

KOKESHITRENDS

Free Publication 2024

Special Issue 5



FOLK TALES: INTERPRETATIONS IN WOOD

W E L C O M E

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the widespread popularity of modern toys in Japan, traditional *Furusato no omocha* (hometown) toys continue to hold significant importance in the lives of the majority of Japanese children. These hometown toys are deeply rooted in Japanese folklore, local history, customs and legends, making them not just playthings but also cultural treasures.

Japanese toys are more than just objects for entertainment - they are symbols of distinct areas of Japan, each showcasing unique aspects of the country's rich heritage. From *koma* (tops) to *rūretto-koma* (roulette/fortune games), *ningyō* (dolls), and miniature replicas of real-life figures and objects, these toys exemplify the exquisite craftsmanship and artistry of the Japanese toy makers known as *kijishi*, *kijiya* or *rokuro-shi* (wood turner/worker).

The intricate details and stories behind these toys make them not just playthings, but also windows into Japan's vibrant culture and history. So, the next time you see a traditional Japanese toy, remember that it's not just a toy - it's a piece of living history that continues to captivate and inspire generations of children and adults alike.

This is the 3rd installment in the "Toy" series. The 1st was Folk Art: Exploring the Wooden Toys of Japan and the 2nd was Folk Art: "Wooden" You Like to Go for a Ride.

Madelyn Molina
Founding Editor

| | |
|----------|---------------------------------|
| Type | Tōgatta YOB: 1933 - 2020 |
| Maker | 広井道顕 |
| Master | Hiroi Kenjiro (Father) |
| Material | Wood, liquid ink |



About the Kijishi:

Michiaki Hiroi (1935~2019) was a 4th generation craftsman and one of the two Hiroi toy-making brothers. Tragedy took his mother, young brother and many classmates during the war. He chose to honor them by doing something that would have made them happy. He made koma (tops), and in this way he could remember their smiling faces. With his *Kyokugei* tops, he revitalized the art, and made over 3,000 unique types of tops during his lifetime.

shiro



THE OLD MAN WHO MADE THE DEAD TREES BLOSSOM

HIROI MICHIAKI

Hanasaka Jiisan (花咲か爺さん) or *Jiji*, refers to *The Tale of the Old Man Who Made Dead Trees Blossom*. It is a captivating story that follows the journey of a kind elderly couple who cherished their pet dog Shiro.

One fateful day, Shiro led them to a hidden treasure of gold coins. However, their greedy neighbor, consumed by envy, borrowed Shiro in hopes of finding his own fortune. Unfortunately, his greed led to a tragic end for the loyal dog.

As the story unfolds, we witness the consequences of greed and envy. The nice old man, using the wood from a pine tree grown from the dog's burial site, creates a miraculous mortar that produces an abundance of barley grains. In contrast, the greedy old man, driven by jealousy, meets a series of misfortunes that ultimately lead to his demise.

The tale of *Hanasaka Jiji* serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of greed and the rewards of kindness. It is a story that resonates with audiences of all ages, captivating them with its moral lessons and dramatic twists. In the end, it is a story of redemption and justice, where good deeds are rewarded and evil deeds are punished.



THE TALE OF THE BAMBOO CUTTER 竹取物語



PATRICK PATHENAY

| | |
|----------|------------------------------------|
| Type | Sōsaku |
| Maker | Patrick Pathenay (Patrick Kokeshi) |
| Master | Niyama Minoru (Yajirō) |
| Material | Wood, acrylic paint |

About the Kijishi

Patrick Pathenay, the artisan behind Patrick Kokeshi, is a French craftsman who categorizes his work as sōsaku. Despite this, he made the decision to apprentice under the guidance of Yajirō artisan Niyama Minoru in order to gain insight into Kokeshi making techniques and potentially introduce traditional Kokeshi to France. He has already won multiple awards for his works.

The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter (Aketori Monogatari) is a beautiful and enchanting story that has been passed down through generations in Japan. It is a tale of love, magic, and the wonders of nature. The discovery of the tiny princess, *Kaguyahime*, inside a bamboo stalk is a testament to the unexpected and miraculous things that can happen in life. It reminds us to always keep our hearts open to the possibility of magic and wonder, even in the most ordinary of places. The story of the Bamboo Cutter is a reminder that there is beauty and mystery all around us, waiting to be discovered.

THE TALE OF THE BAMBOO CUTTER

Kaguyahime, pop-out top (Ito-hiki Koma) unsigned.



Konno Akihiro (近野明裕)
Tsuchiyu



SUZUKI AKIRA

| | |
|----------|-----------------------------|
| Type | Sakunami YOB: 1960 - |
| Maker | 鈴木明 |
| Master | Suzuki Shoji |
| Material | Wood, liquid ink, beeswax |

About the Kijishi

Suzuki Akira was born in Sendai. He began training in wood carving at a young age, under his father, Suzuki Shoji. He is the third-generation of his family to operate Akiu Crafts Village Ganguan Kokeshi Shop, a store specializing in restoring and creating Enakichi-style Kokeshi.

The store was originally inherited by his grandfather, Suzuki Kiyoshi, and later taken over by his father, Suzuki Shoji. Suzuki Akira has continued the family tradition of restoring and creating Kokeshi, preserving tradition while challenging himself with new things. His son, Suzuki Takashi, now also helps him in this craft. Suzuki-san showcases his craftsmanship at various events. His expertise in Kokeshi making earned him the prestigious Prime Minister's Award in 2015 at the All Japan Kokeshi Competition.

THE TALE OF THE BAMBOO CUTTER

Princess Kaguyahime



The Inch-High Samurai
Issun-bōshi (一寸法師)

HIROI MICHIAKI



Pop-Out Top
Ito-hiki Koma
Unsigned



Once upon a time, a couple wished for a child and were granted a son named Issun-bōshi, who despite his tiny size, grew up to be respected. Equipped with a needle sword and rice bowl boat, he journeyed to the city, becoming a retainer of the lord. The lord's daughter grew fond of him, and they became close.

When ogres blocked their path, Issun-bōshi bravely fought them, gaining a magic hammer from the battle. The princess offered him anything he desired, but he only wished to grow full size. Using the hammer, the princess granted his wish, turning him into a handsome warrior. He married the princess and lived happily ever after.

KINTARO AND THE GIANT CARP

KON AKIRA

| | |
|----------|----------------------------|
| Type | Tsugaru YOB: 1953 - |
| Maker | 今晃 |
| Master | Hasegawa Tatsuo |
| Material | Wood, liquid ink |

About the Kijishi:

Artisan Kon Akira's work is celebrated for its intentional childlike quality, which sets it apart from fellow Tsugaru artisans. His whimsical and playful approach creates a sense of innocence and nostalgia that resonates with a niche group of collectors who appreciate the unique perspective that he brings to each piece.

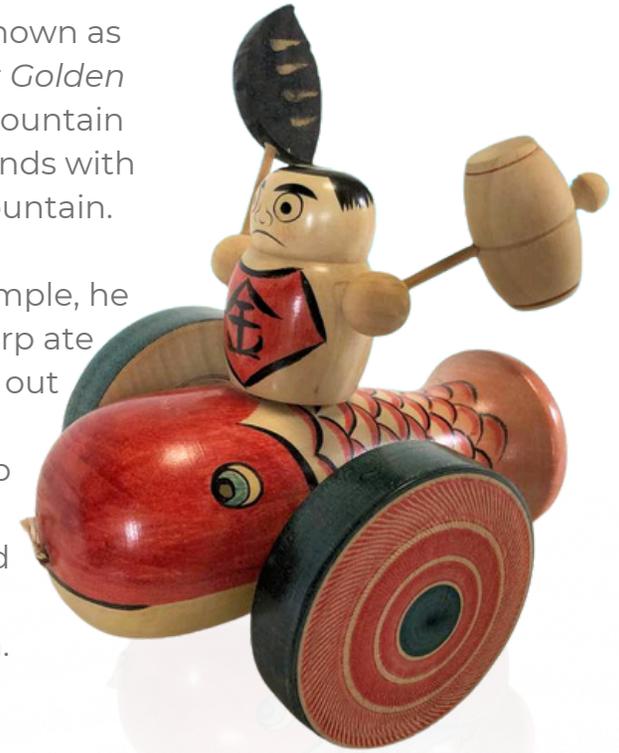


The simplicity of his designs belies the incredible amount of skill and technique that goes into creating them, making each piece not only charming but also highly sought after. Artisan Kon Akira manages to capture the essence of childhood wonder and imagination, making his work truly special and coveted among collectors who value authenticity and creativity.

HIROI MICHIAKI

Kintarō (金太郎), also known as *Sakata Kaido-maru* or *Golden Boy*, was raised by a mountain witch and became friends with the animals on the mountain.

While studying at a temple, he learned that a giant carp ate his mother, and he set out to kill the fish. Kintarō wrestled the giant carp under a waterfall, eventually killing it and finding his mother's remains in its stomach.



PULL TOY



Kintarō wearing only a *haragake* apron with the kanji for "gold" (金). He holds his hatchet and a mallet.

KONNO AKIHIRO

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Type | Tsuchiyu YOB: 1950 - |
| Maker | 近野明裕 |
| Master | Sato Hisaya |
| Material | Wood, liquid ink, beeswax |

About the Kijishi

Akihiro Konno made his debut in 1983 at the Fukushima City Products Exhibition. The next year, he was featured as a craftsman in the *Kokeshi Kawaraban* magazine edited by Oura Yasuhide.

It took 15 years of hard work and dedication before he was finally accepted into the prestigious *Tsuchiyu Kokeshi Craftsmen's Union*. From that moment on, his works were officially considered as traditional Tsuchiyu style. He also makes "New Style" Kokeshi that are a blend of traditional and creative design elements. What an incredible journey it has been for Akihiro Konno!



MOMOTARŌ PEACH BOY

Momotarō (桃太郎), also known as the *Peach Boy*, is a legendary figure from Japanese folklore. In a time filled with magic and hidden treasures, an elderly couple discovered a baby boy inside a giant peach. They named him Momotarō, and he grew into a strong and courageous young man.

Embarking on a perilous journey to Ogre Island, Momotarō was accompanied by a monkey, a pheasant, and a dog. Together, they vanquished the Ogres, seized their treasures, and generously shared the spoils with others. Momotarō's epic adventure demonstrated his bravery and leadership, earning him admiration as a noble and valiant hero among his community.



MOMOTARŌ - PEACH BOY



Tsuta Fumio

Momotarō emerging from a peach. By Hiroshi Kadoma (門馬広志作).



Tsuta Fumio

TSUTA FUMIO

| | |
|----------|------------------------|
| Type | Yajirō YOB: 1944 - |
| Maker | 薦文男 (つたふみお) |
| Master | Tsuta Mamoru |
| Material | Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood) |

The Tsuta family business, Tsutaya Bussan Co. Ltd., was Japan's No. 1 source for spinning tops and toys. The family won various awards for their creations in Kokeshi competitions.

The workshop was the main souvenir manufacturing source of toys for *Onogawa Onsen*. They were also members of the Japan Top Spinning Association. Regrettably, they went out of business on May 11, 2020 as a result of the impact of Covid-19.



MOMOTARŌ

Small Momotarō top is inside the peach shaped container (unsigned).



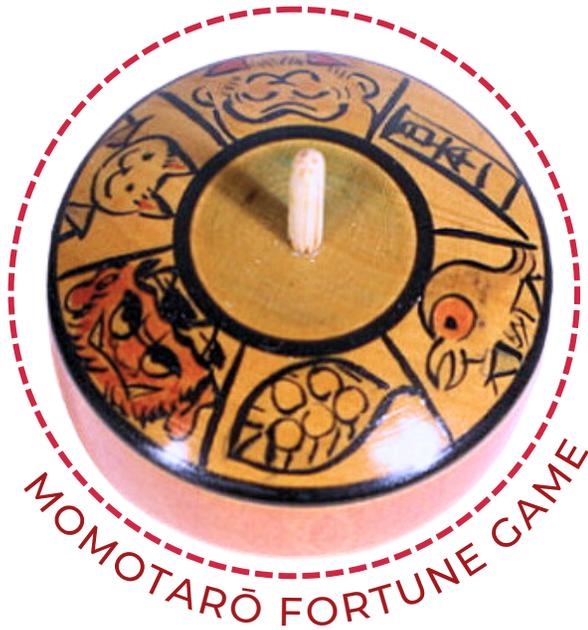
Spin



Hiroi Michiaki



Pulling the string will cause the peach to split open as it spins and reveal a little Momotarō inside!



About the Kijishi:

Yasushi Fukushima (福島保) is an independent artisan. He was born in Tokyo, Japan in August 1947 and started making Edo tops around 1970. He learned the craft from the Hiroi brothers, Michiaki and Masaaki. His wood preference is Mizuki (dogwood).

- Choose an Outcome**
1. Ogre
 2. Monkey
 3. Dog
 4. Pheasant
 5. Leaf
 6. Japan (nihon ichi)



RAT SUMO - NEZUMI NO SUMO

MAEDA RYOJI

| | |
|----------|------------------------|
| Type | Tōgatta YOB: 1981 - |
| Maker | 前田良二 |
| Master | Kanayama Buntaro |
| Material | Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood) |

Nezumi no Sumō (ねずみのすもう or ねずみの相撲, lit. "Rat's/Mouse's Sumo") is a Japanese folktale about an old couple who help mice participate in sumo wrestling. In the story, a slender mouse helps a starving couple after their crops die.

The mouse discovers a sumo club run by a fat mouse who challenges anyone to a fight for a gold coin, but the fighter must give the fat mouse a rice cake.

The couple helps the mouse by making rice cakes from their remaining rice, and eventually one of the mice rewards them with enough gold to live comfortably for the rest of their lives.

Studio Ghibli released a 13-minute short film in 2010 titled *Chūzumō* based on this folk tale. The film shows at the Ghibli Museum in Mitaka.



Unsigned



NISHIYAMA TOSHIHIKO

| | |
|----------|----------------------|
| Type | Tsuchiyu YOB: 1959 - |
| Maker | 西山敏彦 |
| Master | Nishiyama Kenichi |
| Material | Wood, Metal |

The character of Snow White comes from a German fairy tale first written down in the early 19th century and published in 1812 by the Brothers Grimm, who also wrote Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella and Rumpelstiltskin. The original German title was Sneewittchen, which is now spelled Schneewittchen. In 1994, German scholar Echard Sander argued that the Snow White tale is based on a real person, Countess Margarete von Waldeck of Bavaria.

Snow White is featured in the Disney studio's first animated feature-length film, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937). She is a kind and optimistic princess with red lips, black hair, and snow-white skin. Snow White is known for her iconic dress with a blue bodice and puffy red and blue striped sleeves.



SNOW WHITE 白雪姫 SHIRAYUKI HIME

In the story, Snow White's stepmother, the Queen, is jealous of her beauty and orders her murder. When the Magic Mirror proclaims Snow White the fairest one of all, she flees into the forest, where she befriends the seven dwarfs. The Queen tricks Snow White with a poisoned apple, and only the magic of true love's kiss can save her.

These Kokeshi are an interpretation by Niishiyama Kenichi of Snow White, the prince and the poison apple!



URASHIMA TARŌ



Urashima Tarō (浦島太郎) is a traditional Japanese folktale that narrates the story of a fisherman who is granted a reward for saving a sea turtle, which leads him to the Dragon Palace located under the ocean. In this enchanted realm, he is hosted by Princess Otohime. Although he perceives his stay as lasting only a few days, upon his return to his village, he discovers that more than a century has elapsed. When he opens a forbidden jeweled box bestowed upon him by Otohime, he unexpectedly transforms into an elderly man.

PULL TOY



URASHIMA TARŌ



Urashima Tarō holding his fishing rod and the Tamate-bako (Box of the Jewel Hand) gifted to him by Otohime Sama



Assembly tops



Omiyage (souvenir) Kokeshi are typically unsigned. Sometimes an onsen marking can be seen.



THE RED OGRE WHO CRIED NAITA ONI (泣いた赤鬼)

A red ogre wants to be friends with children, but he fails. His good friend, the blue ogre, comes up with a plan. The blue ogre will pretend to terrorize the children. The children will be frightened, and the red ogre can come rescue them. Then, the children will love him and be his friend. To make this plan a success, the blue ogre leaves after he scares the children, so that his red friend can be the hero. The red ogre becomes full of regret, heartbroken at the loss of his true friend, the blue ogre, who made such a big sacrifice for him.



Tanaka Keiji

TANAKA KEIJI

| | |
|----------|---------------------------|
| Type | Zao YOB: 1953 - |
| Maker | 田中恵治 |
| Master | Okazaki Ikuo |
| Material | Wood, liquid ink, beeswax |

Tanaka Keiji is a proficient artisan hailing from Tsunagi, Yonezawa. He is related to Tanaka Atsuo, a notable Kokeshi maker from Zaō. Born in 1953, his journey into the realms of woodturning and Kokeshi craftsmanship commenced in 1972 under the tutelage of local masters.

In approximately 1980, he started producing the body bases for Kokeshi crafted by Okazaki Ikuo. This provided him with the opportunity to perfect his turning techniques. By 1982, he had begun to showcase his creations under the designation "Zaō Takayu".

Tanaka Keiji continues to reside in Tsunagi, and remains active in the production of Kokeshi.



HAYASHI TAKATOSHI

| | |
|----------|---------------------------|
| Type | Ishinomaki YOB: 1975 - |
| Maker | 林貴俊 |
| Master | Various |
| Material | Wood, liquid ink, beeswax |

NAITA ONI (泣いた赤鬼)

Takatoshi Hayashi, owner of *Hayashiya Kimono Store*, started making *Ishinomaki Kokeshi* after the *Great East Japan Earthquake*, to revitalize the area. Hayashi's passion for preserving traditional Japanese crafts led him to seek out skilled craftsmen to help him bring his vision to life.

He opened *Tree Tree Ishinomaki* four years later with guidance from many traditional craftsmen, including *Kusaka Hideyuki (Tōgatta)* and *Niyama Yoshinori (Yajirō)*. Additionally, he drew inspiration from the work of *Shida Kikuhiko*, a *Yamagata* craftsman.



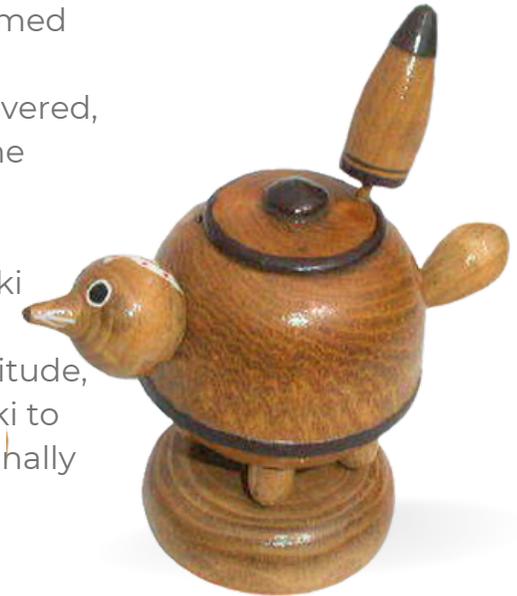
He worked tirelessly to create unique and beautiful Kokeshi that would attract visitors to the area. His dedication paid off, as *Tree Tree Ishinomaki* quickly became a popular destination for both locals and tourists alike.



BUNBUKU CHAGAMA



Bunbuku Chagama (分福茶釜 or 文福茶釜) is a Japanese folktale about a tanuki (raccoon dog) that uses its shapeshifting powers to reward its rescuer for his kindness. The tanuki, who had transformed into a tea kettle, is sold to a traveling peddler. Once discovered, the peddler agrees to treat the tanuki well in exchange for it performing acrobatics at his roadside attraction. The tanuki helps the peddler become wealthy, and as a sign of gratitude, the peddler returns the tanuki to the temple where it was originally found.



Assembly tops
Unsigned



ARTISANS' PAGES

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RESOURCES

[KOKESHIWIKI](#)
[KOKESHIVILLAGE.COM](#)
[PATRICK KOKESHI](#)
[RYOJI MAEDA](#)
[SENDAI KOKESHI](#)



Happy
Holidays

The holiday season brings joy, magic, and traditions from around the world. During this festive time, people come together to celebrate their unique customs and share in the spirit of giving. Whether it's decorating a Christmas tree, lighting a menorah, or preparing a special meal, the holiday season is a time to embrace diversity and unity.

As we gather with loved ones, we are reminded of the importance of cherishing moments of togetherness and spreading kindness to those around us. It is a time of warmth, merriment, and generosity. Family traditions create lasting memories.

Remember to prioritize self-care and appreciate the little joys in life. Carry forward the spirit of joy, kindness, and gratitude throughout the year. Happy Holidays to all!

Kokeshi Trends Team

FOLK ART: EXPLORING THE WOODEN TOYS OF JAPAN



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