

OKINAWA

L I V I N G

Hina Matsuri


AN AGE-OLD TRADITION
PASSED FROM GENERATION
TO GENERATION

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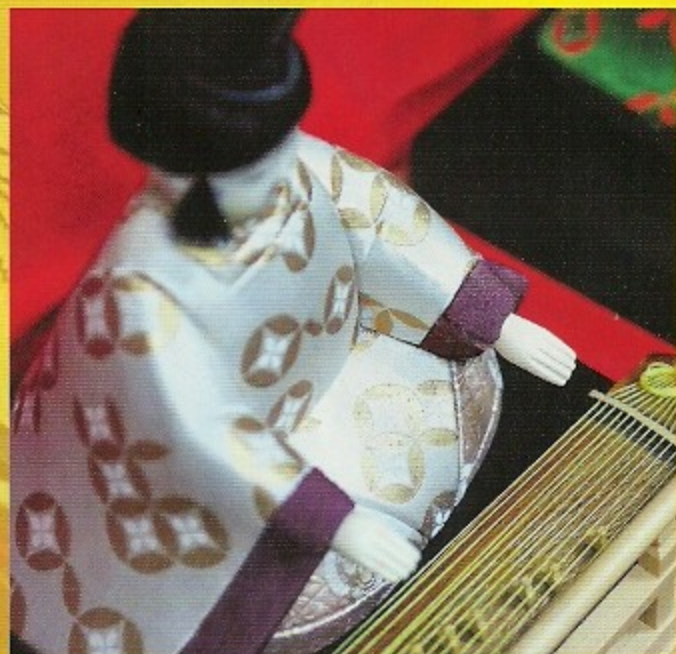
In Japan, dolls are called *ningyo*. The word itself is made with two kanji characters—*nin*, which means “human” and *gyo*, which means “form.” Since ancient times in Japan, dolls and figurines were thought to contain magical properties and more than a few carried substantial religious significance. The earliest known examples of dolls in Japan are figurines made of stone and solid clay from the Jomon period (10,000 BC– 300 AD). During the Kofun period (300– 710 AD), dolls called *hanitwa* (human figures as well as effigies of animals and architectural works made of hollow clay) encircled the final resting places of the ruling classes. Besides serving decorative and spiritual purposes, (such as protecting, comforting, or entertaining the deceased in the afterlife), these figures also served as a sort of retaining wall for the burial mound.

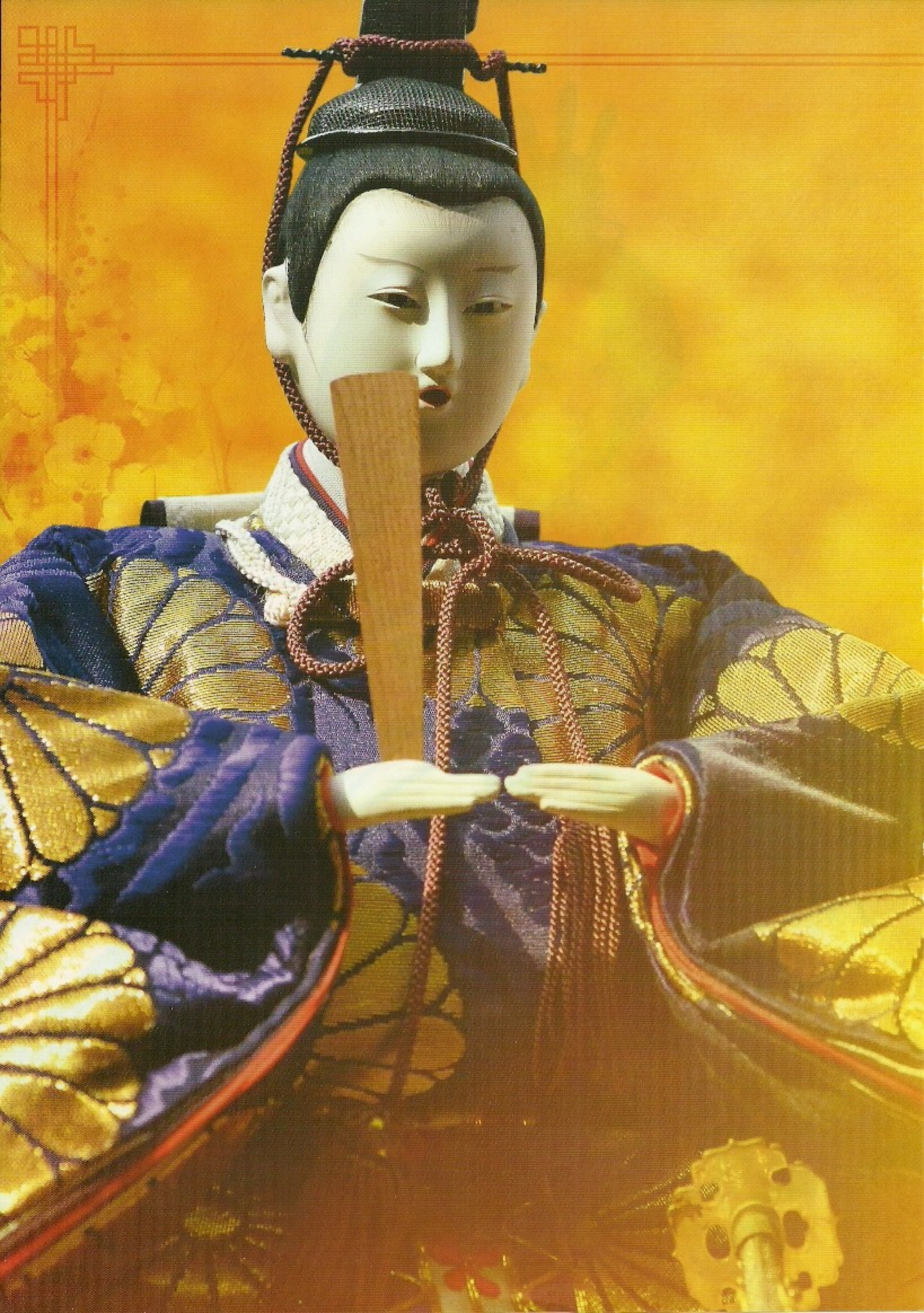
It is commonly believed that dolls served many functions in pre-modern Japan. Effigies called *hitogata* or *katashiro* were used as something similar to scapegoats in ceremonies to remove defilement, divert malevolent energies and prevent injury or disease. Many folk traditions during that period

attributed magical powers to some dolls and many even thought that a few special dolls had souls of their own. Dolls also played specific roles in Shinto-related court ceremonies, and they were also used in moralistic roadside dioramas set up by Buddhist monks.

Of course, not all dolls in ancient Japan played parts in religious ceremony or carried mystical powers. The designs of small wooden dolls excavated at Nara from the ruins of *Heijōkyō* suggested that the dolls were also used as playthings for children. And, many examples of Heian-era literature state that the children of royalty often played with elaborately garbed dolls called *Hina Ningyo*. During the Edo period (1600–1868 A.D.) doll-making flourished in Japan and many different types of dolls—each seemingly more beautiful than the next—were manufactured in droves to entertain royal kids. It was during the Edo Period when formal, often elaborate, displays of dolls began to be used as the focal point of individual household festivities during *Momo no Sekku* (a seasonal festival during the third month of the year).

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Hina Ningyo

Traditionally, a complete set of Hina dolls consists of at least 15 ningyo set upon a tiered structure covered in vermilion cloth called a *hinadan*. Although modern versions include dolls modeled after different cartoon characters

such as Hello Kitty characters, many families prefer actual hina dolls. They are usually dressed in full Heian-era court regalia—usually consisting of intricately brocaded kimono. The uppermost tier is occupied by *O-Dairi-sama* and *O-Hina-sama*—the emperor and

empress which are usually the most elaborately dressed and are often the most expensive. The uppermost tier also holds various exquisitely constructed miniature household articles—the most important of which is *bombori* or paper-covered lamps that light the top level. Two ministers usually occupy the second tier, accompanied by three ladies in waiting (called *kanjo*), caricatures of tea ceremony sets and food offerings including miniature *hishi-mochi*. Five court musicians wielding drums and flutes for the royal couple's pleasure occupy the next level and the lowest level is reserved for three guards bearing weapons to protect the court.

The set of dolls is usually either an heirloom passed down through generations or purchased for daughters

by her parents or grandparents for their first doll festival. These sets can be extremely large (some reach heights of 7–8 feet and include over 20 dolls) and are usually quite expensive (some with price tags of a couple million yen or more). These displays

are usually set out between February 4 (considered the first day of spring) and the middle of the month. They are usually displayed prominently in the largest room in the house until the day after the festival when the set is carefully dismantled, packed in boxes, and returned to

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storage for next year. Procrastination usually wasn't a problem—popular superstition states that leaving the doll set up too long was a good way to accumulate bad luck for the daughter. It was also considered inauspicious to dismantle the display when the weather was bad—although humidity and mold may have had something to do with that superstition.

Hina Matsuri can carry many different meanings to the modern Japanese parent—some observe the festival to encourage filial piety, while others wish to impress upon their daughters the importance of honoring ancient traditions. However, regardless of the many different reasons, almost all parents in Japan who observe the festival of dolls almost unvaryingly associate it with two things: the beautiful ningyo that represent the beauty and majesty of old Japan and the simple pleasure of seeing their child's face light up with wonder and joy. **LOL**



The Five Sekku

Sekku, which actually means “seasonal festival,” is a term that originally applied to food offerings made on certain days regarded as equinoxes. However, over time, the term began to be used to refer to the actual day. During the Edo Period, the Tokugawa Shogunate officially decreed these five days as Sekku: January 7 (*Nanakusa no Sekku*, or “Seven Herb Festival”), March 3 (*Momo no Sekku*, or “Peach Blossom Festival”), May 5 (*Shōbu no Sekku* or “Iris Festival”), July 7 (*Tanabata* or “Star Festival”) and September 9 (*Kiku no*

Sekku, or “Chrysanthemum Festival”). Although traditions have changed, many of these festivals are still celebrated during modern times with different customs and new names.

Originally Momo no Sekku (peach blossoms are in full bloom during the third month of the year in Mainland Japan) celebrated spring

equinox, and festivities included the whole family. Since ancient times during the festival, it was customary for all people—men, women, and children—to create effigies of themselves called *hinagata* out of paper and straw and transfer all of their misfortune, sickness and negativity into these dolls via ceremonies involving rubbing the doll against themselves. These dolls were then gathered up, and the family would make a trip to the nearest river or brook, and cast the dolls into the water. This not only ensured the family’s good fortune and health for the rest of the year, it also gave the family a golden opportunity for picnics and get-togethers with other families. Royalty also followed this custom. However, the dolls that they used were more elaborate and a great deal more expensive than versions used by the local populous—many families used dolls similar in design to the beautiful hina dolls popular from Heian times.

Some believe that wealthy families’ began to compete against each other with doll displays that became more splendid and gaudy each year. Others state that a young female member of the royal family talked her parents into keeping the dolls for her to play with. Regardless of which (or any other for that matter) theory is correct, it became the custom to set up elaborate displays of dolls during this Sekku. The idea of transferring ill luck to the dolls also survived (even though the dolls had become too valuable to throw into water), and over time, it became popular belief that the dolls exclusively protected the daughters of the family. The festival began to be known as “Girl’s Day,” and commonly called *Hina Matsuri*.

Today, Hina Matsuri is celebrated throughout the nation to pray for daughters’ happiness. It is observed with a ritual display of dolls and gatherings of young girls clad in kimono eating and drinking special Hina Matsuri fare, including *chirashi-zushi* (sashimi, seaweed, shredded, scrambled eggs and other delicacies strewn over sushi rice), *ashio-jiru* (a type of clam soup), *hishi-mochi* (diamond shaped rice cakes colored pink, white, and green) and *shiro-zake* (an extremely mild, opaque rice wine). They also offered tea and refreshments to their dolls, and sang “*Ureshi Hina Matsuri*”—a traditional Japanese folk song about the festival.

