

# ***Dolls from Japan***



an exhibition arranged by the  
Society for International Cultural Relations, Tokyo  
and the Australian State Galleries.

## DOLLS FOR THE GIRLS' FESTIVAL

### A. Hina Ningyo (Hina Dolls)

The Hina Ningyo, or "miniature dolls" are dolls displayed at the traditional girls' festival on the third of March.

The dolls are arranged in order on graded shelves. At the centre of the top shelf sit an Emperor and Empress (Dairihina) behind whom are placed small folding screens. On the shelf immediately below are three Court ladies (Kanjo). On the third shelf are a singer and four musicians, holding a flute, a drum, and two tambourines respectively. The fourth shelf has two seated dolls, a military and a civil dignitary, between whom are lacquer boxes containing offerings. On the fifth shelf are three male servants kneeling between miniature cherry and orange trees in bloom. The lowest shelves contain furnishings and other articles in black lacquer decorated with gold, intended for the use of the royal couple. These consist of miniature chests of drawers, a palanquin, a carriage, braziers, swords, mirrors, etc. There are also various offerings, principally of cakes made of cooked rice or beans.

The dolls are dressed in the richly embroidered ancient costumes of the Court. The collections of dolls increase with the addition of some new ones as the number of children in a family grows.

That the origin of this kind of doll is very ancient may be inferred from a passage in the 10th century novel, *The Tale of Genji*, written by a lady writer, Murasaki Shikibu, in which it is mentioned.

These dolls were first made of paper for the purpose of amusement; then they became a token of parental affection for the children, in order to protect the latter from disease. On the other hand the custom also prevailed of making such dolls with the purpose of protecting oneself from unexpected danger and of praying for one's own health and fortune.

This fusion of different causes fostered the development of the Hina Ningyo, which reached its highest development after the Tokugawa family founded the Shogunate in Edo at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Through the succeeding three hundred years of peace the art of doll-making progressed in a direction rather different from the original idea. This is more so as the general taste of the period tended toward ceremonious complication. Nowadays pieces of furniture and other accessories have been added to the doll display and Hina Ningyo have become an object of family amusement and of festivity for girls.

#### B. DOLLS FOR THE BOYS' FESTIVAL

In the Japanese family-folkways, there is a long-standing traditional festival for celebrating the future of the male-children. A family with a newly born boy often receives beautifully Kimono-clad male dolls from relatives. This type of doll is shown below.

It is the custom to display these dolls in the home on the fifth of May every year until the boy becomes six years old or so. The most popular among the dolls to be exhibited on the day is an image of a Japanese warrior in the Middle Ages - Samurai. The image of the old days' Samurai is a symbol of the most respected and feared person in the feudalistic society.

1. -2. An image of a warrior mounted on a horse and Samurai Taisho (General in a battle field)

Originally, real armour and helmets were displayed on the May 5 festival (boys'festival), but recently it has become common practice to replace them with models and armoured warrior dolls in order to make them familiar to the boys to whom these toys were presented.

3. Momotaro ("peach-boy")

This doll depicts a young boy, called Momotaro. (Momo-peach, and Taro - the most popular first name of boys.) This doll has its

origin in a legend of the Middle Ages. It says the boy grew to be young samurai (warrior), and conquered an island of ogres. Thus the doll is symbolic of bravery for Japanese boys.

4. Jin-maku (Curtain to be stretched in battle fields to form a camp.)

In olden days, the military headquarters in the field was usually marked with this jinmaku curtain to show the camp site to the warriors of their own side and to encourage their allies to fight well.

5. Tankei

This tool was used for lighting in the Middle Ages, between the 11th and 14th centuries. In those days, this oil-burning device was the only lighting equipment. This type of light was also often used in battle fields.

6. Koi Nobori (Carp pennants)

The pennants are usually flown at the top of a tall pole. The carp is believed to be one of the most energetic fish, even able to climb up falls and rapids. When flying over the roofs of houses, the carp pennants flap in the sky as if swimming in water.

7. Fukinagashi (Streamers)

In the Middle Ages, mainly between the 15th and 16th centuries warriors in battle fields carried colourful streamers on their backs. These streamers usually bear the design of their family crests.

8. Iris wine

The iris is used as an ornament in many ways in the boys' festival, because their leaves are thought to resemble the shape of a sword. It was commonly believed that iris wine was good for health. Iris leaves are soaked in wine (Sake) to give a fresh flavor.

## 9. Kashiwa-mochi (Rice cake wrapped in Oak leaf)

Rice cake, made of rice flour, is wrapped in an oak-leaf that gives a strong fragrance.

## 10. Chimaki

This is a rice-dumpling wrapped in bamboo leaves. Nowadays, it is a sort of cake to be presented to the Hina dolls of the Boys' Festival. It used to be an important ration food for warriors in battle.

## C. DOLLS IN COSTUMES

These dolls symbolize a variety of national folk costumes from each era, from ancient ages to modern times.

## 1. Bride dolls

In Japan, parents spare no expense in having their daughters wear the most beautiful wedding dresses. The formal wedding costume for a bride is a colourful silk Kimono with long sleeves and a big puffed-out bow tied in the back (obi) and covered with a long silk overdress. Some brides wear a white silk head covering called "Tsunokakushi", symbolizing the bride's virtue and her obedience to her bridegroom.

## 2. Daughter beating a shoulder drum

The shoulder drum was introduced to Japan from China between the 6th and 7th centuries. Later it was remodelled in accordance with Japanese preferences. Since then, it has been used as an important percussion instrument in Japanese music, from folk songs to court music.

It was believed that to learn the shoulder drum is an accomplishment for cultured women.

## 3 Ogi Mai

From ancient times, a fan has been an accessory indispensable for formal dress. It is also often used as an accessory in congratulatory dances. These dances make special effort to display the various beauties of the fan in relation to the dancer's postures.

## 4. A girl playing a Koto (Traditional Japanese harp)

The Koto is a traditional string instrument imported to Japan from China in very early times. Later, it was remodelled into the present style, having thirteen strings. In the feudal period, it was used for entertainment only by aristocrats. More recently, it has become popular among young women, wishing to learn a musical instrument to achieve some cultural accomplishment. (Modern style)

## 5. Geisha

Geisha girls are those who wait on and entertain guests at high class parties by singing songs, playing Japanese musical instruments, and dancing traditional Japanese dances.

## 6. A dancing girl

The doll is that of a young girl who dances at a party or reception to entertain guests. The doll is a lovely representation of a young girl with an elaborate hair style and modern costume. One of the features of the doll is the long obi (sash) tied on the girl's back, with its ends hanging down. (Modern fashion)

## 7. Woman with an umbrella

A housewife of a merchant is the model of this doll. It expresses the beauty of simplicity and purity. The traditional Japanese umbrella is made of bamboo and paper. It is now replaced by a Western style umbrella (In the fashion of the Meiji Era).

## 8. Young Samurai

Samurai usually regarded it a virtue to wear simple and modest costume. However, in the 18th century when an extravagant, decadent culture flourished under the Tokugawa Shogunate, young Samurai sought to show off their colourful, gorgeous costumes. In those days, they carried a set of two beautifully decorated swords at their left sides (The 18th century costume).

## D. CLASSIC DANCING DOLLS

Between the 17th and 19th centuries, when people enjoyed a somewhat luxurious life and a variety of amusements were created for the commoners, many legends were staged as dances and dramas. In the performance of these dances and dramas, some personal belongings which had close relations to the stories, are believed to have often had very important meanings.

## 9. Fuji-musume (A girl of wisteria)

The doll represents a young woman dancer carrying a long branch of wisteria with many purple-coloured blooms. The young woman at a wisteria flower-viewing party dances with joy, carrying a long wisteria vine. Long trains of Kimono clothes and swaying wisteria blossoms suggest harmonious beauty.

## 10. Dojoji

The doll comes from the legend of a young daughter of a well-to-do family, who fell in love with a handsome priest. The young priest fled into the Dojoji temple to escape from her. The daughter, failing to find the priest, danced in distress in the garden of the temple. The time was spring. While dancing, she changes her costume and belongs many times. It is thought that this dance is the most magnificent among the many traditional Japanese dramatic dances.

## 11. Shio-kumi

The doll represents a pretty young girl suffering from the grief of an unrequited love.

In the 13th century, a young aristocrat visited a small seaside village and fell in love with a young girl in the village. However, after staying in the village some time, the noble young man told the girl that he had to return to Kyoto, then, the capital of Japan. The girl was heartbroken and played a folk dance to show her grief.

The two buckets the girl is carrying are used to draw sea water at the shore to make salt.

## 12. Sagi-musume (A daughter who became a white heron)

This doll represents a young lady who became a white heron in distress over her unrequited love. She took the form of a white heron on a snowy winter night after she had been overwhelmed by the grief of her broken heart. She danced slowly, but with occasional vehemence. She is clad in a fancy costume in black and white.

## E. KABUKI DOLLS

Kabuki is a form of Japanese drama, with dance and music, that became popular among townsmen in the 17th century. Costumes of Kabuki actors are designed fashionably to emphasize stage effects. These costumes had important influence upon the contemporary fashions in each period of the Middle Ages.

## 13. O-miwa

The doll represents a young girl called Omiwa, she tied the end of a spool of twine to the sleeve of her sweetheart's kimono, in order not to lose him. She sought her lover following the twine laying on the road, but when she found that the twine had been cut, she danced madly. Her costume shows the simplicity and purity of a country girl in the 18th century.

## 14. Kanjin-cho

The doll is the Musashibo Benkei, a noted priest in the 13th century and a brave warrior of General Yoshitsune. Yoshitsune was assassinated by soldiers on the order of his elder brother Yoritomo,

the founder of the Kamakura Shogunate (government). The doll's costume shows the classic style of a Buddhist priest who had studied the secrets of Buddhism in mountains and wild fields. People called him a mountaineering ascetic. The Kabuki costume was designed to emphasize the wearer's masculine beauty.

#### 15. Yaegaki-hime

The doll is wearing the typical costume of a daughter of an aristocratic family of the 17th century. Princess Yaegaki is grieving over her young husband's death in battle. She is holding her husband's helmet which was brought back to her as a keepsake.

#### 16. Shizuka Gozen

Shizuka Gozen is the wife of General Yoshitsune Minamoto. The doll presents Shizuka Gozen in man's costume. In the 13th century, women dancers wearing men's costumes were rather popular among the masses.

#### 17. Osome

Kabuki dramas include many love romances of common people, Samurai and count nobles. This doll comes from the sad love story of a farmer's lovely daughter named Osome, whose love had come to an unhappy conclusion.

#### 18-19. Kagami-jishi

"Kagami-jishi" is one of the most celebrated and spectacular of the Japanese Kabuki dances. The scene opens with a graceful dance by a young girl in the service of a feudal lord, waving a small lion-like hair piece. As the dance progresses, the "Spirit of the Lion" creeps into the girl, and the dance suddenly becomes highly agitated and violent.

#### F. DOGAN NINGYO

These dolls are made mainly for children. So, their faces are made resembling children's, though the dolls wear costumes of Kabuki dancers and Noh players

#### 20. Takasago

The dolls show an old couple who lived long lives, though they were not very rich. The drama of the old couple is introduced in the Noh play as a very lucky story symbolizing longevity.

#### 21. Renjishi

The dolls represent the lion's dance which is a noted Kabuki dance. The lion's dance was imported to Japan from China in very early times. The two figures are a father with white hair and a son with red hair. Originally the dancers wore lion's costume, but, later they simplified it to enable agile movements. On the other hand, they have further complicated the dance.

#### 22. Futari Sambaso

The dolls represent a dance which is traditional in urban areas as well as in farming villages. People believe this dance will bring good harvest and good fortune. In Kabuki the Sambaso is performed as one of the representative classic numbers. As a means of prayer for a good harvest, Sambaso is still popular today in many places throughout the country. The dance of Sambaso presents a very amusing performance. It shows a synchronized dance by two players, but occasionally the two dance in different forms.

#### G. NOH PLAY DOLLS

The Noh is the traditional, masked drama which was perfected in the 15th and 16th centuries in Japan. The Noh play also formed the basis for many later Japanese theatrical arts. The costumes of the Noh players are gorgeous ones.

## 23. Hagoromo

One day, a beautiful angel flew down to a beach to take a rest. While resting on the sand hill, the angel left her gossamer robe on a branch of a pine tree. A passing fisherman noticed the robe, and took it to his home. Upon returning to the pine tree, the angel was astonished and dismayed to find her robe missing, because she knew she had lost the means to return to her celestial home. But the fisherman gave the robe back to her, and she was able to return to heaven. The doll shows the beautiful celestial maiden.

## 24. Okina

The doll represents an aged man who has been thought by many generations to be a deliverer of peace and happiness to the people. He is respected as a lucky god. The doll shows a simple and bright smile indicating goodness and a peaceful mind. The play of Okina is usually performed early in a Noh performance, as it is regarded as a sacred play.

## 25. Dojoji

The doll shows a beautiful young lady who lost her love to a young priest. She finally disguised herself as the spirit of a serpent, and chased after the man she loved. Although the legend is also introduced as a Kabuki drama, wondrous simplicity and harmonious beauty are shown in the theatrical actions of the players and their costumes in the Noh drama.

## 26. Yuya

The doll represents a young girl who serves her master as a housemaid. She once asked her Samurai master to give her leave to go home to see her ailing mother. At first, the Samurai would not permit her leave, because he liked her so much that he could not live without her. Finally, he allowed her to go back to her home, when he read a poem she had composed while thinking of her mother.

The facial expression of the doll bears the sign of her pain.

## 27. Shojo (orang-outang)

The doll shows a Shojo (orang-outang) which is believed to be an incarnation of Bacchus.

One day he gave a poor young man a sake bottle which, he said, would never become empty, as a sign of his admiration for the young man's kindness to his parents.

## H. MODERN DOLLS

## 28-A. B. Yamato Ningyo

Of the dolls made today, one of the most popular is the Yamato Ningyo. Many girls and boys play with the Yamato Ningyo, which literally means Japanese doll.

## 29-A. B. Osuwari Ningyo (A sitting doll)

Children play with this doll. The doll's neck and limbs are flexible.

## 30-A. B. Haihai Ningyo (A crawling baby doll)

The doll represents the figure of a crawling baby.

## I. KIMEKOMI NINGYO

Among Japanese dolls, there are many which are dressed with pieces of cloth. The word "Kimekomi" means to fit something into a groove. A number of grooves are cut on the wooden body of the doll and pieces of cloth are carefully glued into them.

The doll features simplicity in its design.

31. A girl carrying a plum branch with blossoms which bloom in February and March in Japan.

32. A girl playing a flute.

33. Kabuki dance - Asazuma boat.

34. Fuji-musume (refer to the previous story # 9)

35. Hagoromo (refer to the previous story # 23).

## J. GOSHO NINGYO

Gosho Ningyo represents a baby boy or a boy up to six years of age. The doll usually wears no clothes, except for a piece of cloth called Haragake which covers the front of the body.

The height of this doll is made in proportion of three times as long as its head. Its skin is whitened with a white powder, called Gofun, which represents good health and innocent feelings of a baby.

As a rule, the doll is displayed on a happy occasion. Therefore, the dolls are designed chiefly for expression of happiness.

36. In Japan, a sea bream is believed to be a symbol of happiness. The doll shows a baby catching a sea bream.
37. The doll is a god of wealth, who has in his hand a little hammer made of wood, called Uchideno Kozuchi. It was believed that anybody who swings this hammer could get whatever he wishes to have or to achieve. The dolls represent the gods of wealth, Ebisu and Daikoku, in a baby's form.

## K. HAKATA NINGYO

Hakata Ningyo is a clay doll manufactured in Hakata in northern Kyushu island. Nowadays it is thought that Hakata Ningyo are the best among the many kinds of clay dolls produced in about 50 places throughout the country.

It is said that the Hakata Ningyo have more than 350 years of history. It is believed to have originated at the beginning of the Edo period (around 1615). In the medieval times, the dolls depicted scenes in well-known legends, historical events and warfare.

Some dolls represented figures which were described in known Japanese Ukiyoe, wood block printed genre pictures.

Today Hakata Ningyo are no longer crude products of folk art. Included among their models are actors and dancers, as well as sportsmen.

- 38-39. This doll is the figure of a Geisha dancing with a fan in her hand.
40. A young daughter on an outing is represented by this doll.
41. A figure of a woman carrying a lantern to light her way through the dark, is depicted by this doll.
42. This doll shows a housewife on a street, carrying an umbrella.
43. This doll depicts a present grand champion of sumo wrestling, Taiho, who is posing in salute to his guests. It shows the sumo wrestler wearing a beautiful mawashi, an ornamental loin cloth. Sumo is the national traditional sport.
44. This Hakata doll shows a judoist taking part in a contest.
45. This represents an old fisherman repairing his fishing net whilst sitting on a sunny beach.
46. This doll shows us a farmer in a raincoat made of straw, digging vegetables.
47. The performers of a classic dance, Sambaso, are depicted by these dolls. Sambaso is performed as a prelude to a happy program.
48. A Samurai dancing with a spear and big cup at a congratulatory banquet. This Samurai wears a fashionable costume of the 18th century.
49. A woman of the aristocracy is depicted by this doll. The noble woman wears Kimono which are thought to have been in fashion some 950 years ago.

## L. KYODO NINGYO (folk dolls)

There are tens of thousands of folk dolls made locally in many places throughout the country. Many of them are made of clay, wood or paper as well as other materials.



These dolls are known to have been made during the last few hundred years.

#### 50-53. Clay-dolls

Since about 300 years ago, the Japanese have enjoyed making various types of clay-dolls. At least 500 production centres were located across the nation at one time. Some of them are preserved in many private homes as their properties. These dolls are considered to have many propitious powers.

#### 54-56. Hariko dolls (Papier-mache)

To make this type of dolls Japanese paper pulp is pressed on a model wooden doll, and moulded into a shape. Hariko dolls have been popular among the Japanese for many hundreds of years. Daruma, the most characteristic doll of papier-mache, is made in such a way, that when it is turned over, it always rolls back to an upright position.

Some dolls are made in such a way that the head may wiggle and nod and move freely from side to side. The most representative doll of this type is a tiger figurine, made in western Japan. In the Orient, the tiger is considered to be the King of beasts and is a symbol of strength.

#### 57-59. Anesama Ningyo (Elder sister dolls)

This doll has a head of paper with clothes of Chiyogami, paper printed in fancy colours and designs. It is sold as a plaything for girls.

#### 60-64. Kokeshi dolls

Kokeshi were originally made in mountainous villages in the Tohoku district, the northern part of Honshu island. The simplicity and primitiveness of Kokeshi dolls are derived from crude manufacturing processes using a wood lathe, and partial painting methods. These dolls were originally for girls to play with. It may be interesting to note that the sensitive facial expressions of the Kokeshi dolls are depicted at the makers' own discretion.

#### M. OSHI-E (A pastedrag picture)

Oshie or a raised picture with pasted pieces of cloth is often displayed on Japanese festive occasions. The technique of making Oshie is regarded as akin to the Kimekomi method. Although nobody knows which of the two came first, it is believed that one was the basis for the other.

In accordance with original pictures, sheets of thick paper are cut out, cotton is placed on them. Then, they are wrapped with pieces of clothes, as if to make a pin cushion. These pieces of cushion are combined together to make the shape of an Oshie doll. In olden times, Oshie doll-making was a kind of fancy work for women of high society.

Nowadays, expert doll-makers manufacture Oshie to be used as the decoration of Hagoita or battledores (paddles). The following three Oshie Pictures are based upon popular Kabuki characters.

#### 65. Sukeroku

Sukeroku is one of the most popular Kabuki characters of townsmen. He is originally a servant of a Samurai family. But he chastens many villains of his master's class.

#### 66. Benkei

He is one of the most faithful warriors who served General Yoshitsune Minamoto (1159-89). (Refer to a story of Kanjincho in Kabuki dolls #14).

#### 67. Dojoji

(Refer to the previous story in Classic Dancing Dolls #10).

#### 68. The River Sumida by Hokusai.



