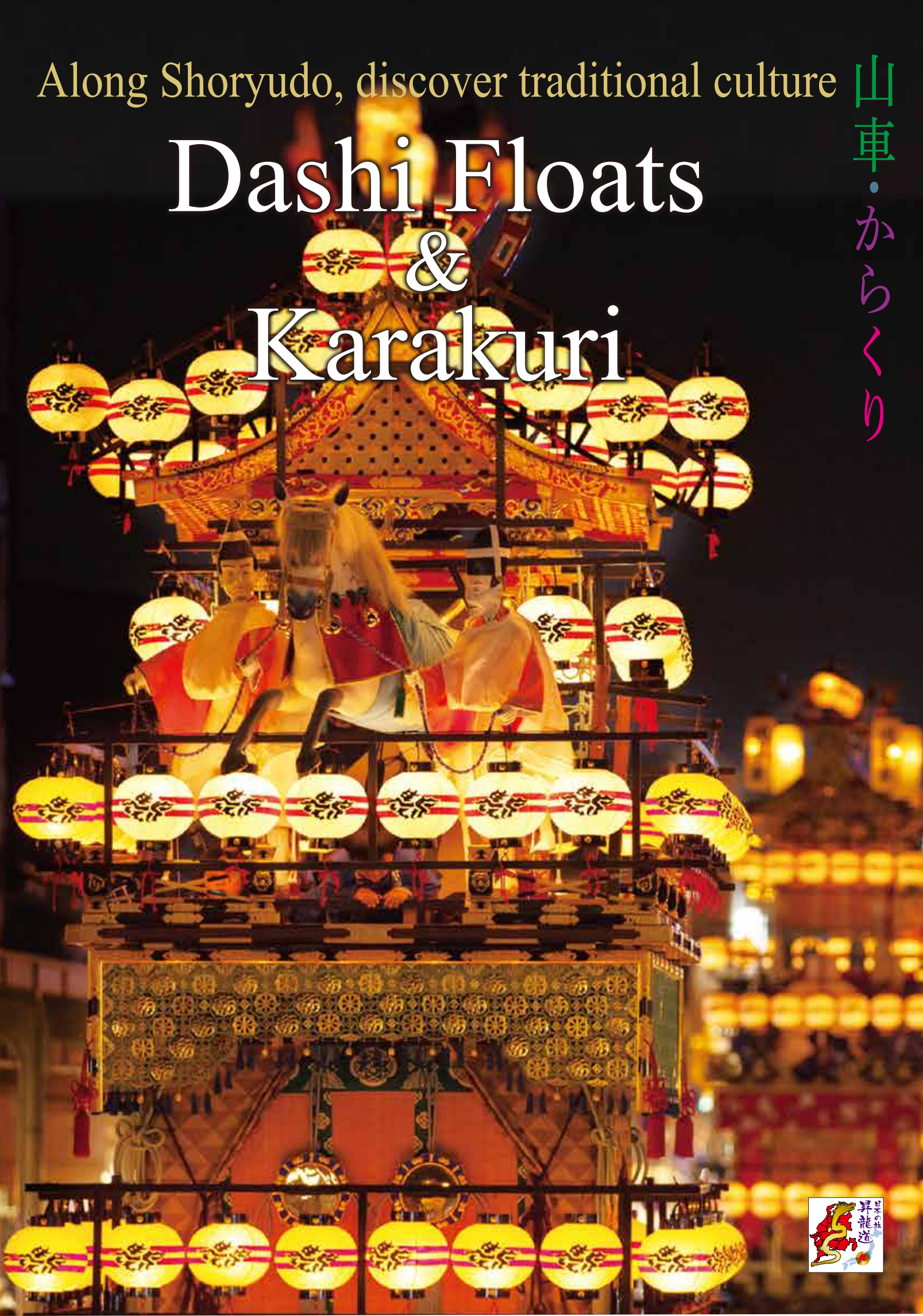


Along Shoryudo, discover traditional culture

山車・からくり

Dashi Floats & Karakuri



Handed down by the ages, the soul of Japan



Asahi Festival (Echizen Town, Fukui Prefecture)

DASHI FLOATS & KARAKURI

What are *dashi* floats and *karakuri*?



Dashi floats endow local festivals with stately grandeur.

Depending on the part of Japan, they are called different names such as *yama* [mountain], *hikiyama* [haul mountain], *hoko* [halberd], *yatai* [cart], and *danjiri* [float].

Many Asian countries have the custom of parading floats in festivals.

Currently, all over Japan, there are said to be about 5,000 such floats.

Pulling floats around the town is a prayer for local prosperity and family safety.

Sustaining strong ties and local pride, float festivals

have been passed down from generation to generation.

Some *dashi* floats used in Japanese festivals have moving *karakuri* puppets.

About 300 such *karakuri dashi* exist in Japan: most of them are in Chubu.

Customs evolved from hope of receiving divine favor

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Many rites carried out at Shinto shrines are connected with encouraging *kami* spirits to descend to designated objects. Since *kami* are believed to descend from mountains, to encourage divine presence to dwell in a place, symbolic items may be set up. These include *okiyama* replicas of mountains, stand-ins for tall trees, decorative pillars, *hanagasa* hats, and dolls. At some point, these spirit-accumulating objects were placed on wheels and paraded around the town. This was how floats came into being. They expressed the hope of receiving divine favor.



Furukawa Festival
(Hida City, Gifu Prefecture)



Owari Tsushima
Tenno Festival
(Tsushima City and Aisai City,
Aichi Prefecture)

Origin of float festivals

In cities, floats first appeared in Kyoto's Gion Festival. The float procession is believed to have become an established in its current form in the 14th century. From the 15th century, there is a record of 61 floats. Around this time, floats also started to be built at other places. In the Owari Area of what is now Aichi Prefecture, floats were rolled out at the Tsushima Tenno Festival, the Atsuta Oyama Festival, and Kamenoo Tenno (now Nagoya Shrine) Tenno Festival.

During the Edo Period (17th to mid 19th century), starting with castle towns, float festivals began to spread across the country. In the 18th century commercial cities and ports also adopted the custom, which lives on in *dashi* festivals at Chiryu, Takayama, Johana, and Ueno Tenjin. The generation or two before the Meiji Restoration (1868) was a period when the culture of townspeople blossomed. It was also the heyday of float festivals. At this time small towns and rural areas also started their own float festivals.

The first appearance of *karakuri* puppets

Floats with moving *karakuri* puppets appeared some time before 1603, the start of the Edo Period. As time passed, the amusing movement of *karakuri* puppets and the charm of *dashi* floats was combined in outright *karakuri dashi*. These were very popular and they were widely adopted.



Takayama Festivals
(Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture)



Takaoka Mikurumayama Festival (Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture)

Although puppetry has existed since ancient times, as cultural objects in Japan, puppets underwent serious development in during the Edo Period. At first they were made for the amusement of lords, aristocrats, successful merchants and other people with great status or wealth. *Karakuri* puppets, such as *cha-hakobi ningyo* (tea serving automaton) were created as "parlor cushion puppets."

In mid 17th century Osaka, remotely operated public stage puppets appeared in the form of an army in Takeda *karakuri shibai*. People were greatly interested in *karakuri* performances and the amusement of seeing such puppets spread down the social ranks. In travelling shows, this amusement spread to far-flung places.

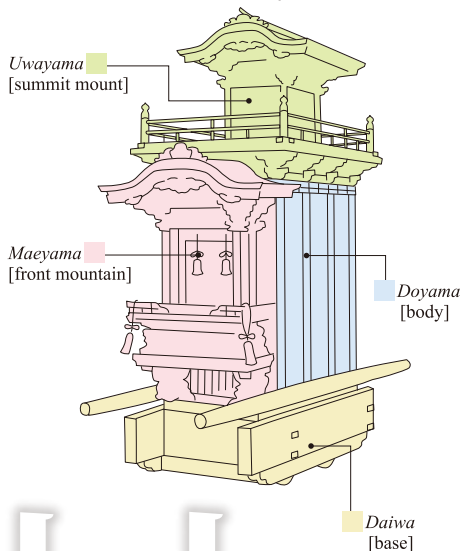
In Chubu, puppets found a place of honor atop *dashi* floats: devising festival *karakuri* routines became a form of display. In this way, *dashi karakuri* festivals began and were developed.



Ueno Tenjin Festival
(Iga City, Mie Prefecture)

End result of accumulated competence

◆ Dashi float structure and part names



Gorgeously decorated floats

One of the attractions of the floats is how they embody consummate skills of decoration. Whether extravagantly showy or highly refined, at each festival, the character of the float is on show.

Parts such as *uwayama* at the top of the float and the *maeyama* at the front generally feature expert carving. On a single float, gold leaf and silver leaf may also be applied at up to several hundred places. Popular motifs include mythical animals such as *shishi* lions, dragons, and phoenixes or subjects

found in legend and history. These images emerge from the floats with great dimensional presence.

The two kinds of drapes adorning the body of the *dashi* make it even more sumptuous. A *mizuhiki-maku* valence runs around the sides and rear. These are usually embroidered with pictures representing good fortune, often based on the works of famous painters. Curtaining off the interior of the body, where the musicians and puppets ride, the *omaku* is made from red or blue *raxa* felt. Often, this cloth features dyed designs and stitching with gold and silver threads.

Combining delicate precision along with robust strength, the flowing beauty of the decoration is uplifting. Floats with such artistry can indeed be called moving museums.

Dashi karakuri puppets

While float festivals are held all over Japan, Aichi Prefecture has the greatest number of festival floats with *karakuri* puppets. In the whole country, there are about 200 *karakuri dashi* floats: more than two thirds of them are in the Chubu Region.



Inuyama Festival
(Inuyama City, Aichi Prefecture)

Making *karakuri* puppets move

- (1) Directly manipulated by hand
Chiryu Festival • *Dashi float bunraku* with three operators, etc.
- (2) Stringing multiple lines into the body and limbs of the puppet and, by pulling the strings, which pass through the bottom of the puppet, operating them upright on an *uchitoi* box gutter jutting out from the float.
Takayama Festivals, etc.
- (3) Remote operation of separate individual puppets that seem to be moving independently.
Kutami Festival, etc.



Ogaki Festival
(Ogaki City, Gifu Prefecture)



Chiryu Festival (*Dashi float bunraku* with three operators)
(Chiryu City, Aichi Prefecture)

Dashi *karakuri* puppet performances

Karakuri puppets have a wide repertoire of movements. Some motions are standard, others are unique. The goal of the creators and operators is to present amazing actions and to fascinate observers with the complexity of the routines.

- (1) Neck movements: up and down, left and right
- (2) Limbs: raising and lowering
- (3) Drum beating, bamboo flute playing
- (4) *Sakadachi* (handstand)
- (5) *Kataguruma* (piggyback)
- (6) *Menkaburi* (putting on a mask)
- (7) *Noh mai* (noh actions)
- (8) *Mojikaki* (writing)
- (9) *Ayawatari* (tightrope walking)
- (10) *Rangui watari* (stilt walking while wearing high-heel geta dogs)
- (11) *Daisharin* (gymnastic swing turn)
- (12) *Tanjo* (emergence)
- (13) *Henshin* (transformation)
- (14) *Miko mai* (Shrine maiden dance actions)
- (15) *Yauchi* (arrow shooting)
- (16) *Karakuri ningyo shibai* (staged routines)



Johana Hikiyama Float Festival (Nanto City, Toyama Prefecture)

Climate that nurtured present day *monozukuri* industrial attitudes



Kamezaki
Shiohi-matsuri
(Handa City,
Aichi Prefecture)

In 1619, the Toshogu-sai, which became the current Nagoya Festival, featured puppets paraded on two-wheeled wagons. This was the forerunner of *dashi karakuri* float festivals. The then Lord of Owari (in western Aichi) also provided financial support. When, in the early 18th century, nine floats appeared with *karakuri* puppets, the event developed into a grand festival. Symbolizing the vibrant energy of the community, such displays of ingenuity became established in the annual festivals of many shrines across the land of Owari. And from here, *dashi karakuri* spread to the whole Chubu Region in a tradition that still lives on today.

Karakuri puppets move their hands and feet as if they are alive, and can also perform stunning tricks. To design and successfully make these complex puppets, takes a great deal of scientific knowledge and manufacturing craft skill. Each neighborhood with a float vied with the others to create more sophisticated *karakuri* puppets and more varied movements. This rivalry spurred and spread local technological progress. These days, the Chubu Region is an integrated global center of industry that depends on diverse industrial skills and knowhow to make automobiles, precision machinery, machine tools, airplanes, and spacecraft.

The desire to outdo each other in pleasing people, by diligently studying how to devise better *karakuri* mechanisms, was one of the roots of this advanced development.



Seihaku Festival
(Nanao City, Ishikawa Prefecture)



Tatemon Festival (Uozu City, Toyama Prefecture)



Ishidori Festival
(Kuwana City, Mie Prefecture)



Sunari Festival
(Kanie Town, Aichi Prefecture)



Nagahama Hikiyama Float Festival
(Nagahama City, Shiga Prefecture)

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Whaling Floats of
Toride Jinja Shrine
(Yokkaichi City, Mie Prefecture)



Dashi float festivals in Chubu

The Chubu Region of Japan



Festival featuring *karakuri* puppet performance or a float procession

Facility with permanent exhibition of floats or other festival materials

Places holding float festival (mail survey responses March 1, 2014)



Regional Sightseeing and Itinerary Formation Project “Shoryudo: Roads to *dashi* floats and *karakuri* puppets”

Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Chubu District Transport Bureau, and Hokuriku Shin'etsu District Transport Bureau;
Japan Travel and Tourism Association Chubu Branch; Central Japan Tourism Promotion Association; Chubu Centrair International Airport Promotion Council

Cover photo taken at Takayama Festival. Source: PIXTA, March 2016.