



雛祭り Hina Dolls

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Hina-ningyou are a special class of Japanese dolls. Semi-religious in tradition, yet even in modern times much more than simply display pieces, and never a play item. Originally made of white strips of paper, sometimes a few leaves or twists of straw, they served to protect the owner from harm, absorbing any disease or ill fortune and thus helping to relieve the host of some of the fear that comes from dealing with the unknown forces of nature.

These were kept close to the benefactor, sometimes being worn on the body, sometimes being kept in the family shrine. Often special prayers were written upon them giving them the function of both prescription and medicine.

Periodically, these proxies would be purified by disposing of them through fire or water, sometimes allowing them to drift downstream carrying all accumulated evil with them out to the great expanses of the boundless oceans. Today, this custom is still practiced throughout Japan. With the passage of time, these charms became more familiar, or intimate, taking on human characteristics in their design. Small *amagatsu* and *houko* used to be carried about on the person. People began to dress these figures, each adding special touches to this companion that watched over them. Gradually, these began to grow larger and be increasingly used as display items in addition to their role as protector.

The older styles, many still in use today in their original forms, evolved from their simple origins into figures of elaborately printed papers. These took on a three-dimensional look as the grateful owners sought to embellish them and enhance their powers. Soon the dolls were being dressed to represent the styles of the ruling class, often with beautifully embossed gold sheets as seen in this *tachibina* version.



tachibina

Others retained their simple designs, and were purified in annual community events that later developed into lively festivals. Dolls known as *nagashi-bina* (lit. *set-adrift-dolls*) are gathered onto little straw rafts, or sometimes origami boats, and set afloat to be carried away on cleansing waters, and with them every ill fortune accumulated over the preceding year.

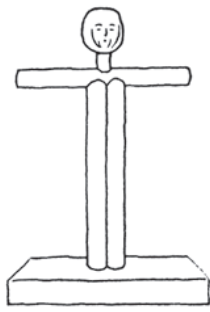


ancient *hitogata*



setting *nagashibina* adrift

As more elaborate modes of construction came to be employed, a greater trend toward realism appeared.



amagatsu - original state and dressed



houko - original version and later more elaborate style



Many of these dolls were carved of wood with a shell mixture, gofun, applied to create a lustrous layer of white or tinted flesh. To this was added delicately blown glass eyes and silk or human hair, accompanied by highly detailed and opulent garments.

The wealthier classes began to spend much of their resources on these effigies. So much so that during the Edo Period a number of sumptuary laws were passed restricting not only the size of the dolls, but also the types of materials that were allowed to be used in their construction. Which class of person was allowed to own what type of dolls was clearly defined by law. The poorest farmer's daughter was allowed to receive only on small clay doll, *tsubibina*, as a gift from her grandparents at birth, and no more.

These are the dolls that later evolved into the more modern day hina.



tsubibina

Although the use of hina dolls has never been restricted to one holiday, in modern times March third has been declared their official day of celebration. Today's dolls represent a somewhat idealized court setting from the classic period. Most often set up in cascading hierarchy upon a set of stairs draped in scarlet yardage.

On the highest step rests a regal pair, a prince and princess in full court attire.

On the next step down we find the three ladies in waiting, wearing scarlet pantaloons, delicately poised with containers of refreshment. They rep-



contemporary hina sets (*hinadan*)

resent purity and beauty.

On the third step we find the protectors of the court: a young warrior in his virile prime; and an older warrior with his years of experience and wisdom. As wisdom combined with youth they make a formidable pair.

On the fourth step we find the lively musicians, three drummers, a flute player, and the singer as indicated in holding a fan. Combined they serve to represent the lighter side of life in all its gaiety.

On the fifth, but not final step, we encounter the three court vassals, each serving the needs of the court, one carrying shoes, one carrying an umbrella, and the other refreshment.

The steps may go on many more levels, decked out with exquisitely executed miniatures in furniture, utensils, and often even an ox cart.

Quite often supplemental treasures are to be found on the various levels represented: Standing lanterns, screens, and even an expertly wrought version of the Imperial Palace may be placed on the same level as the Imperial Pair, with representations of plum and mandarin orange trees, which are traditionally found gracing the palace gates, just below them. A sampling of rice sweets, mochi, is offered in the three shades of spring: pink, white, and green; along with sweet sake and water are also offered in delicate dishes and on graceful stands.



full set with *dairibina* on top level



san'nin kanjo - three ladies in waiting



various pieces of furniture accompanying a contemporary traditional set



udaijin and sadaijin - young and old warriors



goninbayashi - five musicians



three attendants (on maudlin, one contakerous, one merry)

A NOTE ON MATERIALS USED IN CONSTRUCTION: Several materials were mentioned above, but in reality anything may be used to represent a Girls' Day pair. The "male" entity is usually represented by something large, or dark, or hard. The "female" entity is often represented by something small, or pale/bright/light, or soft/gentle (all relative to the

“male”). Therefore a large rock coupled with a small one will qualify as a complete set of Girls’ Day dolls. So would a black brush coupled with a smaller red brush for a calligrapher, or winter tea whisk coupled with a summer summer whisk for a Sadou teacher, or for that matter, even a nut with a bolt would do.

However most modern day dolls are made from carved wood (or molded composition) over which is applied a layer of *gofun*. Gofun is a mixture of powdered seashell and a gelatin. This is what gives the dolls such milky white porcelain-like skin. Pigments may also be added to tint the complexion. The costumes are most often of woven silk, silk with paper, or in most recent times ray-ons and other synthetics. From the point of view of materials used in construction, the best quality dolls are those with glass eyes, silk garments, and gofun-over-wood or composition (many plastic faced dolls are currently on the market in Japan). It is, however, ultimately the beauty and warmth of each doll in the eyes of the collector that makes it a most valuable treasure.

Have fun making your own imaginative set!

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meotoiwa - husband and wife rocks in Ise



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confections