joy of *Wagashi*

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**ON THE COVER**

Hina Ningyo (Hina festival dolls) handcrafted by Kyoto workshop Ohashi-Ippou

Photo: Courtesy of Ohashi-Ippou

**EDITORS' NOTE**

Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

# ONE OCEAN SUMMIT VIDEO MESSAGE BY JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER KISHIDA FUMIO

**On February 9-11, 2022, the One Ocean Summit, hosted by Mr. Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, was held in Brest, France. Government leaders, along with representatives of municipalities, multinational companies and civil society, scientists and others from around the world, gathered to discuss wide-ranging issues related to the ocean. Mr. Kishida Fumio, Prime Minister of Japan, attended the high-level segment held on February 11 by sending a video message as follows.**

I would like to pay tribute to the leadership of President Macron in hosting this One Ocean Summit.

Japan has been making efforts to lead the world in addressing a wide range of ocean-related issues.

In the area of marine plastic litter, Japan set out the G20's Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, which aims to reduce additional pollution to zero by 2050. Toward the upcoming United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), Japan has also made a concrete suggestion to launch a negotiation process for a new international legally binding instrument. Japan will make further contributions to tackle marine plastic litter across the globe, including through providing assistance to developing countries and establishing an international database.

Decarbonizing maritime transportation and



The Video Message by Prime Minister Kishida can be accessed on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website here: [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/ic/ge/page4\\_005505.html#](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/ic/ge/page4_005505.html#)

port operations will support achieving the Paris Agreement goals, and Japan endorses the joint declaration suggested by France, in this regard.

As a maritime nation, Japan is determined to spare no effort with all of you to protect our beautiful ocean.



During the annual Hina Matsuri (Doll Festival) at Kasuisai Temple in Fukuroi City, Shizuoka Prefecture, approximately 1,200 dolls are displayed on 32 tiers in the Zuiryukaku reception hall  
Photo: Courtesy of Kasuisai



# Dolls, Puppets and Model Figures of Japan

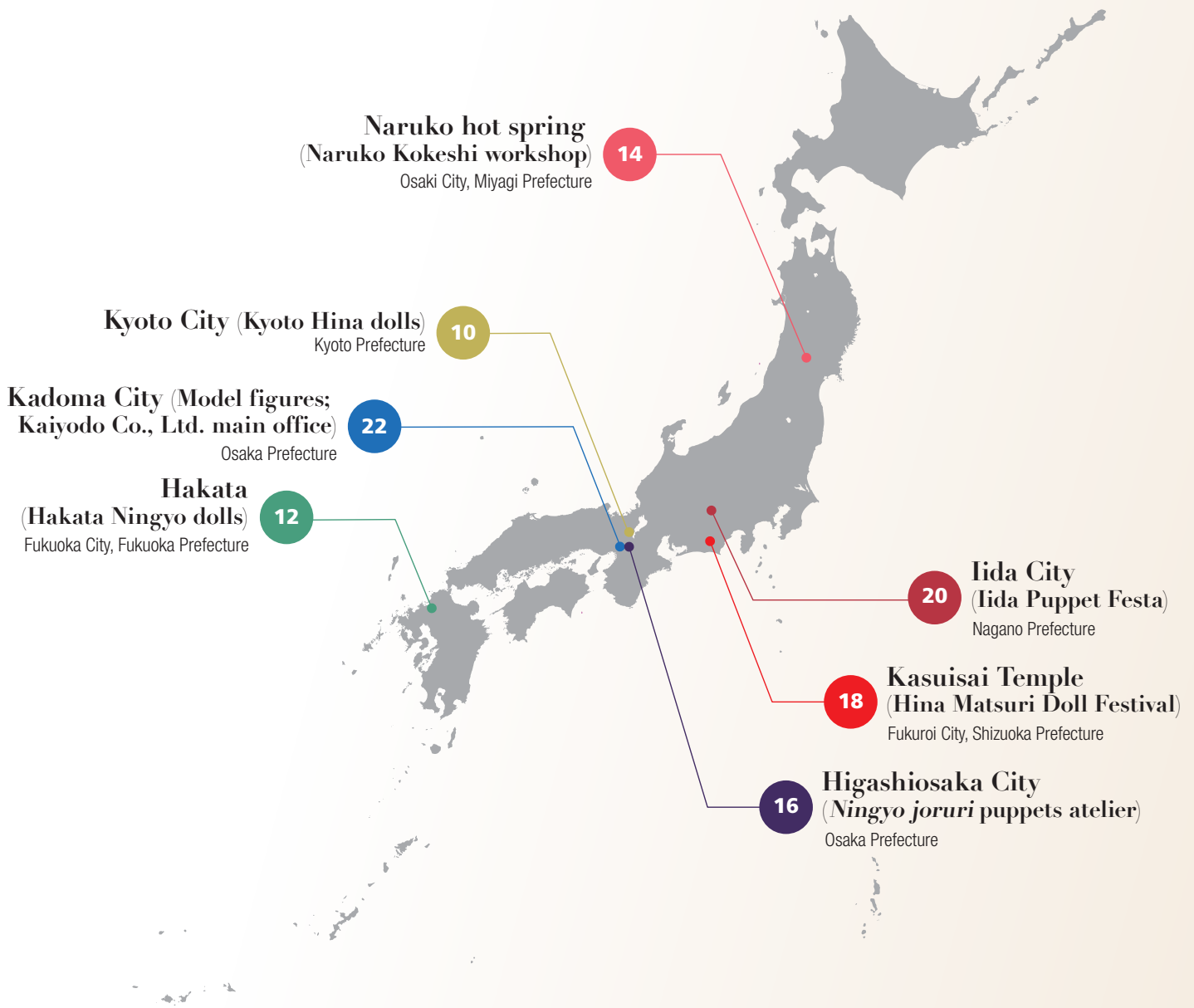


Kokeshi dolls, a traditional wood craft of the Tohoku region of northeast Japan  
Photo: Courtesy of SenTIA



Model figures from the Japanese animals series created by Kaiyodo  
© KAIYODO

**J**apanese people have cherished *ningyo* (dolls) since ancient times and continue to do so for reasons ceremonial, recreational and artistic. We introduce some of the best known traditional and modern types of *ningyo*, from the Hina *Ningyo* after which the age-old Doll Festival is named to *ningyo joruri* puppets and the “model figures” of today loved by young and old alike.





# The History and Culture of Japanese Dolls



Hayashi Naoteru, director of the Japan Doll Culture Research Laboratory, holding a Daruma doll  
Photo : Courtesy of Hayashi Naoteru

JAPANESE people have lived alongside a variety of *ningyo* (dolls) since ancient times. We spoke to Hayashi Naoteru, director of the Japan Doll Culture Research Laboratory, about the history and features of Japanese dolls.

## Tell us about how Japanese dolls began.

One of the origins of Japanese dolls was the *hitogata*, a human-shaped doll made from materials such as wood and paper. To protect oneself from misfortunes, including illness and disaster, there was a custom in Japan of driving away evil spirits by attaching misfortune to a *hitogata* and then burning it or sending it into a river or the ocean. *Hitogata* made of wooden board have been unearthed from seventh-century archeological sites, and it is thought that the custom had begun by at least this period.

Separate from this, dolls have been used as toys in Japan since more than 1,000 years ago. In *The Tale of Genji*, a long novel with aristocratic society as its setting written by

Murasaki Shikibu in the early eleventh century, there is a scene where a girl enjoys playing with a doll that is referred to as *hiina asobi*, or playing with *hiina*. In *hiina asobi*, a child would use small furniture and doll's houses and play with the dolls in a variety of roles, in the same way that children play with dolls today. Unfortunately, there aren't any dolls remaining that were used in the *hiina asobi* from this period, but considering the high level of craftsmanship of the time, we can assume that highly sophisticated dolls were made as toys for the aristocracy.

**Nowadays, we celebrate the Hina Matsuri (Doll Festival) on March 3 each year by displaying Hina Ningyo (Hina dolls). How did this festival come to be?**

Since ancient times in Japan, there has been a rite to drive away evil spirits using *hitogata* on a day known as *Joshi* held at the beginning of March. It is thought that this custom merged with *hiina asobi* as time went on, and became the Hina Matsuri where people display Hina Ningyo and pray for the health and growth of young girls. The first such festival recorded in written accounts is a Hina Matsuri that was celebrated within the Imperial court at the end of the sixteenth century. After that, the festival spread to samurai families, and by the first half of the seventeenth century, ordinary people were also celebrating the festival. The Hina Ningyo used in the Hina Matsuri were originally a pair of male and female dolls in simple clothing, but they



Examples of *kokin-bina* made during the nineteenth century. Left: *mebina* (female hina doll) (66.5 cm tall), right: *obina* (male hina doll) (57.5 cm tall)  
Photo : Courtesy of Hayashi Naoteru

Isho Ningyo (Costume doll) of a kabuki actor made in the eighteenth century (16.2 cm tall)  
Photo : Courtesy of Hayashi Naoteru



traditional performing arts or the everyday lives of ordinary people. During the Edo period, popular *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints were created with similar themes, and you could say that Isho Ningyo are three-dimensional versions of *ukiyo-e*. Ichimatsu Ningyo were a type of Isho Ningyo that can be traced back to Sanogawa Ichimatsu, an eighteenth-century kabuki actor known for his handsome appearance. Similar to today's model figures of "idols" (celebrities), dolls were created that resembled the actor and they became quite popular among fans. Later, these Ichimatsu Ningyo developed as toys that could be dressed up, embraced and loved. Nowadays, Ichimatsu Ningyo mainly refers to dolls of young girls wearing kimono with bobbed hair, and which are made to be displayed.

During the Edo period, simple dolls came to be created all over Japan. Tsuchi Ningyo (Clay dolls) are one such type of doll. One type of Tsuchi Ningyo is the Fushimi Ningyo, said to be the first Tsuchi Ningyo and still made today in the traditional way in Fushimi, Kyoto. These dolls were made from clay found near Fushimi Inari Taisha (see *Highlighting Japan*, October 2020), a shrine which has attracted the deep faith of people wishing for a bountiful harvest, and also spread across Japan as souvenirs from Kyoto. Tsuchi Ningyo modeled after these Fushimi Ningyo then came to be made all over Japan. Hina Ningyo, Gogatsu Ningyo, kabuki actor dolls and more were made as inexpensive

evolved into splendid dolls dressed in clothing of court nobles, growing in size and number. While these changes were occurring, dolls known as *Kokin-bina* were made in Edo (today's Tokyo) at the end of the eighteenth century, and these dolls reflected ordinary people's image of court nobles of the time. With splendid clothing and beautiful faces, these dolls were quite popular.

During the same period, meanwhile, on May 5, a day known as Tango, samurai families held a grand celebration to pray for the health and growth of young boys, which included decorating the house with helmets and flags. Ordinary people followed suit and the rite spread to become a custom of praying for the growth of young boys and decorating houses with Gogatsu Ningyo (May dolls) that represented famous heroes of history and legend. Behind the establishment of this custom of displaying Gogatsu Ningyo is the fact that during the Edo period, for about 260 years from the start of the seventeenth century, there were no major wars and there was emotional and economic room for people to enjoy cultural events.

### Can you tell us what other kinds of dolls were created during the Edo period?

For example, there are Isho Ningyo (Costume dolls). These dolls have cloth or paper clothing over bodies made of wood or straw. They were made with a variety of themes, such as scenes from noh, kabuki and other Japanese



A modern, ordinary Ichimatsu Ningyo with a kimono and bobbed hair  
Photo: yellow\_rail/PIXTA





Fushimi Ningyo of a kabuki actor made in the nineteenth century (23.8 cm tall)  
Photo : Courtesy of Hayashi Naoteru

Tsuchi Ningyo and loved by the people.

Paper Daruma dolls, which mimic the seated meditation pose of Buddhist monk Bodhidharma (known in Japan as Daruma), also began to be created in the eighteenth century in Edo as good luck charms for the prosperity of one's descendants or to ward off misfortune, and they eventually spread across Japan. Fuji City in Shizuoka Prefecture where I live is one area of production for these dolls. Fuji City hosts the Bishamonten Daruma Market, one of the three largest Daruma markets in Japan alongside the Takasaki Daruma Market in Takasaki City, Gunma Prefecture, and the Jindaiji Temple Daruma Market in Chofu City, Tokyo. In recent years, Daruma dolls have become a popular souvenir from Japan for foreign visitors along with *maneki-neko* (beckoning cat) dolls, which are said to invite good luck.

**Various dolls have been made in Japan since ancient times. Can you tell us about the appeal of these dolls?**

It is no exaggeration to say that the Hina and Gogatsu Ningyo dolls in particular represent the best of traditional arts and crafts. They were created with materials and techniques from a variety of fields, including painting, carving, dyeing, metal working, lacquer art, pottery, and more, and they are full of artistic and craft charm. When the first holders of Important Intangible Cultural Property (Living National Treasures) were recognized in 1955 by the government, Hirata Goyo (1903-1981), a doll craftsman, was chosen as one of them. This shows how dolls are recognized as having extremely high value as works of art and as crafts in Japan.

In many countries, the word “doll” refers to toy dolls. But in Japan, in addition to toys, ningyo have also come



*Maneki-neko* (center) and Daruma dolls for sale at the Bishamonten Daruma Market in Fuji City, Shizuoka Prefecture  
Photo : Courtesy of Hayashi Naoteru

to exist as works of art, crafts, and as objects full of wishes such as with the hitogata and Hina Ningyo. There is still today a strong idea in Japan that anything made into the shape of living creatures should not be mistreated. When someone is no longer able to hold on to a doll that they have cherished, they do not throw them away as garbage. Instead, they dedicate the dolls to shrines or temples and ask for a *ningyo kuyo*, or a doll funeral service, something that has happened since ancient times up to now.

As you can see from these doll funeral services, to Japanese people, dolls are not simple objects. They are special, and treated as if the dolls themselves are alive in people's lives. I think this is an integral point in considering the relationship between Japanese people and dolls. 📖

Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU



Gogatsu Ningyo (May doll) by Hirata Goyo who was recognized as a Living National Treasure (35.5 cm tall)  
Photo : Courtesy of Hayashi Naoteru

Ohashi-Ippou's masterpiece, the *Suzakuoji daigokuden sokutai bina* (Different type from that exhibited at the Kyoto State Guest House)



# KYOTO HINA DOLLS

Inspired by ancient imperial ceremonies and events, Kyoto Hina Ningyo (Hina dolls) are elegant and refined.

YANAGISAWA MIHO and SAWAJI OSAMU

MARCH 3 is Hina Matsuri (Doll Festival) day in Japan. In families with daughters, Hina Ningyo are displayed to express a wish for their healthy growth. This custom spread in the Edo period (early seventeenth to middle of the nineteenth century). Dolls started to be put on display in the houses of court nobles and samurai, later becoming popular among ordinary people too (see page 7).

When the Hina Matsuri first began to spread among nobles and samurai, only the male and female hina dolls in the

likeness of the Emperor and Empress were used. However, as the dolls' popularity grew, more dolls were added to represent the ladies serving at court and the court musicians playing *gagaku* (Japanese traditional court music), causing the stand for the dolls and other decorations to expand to three, five, and finally seven tiers.

In the Edo period, most Hina Ningyo were made in Kyoto, the center of court culture since the Heian period (late eighth to late twelfth century). Hina Ningyo called *Kyo-bina*, rooted in court culture, are still produced in various Kyoto workshops. Among them, the Ohashi-Ippou workshop makes Hina Ningyo based on *yusokukojitsu* costume traditions and conventions that have been passed down in the court since the Heian period. These dolls are highly admired for their elegance, refinement, and how they perfectly reproduce the world of the ancient imperial court.

Hina Ningyo are completely made by hand, and craftsmen specialize in parts such as head, hair, limbs, and costumes. There are actually about 3,000 steps to completion. Following in the footsteps of his father, Ohashi Yoshio is a second-generation *ningyo-shi* (doll artisan) whose role it is to combine heads, limbs, and other parts made by craftsmen to complete the dolls. Ningyo-shi are also responsible for tasks such as making the torso, designing the kimono, and dressing the dolls.

Ohashi says, "The elegance of the dolls depends greatly on the details, such as the position of the head, the posture, hand positions, and such. For the kimono of dolls we use the same silk fabric as used for real kimono."

An example of these kimono worn by Hina Ningyo



Second- and third-generation Ohashi-Ippou craftsmen Ohashi Yoshio (left) and Ohashi Yoshiyuki (right)

All photos: Courtesy of Ohashi-Ippou





*Tairei-bina*, which are Hina Ningyo representing His Majesty the Emperor and Her Majesty the Empress at the Ceremonies of the Accession to the Throne of His Majesty. The male hina doll (right) wears the *korozen no goho*, while the female hina doll wears a so-called *junihitoe*.



The female hina doll's *junihitoe* color combinations are based on the traditional seasonal combinations known as *kasane no irome*

according to *yusokukojitsu* is the *korozen no goho* for the male hina doll. This is a *sokutai*<sup>i</sup> that may be worn only by the Emperor. It has a yellowish-brown color symbolic of the sun's light called *korozen*, and includes patterns of paulownia, bamboo, the phoenix, and so forth. Ohashi reproduced the kimono to the greatest extent possible. His Majesty the Emperor wore the *korozen no goho* at the Ceremonies of the Accession to the Throne of His Majesty the Emperor on October 22, 2019.<sup>ii</sup>

An example of a kimono for the female hina doll is the so-called *junihitoe*,<sup>iii</sup> which is the highest level of formal attire for women at the court. The *junihitoe* is a kimono that layers garments with various colors, adopting combinations selected

from more than 100 types of seasonal color combinations, known traditionally as *kasane no irome*.<sup>iv</sup> In the spring when the Hina Matsuri is held, for example, the color combination is based on crimson to give a gorgeous feel.

Ohashi has made many Hina Ningyo, but one of his most important works is the *Suzakuoji daigokuden sokutai bina* series. *Suzakuoji* was Kyoto's main street in the Heian period, measuring some 84 meters wide and about four kilometers long from north to south. At its northernmost end lay the *Daigokuden* in the Imperial Palace where national ceremonies and events were held. Ohashi's workshop is located near the place where the *Daigokuden* used to be. This series, whose name reflects the pride Ohashi takes in Kyoto's history and traditions, is a work that crystallizes craftsmanship built on *yusokukojitsu* knowledge accumulated over many years. One example is displayed at the Kyoto State Guest House, adding color to banquets and other entertainments for state guests.

Ohashi says, "Traditions that have been passed down in the imperial court for more than 1,000 years are used in our doll making, and we are studying hard every day to pass them on to the future."

Ohashi's son as the third generation is also engaged in making dolls in their workshop. Through Hina Ningyo, Kyoto traditions are passed on to the next generation. ▮

i The *sokutai* is one of the highest levels of formal attire for men at the court.

ii See *Highlighting Japan* February 2020: [https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202002/202002\\_09\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202002/202002_09_en.html)

iii Officially, this formal kimono consists of *itsutsuginu*, *karaginu*, and *mo*. The prefix "on-" is only used when the dress is for the Empress, making it *on-itsutsuginu*, *on-karaginu*, and *on-mo*.

iv See *Highlighting Japan* October 2020: [https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202010/202010\\_06\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202010/202010_06_en.html)

# Hakata Ningyo

## Expressing Human Emotions

**Hakata Ningyo (Hakata Dolls) are unglazed porcelain figurines<sup>1</sup> produced in Hakata, Fukuoka Prefecture. The figurines, which have noh and kabuki actors, beautiful women, and children as their traditional subject matter, are distinguished by their “personality” and rich, delicate coloring.**

### SUGIYAMA MAMORU

**H**AKATA Ningyo are traditional dolls produced in the Hakata area of Fukuoka City in the northern part of the island of Kyushu in southwestern Japan. The figurines are made of a fine-textured clay that is pressed into a hollow mold then dried and fired at a low temperature without a glaze. The dolls are covered with a white pigment undercoat and then painted entirely by hand. There are various theories as to the origin of these figurines, but it is said that a roof tile craftsman began firing dolls about 400 years ago.

The figurine of Ito Mancio presented to Pope Benedict XVI in 2011



Hakata Ningyo maker Nakamura Shinkyō

Later, from about 200 years ago, the current Hakata Ningyo techniques were established. Plaster molds are reproduced from the original clay molds. Then unglazed porcelain figurines of the same shape as the originals are made using these molds. Many Hakata Ningyo were created during the period of high economic growth in Japan in the 1960s featuring women performing classical Japanese dance, noh and kabuki actors, and other actors from traditional performing arts. These figurines came to be known for well representing the beauty of Japan, giving birth to a Japanese saying, “as beautiful as Hakata Ningyo.”

Nakamura Shinkyō is the third-generation craftsman at Nakamura Ningyo, which has been producing Hakata Ningyo for around 100 years. Shinkyō

says, “Hakata Ningyo were already recognized around the world for their value at the turn of the twentieth century. The excellent creative techniques used to make the Hakata Ningyo displayed at the 1900 Exposition Universelle de Paris were highly praised, and this led to requests for various statues from all across Europe. It seems that there was a particularly large number of requests for statues of saints for churches.”

If you visit churches around Europe today, you can still see Hakata Ningyo statues of Joseph and Moses made by Shinkyō’s father and grandfather.

The prosperous city of Hakata flourished as an international trading port that had been open to East Asia since ancient times. Shinkyō says that the nature of the city enabled Hakata Ningyo craftsmen to





A Hakata Ningyo depicting the folklore hero Momotaro made by Nakamura Shinkyō

develop their skills by incorporating new and diverse techniques and methods, and that they could create anything requested. “At Nakamura Ningyo, there are no rules at all that must be followed, not even for methods, techniques or subjects.”

The Hakata Ningyo that Shinkyō works on are unconstrained and varied, depicting not just traditional subject matter but everything from gorillas in a zoo to large heart-shaped mailboxes. In 2011, Shinkyō presented a figurine to Pope Benedict XVI depicting Ito Mancio, one of the Tensho envoys<sup>i</sup>, the first Japanese people to have an audience with the Pope in Rome in the late sixteenth century. Among Shinkyō’s works, the figurines of robots that appear in the popular Japanese anime and social phenomenon from the 1990s *Neon Genesis Evangelion* have attracted particular attention recently. These figurines were made on request in 2021 to coincide with the theatrical release of the newest movie in the *Evangelion* franchise.

“I value a realism in Hakata Ningyo that expresses ordinary reality, and it was quite difficult to figure out how to express realism in robots, which are originally based in fantasy,” says Shinkyō.

He adds that regardless of the motif, he creates figurines by incorporating a “prayer” to express the reality of the times and life in a way that is meaningful to people. He says that for this reason, he doesn’t want Hakata Ningyo to be called “dolls” in English but rather by the Japanese term, “ningyo.” (“Ningyo” means “human” (*nin*) “shape” (*gyo*).)

Hakata Ningyo are not created merely as traditional ornaments, but rather to express the personality of beautiful women and children from different periods of time. It can be said that the figurines do not simply display exterior form, but are works of art that attempt to express everyday human realism and the full range of internal emotions. They possess a reality that speaks to the viewer. <sup>ii</sup>



“Matsu no Kotobuki,” a Hakata Ningyo made by Nakamura Shinkyō depicting a performance of a Japanese traditional dance to a song of that name



Figurines based on the robots that appear in the popular Japanese anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

i Porcelain fired without applying a glaze to the clay

ii A mission of four young men dispatched with the goal of having an audience with the Pope in Rome in the 16th to 17th centuries. They departed in 1582 and returned to Japan in 1590.



# The Kokeshi Dolls of Tohoku

**Kokeshi are traditional wooden dolls from the Tohoku region of northeast Japan which typically feature a spherical head atop a cylindrical body with patterns painted on the body and expressions on the face. The dolls remain popular today as simple folk crafts. The artisans who create these dolls are working to pass on traditional techniques to the next generation while also enthusiastically working to create new and original kokeshi.**

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## SASAKI TAKASHI

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**S**INCE long ago, the mountain areas of the Tohoku region have been dotted with villages of woodturners who work wood with a lathe<sup>i</sup> to create bowls, trays and more. The first kokeshi are said to have been toys made by these woodturners between jobs. The dolls, which combine a spherical head with a cylindrical body, have different characteristics based on where they were made, and each doll has a slightly different shape and expression. There are eleven traditional types of kokeshi still being made in the six prefectures of the Tohoku region, and among them, five types<sup>ii</sup> from Miyagi and Yamagata Prefectures are designated as traditional crafts by the national government.

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<sup>i</sup> A spinning machine used in woodcrafts and ceramics

<sup>ii</sup> Togatta type, Yajiro type, Sakunami type, Hijiori type, and Naruko type



For 200 years and more, kokeshi have been made as souvenirs mainly for visitors to hot spring areas, and that tradition continues today.


Okazaki Yasuo is an artisan who established the Kokeshi no Okajin workshop in the Naruko hot spring area and works as the executive director of the Miyagi Traditional Kokeshi Dolls Association. “In the past, farmers had a custom of visiting therapeutic baths during the off season to heal the fatigue of the year. They bought kokeshi to take home to their children as souvenirs.”

Kokeshi-making flourished through the Meiji period (1868-1912), but declined as Western dolls and plush toys became popular as toys for children. However, since the 1930s, antique lovers have sought out kokeshi as collectable folk crafts. During the postwar period of rapid growth (1960s and 70s), the dolls became popular once again as souvenirs and presents to take home when traveling to the Tohoku region.

There are six steps to creating a traditional kokeshi. For the Naruko Kokeshi made in the hot spring resort of Naruko in Miyagi Prefecture, the source wood is first cut from the tree and dried. Measurements are then taken and a block of wood is cut out. After the head and body have been turned on the lathe, a hole to accommodate the neck is carved into the body. The head is attached to the body using friction while the lathe is being turned. Finally, the face and body are painted and then finished with a coating of wax. The tight fit of the neck in the body is such that the doll squeaks when the head is turned. This process is carried out entirely by a single person, so even among the same types of dolls, each has a unique quality depending on the artisan, and because all the work is done by hand, no two kokeshi are alike.

Okazaki says, “So that kokeshi might bring a sense of calmness to those who see them, the facial expressions are the dolls’ most important features. It’s no exaggeration to say that it is the eyes and eyebrows, which are painted on first, that determine if the doll turns out good or not. But if you paint too carefully and the brush moves too slowly, the ink will smudge. You have to just paint all in one go.”

There are also some new kokeshi trends emerging. Among kokeshi fans this last ten years, there has been a sharp increase in young girls called “Koke-jyo,” and as a result, change has started to come to kokeshi-making. This includes the production of dolls that do not conform to the traditional shapes. Recently, cute kokeshi made for the Hina Matsuri (the annual doll festival for girls; see this issue pp. 7-9) or designed with animal motifs have become popular, as have related products made for everyday use such as kokeshi penholders and even one doll with an LED that automatically illuminates when it falls over in an earthquake.

Okazaki, who turns 68 this year, works not only on traditional kokeshi but on original ones, as well. He says that the methods for creating both traditional and new kokeshi are fundamentally the same. Kokeshi artisans are working to create something new with techniques that have been passed down, further spread the allure of kokeshi, and connect with the next generation. 



Making the body of a kokeshi doll  
Photo: Courtesy of Okazaki Yasuo



Decorating a kokeshi  
Photo: Courtesy of Okazaki Yasuo



Traditional kokeshi  
Photo: Courtesy of SenTIA

Female puppet, Tamategozen



Female puppet, Osono



Male puppet, Sanbaso

All photos: Courtesy of Hishida Masayuki

# NINGYO JORURI PUPPETS

*Ningyo joruri* is a notable traditional Japanese performing art that involves the skillful manipulation of puppets to perform stories. The puppets are crafted with passion by puppet craftsmen.

FUJITA MAO

**W**ITH a history of about 400 years, ningyo joruri is one of Japan's leading traditional performing arts. It is musical drama where puppets are skillfully manipulated to express the human emotions alongside *yoruri*<sup>1</sup>. The themes of the dramas are diverse, covering events or stories related to court nobles or samurai to incidents or stories from the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Ningyo joruri has been passed down through the generations in various regions of Japan. Ningyo joruri bunraku,





or bunraku, was established in Osaka and is a representative example still today. In 2008, Bunraku was registered by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity along with Nogaku and Kabuki.

Bunraku and other ningyo joruri puppets are about 130 to 150 centimeters long and weigh several kilograms, with some weighing more than 10 kilograms. Known as “three-person puppeteering” (*sannin-zukai*), there are usually three puppeteers controlling a single puppet. Each puppeteer has a specific role: the “lead puppeteer” (*omo-zukai*) moves the puppet’s head and right hand, the “left-hand puppeteer” (*hidari-zukai*) moves the left hand, and the “foot puppeteer” (*ashi-zukai*) moves the feet. Following the signals of the lead puppeteer, the three people work as one as they make the puppet move and express various human emotions, such as laughter and tears.

Hishida Masayuki, bunraku puppet craftsman and representative director of the puppet atelier Gasha in Higashiosaka City, Osaka Prefecture, explains, “When ningyo joruri first appeared, it was ‘one-person puppeteering’ (*hitori-zukai*) where one person controls one puppet. However, as the depiction of characters’ movements became more elaborate, improvements were made to how the puppets could move, including eyebrows moving up and down, giving side-long glances, having sleepy eyes, and opening and closing the mouth. It seems that something like the current bunraku ‘three-person puppeteering’ was standard by the end of the eighteenth century at the latest.”

Bunraku and other ningyo joruri puppets are composed of the head part called “*kashira*” and the body part called “*do*.” The puppet heads are hand-carved from Japanese cypress and hollowed out inside to fit all the devices needed to move the eyes, eyebrows, mouth, and so forth. The puppeteer pulls and loosens the threads connected to the head to move the puppet’s eyes, eyebrows, mouth, and head up and down. By changing the angle of the head, the puppeteers can express

various human emotions. These threads are the most important device on the stage. Thick and strong silk threads are used to prevent them from breaking on stage.

The puppet’s body is simply constructed as a wooden oval “shoulder board” (*kataita*) and a bamboo circular “hip ring” (*koshiwa*) joined together with cloth and strings. The puppet’s “hands” and “feet” are connected to the shoulder board with string, but female puppets lack feet, so the puppeteer moves the hem of the kimono to create the illusion of feet.

Hishida comments, “Bunraku and other ningyo joruri puppets today adopt costumes and hairstyles to suit the time period in which the story is set and we faithfully tailor them to depict the life and culture of people of the time.”

Unlike *hina* dolls and other dolls that are put on display to be seen and enjoyed, ningyo joruri puppets come alive only when they are moved, which is why Hishida says that he only makes them after first having a very clear idea of how they will look “when moving.” Hishida explains that he envisions a scene in which each puppet plays their role on the stage as he imbues each puppet he makes with “character.” Hishida is passionate about carving puppets with “character” that accurately express the characteristics of different roles according to the story, in the same way that skilled actors change their performance and figure according to the role.

When the puppeteers skillfully move puppets imbued with this “character,” they convey the human emotions and it becomes ningyo joruri that moves an audience.

Ningyo joruri, which has been moving emotions for hundreds of years, has been passed down to the present day thanks to the skills of puppet craftsmen like Hishida, finally allowing it to be recognized as a traditional performing art on the global stage. <sup>7</sup>

<sup>i</sup> The collective name for *katarimono* (narratives) accompanied by the *shamisen* three-string lute. “Katarimono” traditionally referred to “stories told with a beat rhythm from the shamisen.” Nowadays, it often means *Gidayu-bushi*, a form of joruri.





Approximately 1,200 dolls on 32 tiers decorating the Zuiryukaku reception hall on the grounds of Kasuisai Temple  
Photo: Courtesy of Kasuisai

# The Kasuisai Hina Matsuri Doll Festival

**T**HE Hina Matsuri, held on March 3, is familiar to Japanese people as a traditional event where they pray for the healthy growth and happiness of young girls. As the day of the festival approaches, families with young girls will decorate their homes with festival dolls, typically called Odairi-sama and Ohina-sama (emperor and empress dolls). Other customs include celebrating by offering peach blossoms, sweet white sake and rhombus-shaped rice cakes, and eating special *chirashi-zushi*<sup>1</sup> and *hamaguri* (a type of clam) soup. In the ancient Japanese lunar calendar, the festival was held when peach blossoms were blooming, so the festival is also called the Momo no Sekku (Peach Festival) and it is an event that ushers in the arrival of spring.

There are various theories as to the Hina Matsuri's origins,

<sup>1</sup> *Chirashi-zushi* is sushi rice topped, or "scattered," with seafood and other ingredients.

The annual Hina Matsuri (Doll Festival) is held from January through March at Kasuisai, an ancient temple with about 620 years of history in Fukuroi City, Shizuoka Prefecture. At this time, the temple is decorated with about 1,200 dolls on a doll stand with 32 tiers—the largest such display in Japan. It is said that this stunning scene also embodies a sense of gratitude to the dolls themselves.

KATO KYOKO

but one states that it began from a custom in the Heian period (late eighth to late twelfth century) of creating dolls with paper or plants, sending one's illness or misfortune to the doll by patting one's body with the doll, and sending the doll down the river as a sacrifice. That is why it became taboo to pass a doll on from parent to child or to share a doll among sisters as it would pass on and share misfortune. Once a girl safely came of age, many of the dolls, who's duty had ended, would be taken by the Buddhist temple and commemorated.

Akihasohonden Kasuisai Temple is an ancient Buddhist temple founded in 1401 in Fukuroi City, Shizuoka Prefecture, with many buildings on an approximately 33-hectare compound. This temple receives dolls from all over Japan that have served their purpose.

Oota Syobun of Kasuisai Temple says that "even today, there are about 300 to 400 requests each year to commemorate the





Emperor and Empress dolls Odairi-sama and Ohina-sama  
Photo: TAKE/PIXTA



Dolls decorating a hallway during the Kasuisai Hina Matsuri  
Photo: pespiero/PIXTA



Dolls decorating the stairs to the Zuiryukaku reception hall  
Photo: Courtesy of Kasuisai

dolls that have watched over children for many years and have acted as a substitute for misfortunes. People at the temple offer sutras, give thanks, and burn the dolls that are received. Of these dolls that have been cared for at home, many are still in good condition. So we started holding the annual Kasuisai Hina Matsuri in 2015 to properly display and commemorate the dolls before burning them. I hope this festival conveys a sense of gratitude towards the dolls and a sense of taking good care of things.”

The Kasuisai Hina Matsuri is held from January 1 to March 31 each year. The main attraction is the approximately 1,200 dolls on 32 tiers decorating the large hall on the second floor of Zuiryukaku, a two-story reception hall built from cypress that is also designated by the national government as a Tangible Cultural Property. In addition to the display in the large hall, there are splendid dolls decorating the hallways and

other parts of the building. On some days, the 50 or so stairs outside are also decorated, and the whole temple grounds feel gorgeous. In March, the month of the festival, approximately 20 varieties of peonies in 70 pots bloom in the indoor peony garden on the first floor of Zuiryukaku, decorating the event with flowers.

Oota says, “The dolls in the large hall are placed so that visitors can fully see each of their faces. Many people are moved not just by the number of dolls, but by the beauty of some 1,200 dolls neatly arranged.” In Fukuroi City, the City-wide Hina Matsuri Project is held to coincide with the Kasuisai Hina Matsuri, with dolls decorating stores, offices and facilities, and the whole region becoming a part of the Hina Matsuri.

The dolls displayed at Kasuisai Temple reflect both the beauty of the dolls themselves, and people’s feelings of gratitude towards them. ㊦



# Iida Puppet Festa



Hobos Puppet Theater performs the *Giant Turnip* (2021)



Nanja Monja performs *Bekkanko Oni* (2019)



Puppet Theater Kurikinton performs *Moreley's, Looking for Something* (2019)



Neville Tranter of Stuffed Puppet Theatre performs (2019)

Japan's largest puppetry event, Iida Puppet Festa, features a variety of puppet shows and the participation of many puppet troupes from Japan and abroad. It is held each year in Iida City, Nagano Prefecture, a treasury of traditional performing arts.

## SUGIYAMA MAMORU

THE Iida Puppet Festa, held in early August every year in Iida City, Nagano Prefecture (population of about 98,000, as of January 2022), is Japan's largest puppetry event and also one of the world's best known puppetry events. During the four-day event, about 300 troupes from Japan and abroad gather, holding more than 400 performances at about 140 venues, including neighboring



municipalities. In 2019, before the COVID-19 outbreak, as many as 40,000 people attended the shows.

Iida City, located more or less in the center of Japan, has long flourished as a key point in the cultural corridor connecting east and west, in particular with puppet theater performances a favorite. Among these, *ningyo joruri*, which was introduced about 300 years ago, is a tradition actively continued and practiced by four groups still today.

In Iida, where puppet-related performing arts have thus been transmitted, the City-sponsored “Puppet Carnival Iida” started in 1979, with 60 troupes from all over the country participating, and was held 20 times. Subsequently, it was relaunched in 1999 under the name Iida Puppet Festa, organized by several citizens’ groups.

The Festa is jointly created by the audience, the performers and the organizers. Some 2,000 residents volunteer to help run the event. A Festa where “anyone can participate,” whether amateur or professional, every year sees four to five groups from abroad that volunteer to participate. However, due to the COVID-19 situation, the Festa was canceled in 2020, and held in a smaller format with about 100 performances by troupes from Nagano Prefecture only in 2021.

Harada Masahiro, executive chairman of the Iida Puppet Festa Executive Committee, comments, “At the Festa before COVID-19, we had as many as 300 troupes gathering, with performances ranging from traditional marionettes to avant-garde puppetry and *ningyo joruri* by local high school students, so you could see almost every form of puppetry in the world. Recently, there has been an increase in high-tech puppetry that makes use of computers and video technology.”

The 2019 Festa featured troupes from countries such as South Korea, Greece, Poland and the Netherlands. The Korean troupe Bookteller’s Quilt performed a unique work where the narrator manipulated everyday practical items such as spoons, electric kettles, and brooms as if they were puppets to the accompaniment of musical instruments. The world-famous puppeteer Neville Tranter’s one-man Stuffed Puppet Theatre also performed a work rich in social satire in Japan for the first time.

Harada says, “Puppetry differs between east and west, so it’s very exciting to have participants from countries and regions that you don’t usually have the opportunity to see. Inspired by the Festa, people who are interested in the different cultures of other countries are creating new styles of puppet shows.”

The Iida Puppet Festa is a place where everyone can enjoy puppetry rooted in the history and culture of Japan and various other countries around the world. People who became familiar with puppet theater while growing up are now starting to actively help run the Festa. This worldwide exchange through puppetry is being passed on to the next generation. That’s the kind of drama that is unfolding quietly and steadily here. 🎭



Kanae JHS Puppetry Club performs *Nyan-Nyan school! Athletic meet!* (2021)



Puppet theater Musubiza performs *Great Adventure of Kakureyama* (2019)



Puppet Theater Kyougei performs *Mekke of Todorogahuti* (2019)



Greek troupe Antamapantahou performs the *Strings of Music* (2019)



# The Creation of Fascinating Model Figures

Children are not the only ones to be fascinated by the small plastic dolls known as “model figures.” There are more than a few adults who enjoy placing elaborate model figures of anime characters, animals, Buddhist statues, and more on their desk or shelf. Let’s look at these model figures loved across generations and the company that pioneered the industry.

## SASAKI TAKASHI

**I**N the 1980s, model figures began appearing on the market that were uniquely shaped, realistic, beautiful and full of energy, and they captured the attention of people around the world. The company that created these model figures was Kaiyodo Co., Ltd. in Kadoma City, Osaka. Since then, Kaiyodo has produced elaborate model figures of all kinds of things, from a series of Japanese animals to monsters, dinosaurs, anime and video game characters, and even Buddhist statues. Fans and collectors of these model figures are not just in Japan, but are spread out across the United States, China and beyond. The model figures have received high praise, have been used as production materials for internationally famous dinosaur movies, and Kaiyodo was even asked by the American Museum of Natural History,

the largest natural history museum in the world, to create model figures to be used as exhibit pieces.

Kaiyodo was founded in 1964 when Miyawaki Osamu renovated a small rental library and opened a model shop there. The company began working on original 3D models of monsters and animation characters, called “garage kits,” in 1980.

Managing Director Miyawaki Shuichi (Osamu’s son) loved plastic models and became the head of the store in his second year of junior high school. He became a manager in around 1977 just after turning 20. He stresses that “in order to create truly good and wonderful products, have many customers acquire these products, and find joy in the products, Kaiyodo has stuck to its goal of being a group of molding masters and



Miyawaki Shuichi, managing director of Kaiyodo Co., Ltd.

creators.” Regular customers who were creating elaborate 3D models with surprising skill and expert knowledge sympathized with this attitude and began to be drawn in. Kaiyodo then began its journey as a model figure manufacturer by taking molds of these models and selling them on a large scale.

Director Shuichi values his staff’s creativity by calling those who make model figures “molding masters.” He calls the process of making products “creation” rather than “production,” and these





Model figure of Hokusai's "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" woodblock print



A model figure of a giraffe stag beetle with wings extended



A model figure of a Japanese golden eagle in flight



"Allosaurus vs. Barosaurus," created by request for the American Museum of Natural History




A model figure of a statue of Asura, a National Treasure of Japan

molding masters have worked with pride and dedication to create model figures unlike those of other companies. The molding master's name is always etched into the product he or she created. The model figures are not only exquisite, but they are also a grand testament to the individuality of each model creator. Fans from around the world are fascinated by these model figures that are not simply toys or dolls, but "works of figurative art."

The Japanese animal series which Kaiyodo created in 1999 became a huge hit, with 3-4 cm model figures of bugs, small forest and aquatic animals, and marine creatures sold inside egg-shaped chocolate treats, and in three years, they had sold 150 million. Rather than children, the people who sought these out were adults who were fascinated with model

figures. This series also created a boom in capsule toys, with model figures placed inside clear capsules small enough to rest on the palm.

While there is a sense that model figures are typically Japanese anime characters or animals, lately model figures of Japanese arts and crafts such as Buddhist statues and Hokusai's woodblock prints, Snoopy and his friends from the American *Peanuts* comics, and miniatures of works by Swedish ceramic artist Lisa Larson are also popular, and collectors themselves are also becoming more diverse.

The model figures from this organization of molding masters are filled with a desire to have customers love truly fine model figures in the way people love dolls and to let those feelings grow. 



## Waka Poems of His Majesty the Emperor, Her Majesty the Empress and His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino at the Ceremony of the *Utakai Hajime* in 2022

“Ceremony of the *Utakai Hajime*” (Imperial New Year’s Poetry Reading)\*, an annual court event, was held in Seiden-Matsu-no-Ma (State Room) of the Imperial Palace on January 18, 2022. We introduce *waka* poems of His Majesty the Emperor, Her Majesty the Empress and His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino which were read at the *Utakai Hajime*.

His Majesty the Emperor, holding the Ceremony of the *Utakai Hajime*, decides the theme of poem. The theme of this year’s poem is *mado* (window).



Their Majesties the Emperor (center) and Empress (right of center), His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino (left of center) and other members of the Imperial Family at the Ceremony



Ceremony of the *Utakai Hajime* on January 18, 2022

\* See *Highlighting Japan*, June 2021, vol. 157 ([https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202106/202106\\_09\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202106/202106_09_en.html))



## HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR

*As our contacts with the world  
Remain difficult,  
I earnestly hope for a day  
When the window opens to the world*

(Background of the poem)

His Majesty the Emperor expresses, as he did last year, in the poem his hope that the COVID-19 pandemic will be contained.

Last year, His Majesty composed the poem, praying that the peoples' hopes and efforts to overcome difficulties and challenges would bear fruit and thus the COVID-19 pandemic would come to an end.\*

This year, His Majesty expresses in this poem his earnest hope that a day will come, once the pandemic is under control, when the comings and goings of people between Japan and the rest of the world will be revitalized.

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## HER MAJESTY THE EMPRESS

*Looking through the windows  
Of the Fukiage Palace, our new residence,  
We enjoy the greenery  
Of the great trees around us*

(Background of the poem)

In September of last year, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress and Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko moved from their long time residence the Akasaka Palace to the Fukiage Palace, where Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita used to live for a long time until the year before last. Her Majesty the Empress composed this poem with renewed feelings of appreciation to Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita, as she views the lush green from her new residence.

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## HIS IMPERIAL HIGHNESS CROWN PRINCE AKISHINO

*Through the window  
I see the children  
running about,  
and I sense a calmness  
growing in my heart.*

(Background of the poem)

There was a time when, due to the spread of COVID-19, many schools adopted staggered attendance and remote learning. And there was also a time when the students were unable to freely participate in extra-curricular activities.

At the university where His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino gives lectures every year, he looked out the window and saw, in the courtyards of the adjacent schools, the cheerful and energetic schoolchildren. As he recalled those times the sight of the children gave him, for a moment, a sense of reassurance.

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**Source:** Website of the Imperial Household Agency, "Theme for the New Year's Poetry Reading (2022): MADO (WINDOW)"  
<https://www.kunaicho.go.jp/e-culture/pdf/utakai-r04.pdf>

**Note:** This article has been created with the consent of the Imperial Household Agency and on the basis of materials published by the Agency.

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\* See *Highlighting Japan*, June 2021, vol. 157 ([https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202106/202106\\_09\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202106/202106_09_en.html))

Disaster response training using the real-time tsunami inundation and damage forecasting system at the Kochi Prefectural Office

# Forecasting Tsunami Damage in **Real Time**

To support social resilience against a tsunami disaster, a Japanese venture company has developed the world's first system to quickly and accurately forecast tsunami damage immediately after an earthquake occurs.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

**R**ESPONDING to damage from tsunamis is a pressing matter for many countries and regions that face the sea, including Japan. It is still fresh in the minds of the Japanese people that nearly 20,000 people lost their lives or went missing from a large tsunami after the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred in March 2011.

In April 2018, the world's first system to

forecast tsunami inundation and estimate damage in real time began full operations to support early recovery from tsunami damage. The company that developed the system is RTi-cast, a disaster science venture company that got its start at Tohoku University. The company was founded in March 2018 as an industry-academia collaborative venture together with Kokusai Kogyo Co., Ltd., a leading company in the disaster prevention environment industry, NEC, A2 Corp., and other private companies working on earthquake early warning receivers.

Koshimura Shunichi, CTO (Chief Technical Officer) of RTi-cast, describes conventional tsunami prediction systems as “database models” and the tsunami prediction system developed by RTi-cast as a “real-time forward model.”

“For the conventional database model, the Japan Meteorological Agency finds the scale and location of an earthquake when it occurs, checks this information against a pre-calculated tsunami forecast

database, and looks for the height of the tsunami estimated along the coast. Our real-time forward model, however, is based on information on an earthquake that has just occurred, forecasting the scale of the tsunami, how it is propagating towards the coast, how it will penetrate inland, and the status of damage that occurs following the tsunami inundation, all in real time. Compared to the conventional database model, this model is considerably more accurate because the forecasts are made taking into account the latest topographic and coastal facility information, and the use of supercomputers makes it possible to make a forecast in a short amount of time.”

Specifically, the system first estimates the fault rupture mechanism within 10 minutes of the earthquake, and within the following 10 minutes computes tsunami inundation areas and the maximum inundation depth for every 10 meter area. Combined with buildings, roads, and other spatial information, the system then estimates damage to buildings. It only takes 20 minutes since an earthquake occurred to complete inundation forecast and building damage estimates.

According to Professor Koshimura, there were three technological challenges in developing and implementing the real-time tsunami inundation and damage forecast system.



Professor Koshimura Shunichi, CTO (Chief Technical Officer) of RTi-cast



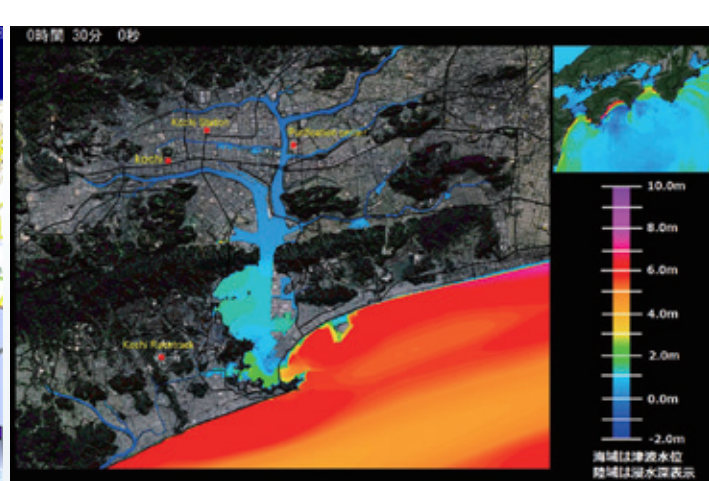


Image of reports estimating tsunami damage of buildings

Image of a tsunami inundation forecast at the test site, Kochi Prefecture

The first challenge was in estimating mechanisms of fault<sup>1</sup> rupture in real time.

“We have to think about sea bottom deformation due to fault ruptures to estimate the initial sea surface displacement. To do so, we acquire crustal movement observation data from the approximately 1,300 observation points around Japan operated by the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (GSI) and earthquake early warning information (earthquake location, depth, and magnitude) from the Japan Meteorological Agency and make an estimate of the fault model from these data.”

The second challenge was in accelerating tsunami simulation to offer tsunami forecasts in real time.

“Use of supercomputers with high performance computing infrastructures is essential in simulating tsunamis in real time. However, supercomputers are in operation in a variety of other research areas, and they cannot always be used. So we developed a novel operation and algorithm that automatically prioritizes the code of tsunami forecasting whenever an earthquake occurs.”

The third challenge was in establishing a quantitative method of building damage estimation.

“We can quantitatively understand the damage by visualizing it on a map, estimating how much damage will occur on buildings and how many people will be affected in certain areas. For example, the empirical relationship between tsunami inundation depth and building damage implies two meters of flow depth would cause severe damage or total destruction. For this, we use damage data from the

Great East Japan Earthquake.”

This system is currently in operation as one of the functions of the Disaster Information System in the Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, which oversees disaster prevention in the government.

“The system currently distributes a forecast report regarding tsunami height along the coast, the inundation zone

possible to immediately understand the areas that would be damaged or the scale of the affected areas of the Great East Japan Earthquake. If we can estimate the damage in a quantitative manner in real time, it can lead to quicker and more effective recovery in the affected areas as we can quickly determine where medical response activities are needed and how

## Three Challenges in Developing a Real-time Tsunami Inundation and Damage Forecast System

### 1. Developing a tsunami forecasting model

- Estimating displacements of the sea bottom
- Utilizing surface displacement information through GPS measurements

### 2. Accelerating forecast (Real time)


- Utilizing supercomputers
- Implementing initiatives that prioritize computing power during disasters

### 3. Quantifying tsunami damage estimations

- Developing a method to estimate building damage by tsunami inundation

and the maximum inundation depth, the number of buildings to be washed away, population information within the inundation zone, and more, within 30 minutes of a large-scale earthquake occurring. This report is intended for use as materials in the first meeting at the Disaster Management Headquarters of Japan immediately following a large-scale earthquake tsunami. Without the damage forecast information, it was not

much other support is needed.”

Regarding the future of this system, Professor Koshimura says, “We are currently operating the system for the Pacific and Japan Sea coasts, from the main islands of Kyushu to Hokkaido, and this will be expanded to all of Japan. In the future, I hope to grow the system into one that is aimed at regular people and can convey tsunami dangers wherever a person is in real time.” 

<sup>1</sup> Gaps of underground bedrock caused by forces applied to it from its surroundings. Earthquakes are formed and ground shaking occurs when there is sudden fault movement as these gaps move.





# An American Leading a *Ningyo Joruri* Puppet Troupe

American Martin Holman is the head of a traditional Japanese puppet troupe which performs *ningyo joruri* with members from many different countries.

SATO KUMIKO

**N**INGYO *joruri* is a type of traditional Japanese puppetry dating from the early seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> One of the most active regions for this style of puppetry is Tokushima Prefecture in the eastern part of the island of Shikoku, where about twenty troupes still perform today. One of these troupes, Tokubeiza Japanese Puppet Theater, is attracting attention as a group made up of members from not only Japan, but also the United States, Mexico, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, Nepal and China. The group is led by American Martin Holman.

Holman, who has loved puppets since he was a child, became aware of *ningyo joruri* for the first time when he was a university student. “I took a class on puppet theater from around the world

as a general education course, and upon seeing *ningyo joruri*, I was surprised to find such an amazing, sophisticated type of puppet theater. The puppets express complex emotions through subtle movements,” says Holman.

In 1978, while still a student, Holman had a chance to visit Japan for a short period, and upon doing so, he decided to pursue what he truly enjoyed for his future. When he returned home, he switched his major from biology to Japanese literature.

Later, Holman had his first hands-on encounter with *ningyo joruri* in 1989 as a professor, working as the head of the Japan Center for Michigan Universities, located in Hikone in Shiga Prefecture just northeast of Kyoto. Holman says, “I had known that the Tonda Traditional Pup-

pet Theater was in the city of Nagahama, just near where I lived, so I went to watch them practice. I brazenly took a chance and told eighth-generation puppeteer Abe Hidehiko, the head of the 200-year-old troupe, that I wanted to train as a puppeteer, to which he unexpectedly responded, ‘You start tomorrow at 7:00 p.m.’” Holman then spent three years training and, in 1994, became the first non-Japanese to perform *ningyo joruri* on stage in Japan. After returning to the United States, he set up annual summer programs for American students from the University of Massachusetts and later the University of Missouri, where he taught Japanese language and culture, to spend 8-10 weeks receiving training in puppetry in Shiga and also in Nagano Prefecture with the 300-year-old Imada Puppet





The Consul General of Japan applauds Holman following a performance at the Japan Festival in Houston, Texas, the United States in 2015



Bunraku Bay Puppet Theater members in Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture, June 2011. The puppeteers performed at kindergartens and helped with clean-up work in the area following the tsunami disaster of March the same year

Theater and Kuroda Puppet Theater in the city of Iida. In 2004, Holman assembled some graduates of the programs to form Bunraku Bay Puppet Theater, which has performed around 200 times over the past eighteen years all over the United States, including the Kennedy Center and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., garnering favorable reviews nationwide. Bunraku Bay’s puppetry was also

featured in a short film, *Kaiju Bunraku*, which was selected and premiered at Sundance Film Festival in 2017.<sup>ii</sup>

After retiring from the university, Holman moved to Tokushima Prefecture in 2019, where he had long wished to live for its beautiful nature and ancient puppet traditions. He now works with the Tokushima Prefectural Awa Jurobe Yashiki Museum and Theater, helping to promote the many puppet troupes in the prefecture, whose histories stretch back well over 200 years, as well as translating museum materials and puppetry scripts from Japanese to English. Holman also established his own troupe, Tokubeiza Japanese Puppet Theater, in October 2019, with members, both Japanese and non-Japanese, who perform ningyo joruri.

Their most popular piece is the Meoto Lion Dance. The festive Lion Dance is performed on New Year’s and other auspicious days. Normally, a dancer is covered with a cloth for the lion body while wearing or holding a carved lion head. In the ningyo joruri version of the Lion Dance, the puppets become the hidden dancer and the puppeteers operate the human-shaped puppet and the lion head. The lion dance puppets are heavier than the average ningyo joruri puppets, but Holman says it is worth the extra effort.

He says, “Human-interest stories<sup>iii</sup> can be very tender in their portrayal of the lives of ordinary townsfolk. And in tra-



Holman’s son-in-law (left) Michael Samuel also performs ningyo joruri

ditional *kyogen*<sup>iv</sup> plays, there is a lot of humor as powerful characters are outwitted by socially weaker beings. Many old folktales, like our new project this year, *Kasa Jizo*, can also be performed by puppets. Anyone can enjoy these stories, from children to seniors, so I want to incorporate this kind of sensibility into our ningyo joruri, as well.”

Tokubeiza’s performances and Holman’s lectures and demonstrations on Japanese puppet theater have been somewhat limited over the past two years due to the COVID-19 situation. However, video streaming<sup>v</sup> has led to a new challenge for Holman: to spread the beauty of ningyo joruri around the world. **7**



Holman gives a lecture about ningyo joruri holding the puppet for the character Ebisu used in performances of *Ebisumai*

i. A *yoruri* play is a musical drama expressing the characters’ personalities and emotions to the accompaniment of *yoruri* (a generic term for storytelling in shamisen music)  
 ii. *Kaiju Bunraku* <https://www.shortoftheweek.com/2018/06/19/kaiju-bunraku/>  
 iii. Works that show the human emotions of parent and child, married couples, and more  
 iv. Comedy plays that humorously portray people from ordinary everyday life and from stories  
 v. Lion Dance Covid Strategy <https://youtu.be/tg0xr-dMbik>



# Sharing the Joy of *Wagashi*

***Wagashi* (Japanese confectionery) chef Shimizu Toshinaka traveled to Spain, France and Germany for a month in the summer of 2019 as a Japan Cultural Envoy, where he led workshops on *wagashi*-making and interacted with the local people.**

YANAGISAWA MIHO

**W**AGASHI chef Shimizu Toshinaka is the Director and Executive Adviser of Ryouguchiya Kasyo, a Japanese confectionery store in Anjo City, Aichi Prefecture with a history of about 300 years. As a Japan Cultural Envoy, from June 15 to July 15, 2019, he organized twelve *wagashi* workshops in five cities (Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, Strasbourg and Frankfurt) in three European countries (Spain, France and Germany). In each workshop, Shimizu taught participants about *wagashi*-making, such as how to cook adzuki beans and make *anko* (sweet adzuki bean paste).

Shimizu says, “In recent years, *wagashi* has become exceptionally popular overseas following the growing awareness towards healthy food consumption in developed countries.”

While Western confectionery uses animal-based ingredients including eggs and butter, *wagashi* is made mainly from plant-based ingredients such as rice and legumes thus is low in calories. From the health-conscious to vegetarians, people around the world are increasingly becoming interested in *wagashi*.

Shimizu wanted people to learn about *wagashi* in a comprehensive way and promoted his workshops under the theme “Joyful Gatherings to Know, See, Touch and Taste Japanese Confectioneries.”

“During my visits to these three European countries that are famous for Western confectionery, I tried to directly display *wagashi*’s delight. I introduced how *wagashi* has a history of more than 1,000 years, how there are over 3,000 kinds of them, and how *wagashi* designs are traditionally intended to evoke the four seasons. I took this opportunity to present on *wagashi*’s unique tradition of tasting and appreciating the visual ‘appearance’ alongside the flavor, and on the *anko* bean paste used in many *wagashi* being made by boiling adzuki or other beans and adding sugar to make them sweet. I also mentioned the various types of sugar used in Japan. Participants were able to look, touch, and eat the traditional *wagashi* I made. In some workshops, participants were able to make *anko*.”

It was hot when I visited Madrid, so I made summer *wagashi* such as *mizuyokan*, *warabimochi*, and *kuzumanju*, which the participants seemed to really enjoy. These three types of *wagashi* share a clear, cool appearance and a smooth jelly-like texture. *Mizuyokan* uses agar made from seaweed, *warabi-*

*mochi* uses powder made from the roots of a wild plant called *warabi* (bracken), and *kuzumanju* kudzu powder is made from the roots of the kudzu plant (arrowroot)—each owning a distinctive transparency and texture.

Shimizu comments, “What people like to eat in the heat is the same all over the world. In Spain, the participants praised the sweets as ‘delicious,’ one reason being for the sweets’ transparent appearance.”

In France, to emphasize *wagashi*’s development alongside that of the tea ceremony, Shimizu served *neri-kiri* *wagashi* (made with sweetened white beans) with matcha green tea. However, as it was extremely hot (40 degrees Celsius) during his visit to Paris, he avoided serving hot matcha and instead prepared cold brew tea. He says the participants admired how the small *wagashi*, only a few centimeters long, had Japanese aesthetics condensed in the form of refined colors and shapes. The combination of thirst-quenching green tea and sweet *neri-kiri* was also popular—Shimizu received similar feedback in Germany.

In Strasbourg, participants included patissiers who have been awarded the M.O.F. title (a national competition for excellent artisans; short for *Meilleur Ouvriers de France*) including the president of a liquor manufacturer and other industry leaders. Together, they discussed the varieties of sugar in Japan. Shimizu comments, “In Europe, almost all sugar is from sugar beets. However, in Japan, there is also sugar harvested from sugarcanes. The flavor and sugar concentration contrast depending on how it is made, so by using different types of sugar such as refined Japanese sugar, brown sugar and light brown sugar, it is possible to produce *wagashi* of different sweetness. It could be said that Japan has the best variety of sugar in the world. I was struck by how the president of the liquor manufacturer said, ‘more research on sugar is in need.’”

According to Shimizu, his visits to Europe reminded him that the diversity of *wagashi* comes not only from the multiple types of sugar but also the rich climate of Japan, which is blessed with ingredients for *wagashi* such as adzuki beans and kudzu. Shimizu’s experience as a Japan Cultural Envoy has allowed him to see *wagashi* uniquely different from Western confectioneries. Shimizu affirms the power of Japanese confectionery and is ready to continue spreading the knowledge of *wagashi* as a part of Japan’s one-of-a-kind food culture. **7**





*Wagashi* made by Shimizu Toshinaka at the (live-streamed) 18th Japan Cultural Envoy Forum, March 10, 2021

Photo: Courtesy of Agency for Cultural Affairs



Shimizu Toshinaka (left) and Mizukami Masashi, then ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Japan to Spain

Photo: Courtesy of Shimizu Toshinaka



Shimizu Toshinaka leads a *wagashi* workshop in Barcelona, Spain

Photo: Courtesy of Shimizu Toshinaka



Shimizu teaches *wagashi* workshop participants in Frankfurt, Germany

Photo: Courtesy of Shimizu Toshinaka



Shimizu with *wagashi* workshop participants in Paris, France

Photo: Courtesy of Shimizu Toshinaka



The Tajima cattle is a strain of the Japanese Black *wagyu* breed

Kobe Beef steak prepared on a *teppanyaki* grill

The bronze statue awarded to restaurants serving authentic (GI Mark) Kobe Beef

All Photos: Courtesy of Kobe Beef Marketing & Distribution Promotion Association



GI JAPAN PRODUCTS

## Kobe Beef

神戸ビーフ

Kobe Beef

**K**obe Beef is the beef produced from Tajima cattle which are raised in Hyogo Prefecture and selected according to strict requirements and standards. Its name comes from Kobe, a cosmopolitan port city in the prefecture. The meat feels soft and pleasant on the tongue, and melts in the mouth with its mellowness and unique flavor. Kobe Beef may be served thinly sliced and simmered with other ingredients in the dish called *sukiyaki*, but to enjoy the natural taste of the meat, Kobe Beef is best eaten as steak.



Text and images courtesy of Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries: <https://gi-act.maff.go.jp/en/register/entry/3.html>

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