

Dashi and their Decorations

***Dashi* (festival floats) Create Excitement in People**

Japanese people perceive things that are large and things that are beautiful as deities. Starting with mountain worship and other types of nature worship, manmade objects, such as five-storied pagodas and large Buddha statues at temples, giant burial mounds, and large sacred places have emerged.

The fundamental idea of making such things large and beautiful has always been common since ancient times with arts and crafts developing during the building process. In addition, the creation of magnificent moving shrines known as *dashi* led to the emotion involved with moving precious things of the highest level of beauty in front of people's eyes. This emotion had an impact on everything from *karakuringyo* (mechanical puppets) to the foundation of technical civilization.

Art Used in the Decoration of *Dashi*

Among the curtains and carvings used to decorate *dashi*, not only the excellence of artists' paintings and sculpted pieces but also the appeal of the material that expresses his excellence is added, bringing out the unique beauty that integrates art and craft.

The curtains hung to cover part of the *dashi* become giant canvases with many featuring embroideries of paintings by famous artists. The work of embroidery craftsmen transforms artists' paintings by adding three-dimensional power of expression which makes the creations more appealing in their embroidered forms. Found around the carvings and curtains are shiny metal fixtures that serve to accent the overall design, forming a gorgeous "picture frame." The metal fixtures allow a deeply detailed design to be seen in a restricted, narrow space.



Large curtain design rough sketch (left) and large curtain (right) belonging to the *Rikijinsha* (festival float) of the *Nakagirigumi* (*Kamezaki*)



Inuyama Festival Curtain from Nakahonmachi



Shinmachi Metal Fixtures

Examining How to Look at *Dashi* Carvings

The aesthetic sense of the Japanese has a broad and rich sensibility which can be seen in artistic achievements from the gorgeous luxury represented by *Nikko Toshogu* shrine to the quiet simplicity as expressed by the Katsura Imperial Villa.

The carvings which decorate the *dashi* can also represent both of those aesthetic extremes. Brilliant carved works are spectacular and beautiful, like Japanese paintings coming to life in 3D.



Takayama Festival Float carvings

The plain wood carvings are realistic, sharp in detail, and deeply expressive. They have a mysterious charm that makes them look like real animals or plants despite not being painted with other colors. Using the grain of the wood when making carvings of the human body creates a unique charm which combines the interesting nature of carving and charm of craft.



Platform section carving of the *Kagurasha* (festival float) of the *Tanakagumi* (*Kamezaki*)



(festival float) of the *Nakagirigumi (Kamezaki)*

Powerful god carving found on the *Rikijinsha*



Festival (Kuwana)

Quails on ears of Foxtail Millet, Ishitori



Rabbit hole, Ishitori Festival (Kuwana)

In contrast, when we look at carvings from the viewpoint of prayer, we see that arabesque patterns are often carved on the beams connecting the pillars. This is referred to as *aswakaba* (young leaves) which are for future growth and development. Their corners are decorated with lions, *tapirs*, and elephants as protectors of the deity.