

【English】

Seiobo (Queen Mother of the West) *Karakuri* Puppets

These mechanical puppets (*karakuri ningyo*) were manufactured in 1776 to be displayed on one of the three-story floats that are paraded through the streets of Inuyama during the annual Inuyama Festival. Made almost entirely of wood, the puppets are operated using an intricate system of cogwheels, springs, rods, and pulleys that allows them to perform lifelike movements.

Each set of puppets used in the festival is themed on a traditional myth or legend. This one draws on the story of Seiobo, the Queen Mother of the West, a goddess with origins in ancient Chinese mythology. She lives in a palace on the mythological Mt. Kunlun, watching over a garden of magical peaches that grant their eater immortality.

One day, the Queen Mother notices that a peach has ripened and orders one of her attendants to bring it to her. She waves her fan, and the attendant starts swinging from one tree branch to the other to get to the fruit. The puppets' reenactment of the story is a whimsical affair performed largely unchanged since the seventeenth century; the first version of the Seiobo *karakuri* dolls was completed in 1649.

The Seiobo *karakuri* puppets have been comprehensively repaired several times over the centuries, most recently in 2002. They have been designated a Folk Cultural Property of Aichi Prefecture.

Naka-Honmachi: Seiobo

The Naka-Honmachi neighborhood's *yama* float is named after its mechanical puppets, which act out the Chinese legend of Seiobo, the Queen Mother of the West. During the performance, the Queen Mother's attendant swings from one tree branch to the other; this move is called *ayawatari*.

Shimo-Honmachi: Ogoshi

Ogoshi means "children coming apart and together again." The name of the Shimo-Honmachi neighborhood's *yama* float derives from the movement of its mechanical puppets, which close in on each other before separating again. Highlights of their performance include a small puppet riding on a larger one's shoulders, and the small puppet grabbing a bamboo pole and swinging around it.

Kajiyacho: Jurodai

The Kajiyacho neighborhood's float gets its name from Jurojin, a deity of health and longevity who is one of the Seven Lucky Gods in East Asian mythology. The float's mechanical puppets act out a scene in which Jurojin is enchanted by a child's vigorous dancing.

Naguricho: Hoei

The Naguricho neighborhood's float is called *Hoei*, which means "superb sewing"—a reference to decorative details such as the intricate embroidery on the upper part of the tapestry covering the float's lower deck. The mechanical puppets on this float depict ninth-century courtiers, who quarrel over a pot with a blooming plum tree in it. One of them gets angry and makes the plum petals fall, but the other courtier magically restores the flowers.