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# ICHIMATSU BOY AND THE HISTORICAL IMPACT ON ICHIMATSU NINGYO

By Sherelle Rodgers

## THE ICHIMATSU BOY

The Ichimatsu Ningyo, a creation of Takizawa Koryusai II, is an emblem of the past and a cultural piece that holds much sentimental value to the collectors of these dolls. The Ichimatsu boy, though a unique and handcrafted piece of work, is not a lone piece of work by Takizawa Koryusai II. He is well known for his work with the Goodwill ambassador dolls that were gifted to the United States as a trade between the US and Japan. Though many of the dolls were displaced after World War II, museums still house them today.<sup>1</sup> The Ichimatsu boy has many similarities to the Tōrei-Ningyō (Ambassador dolls) with its pigmented Gofun pasted skin and hands, inset glass eyes, and the silk embroidered Kimono.<sup>2</sup> This setup and design is not only utilized by the Ichimatsu doll, but this does give an image to the styling of this doll.

The Ichimatsu boy created around the Showa Era (1930s) in Japan is a boy doll with a textile jointed body, painted hair, covered in a formal Kimono. His Kimono is abundant with details including a Fuji Mon (wisteria crest) in five positions and images depicting weapons for battle.<sup>3</sup> These details are very important because they hold inklings of the purpose of this doll. Before going further, it is important to note that, by the time they are sold, many of these dolls

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<sup>1</sup>Pate, Alan Scott. Japanese Friendship Dolls of 1927 - Antique Japanese Dolls.  
[http://www.antiquejapanesedolls.com/pub\\_friendshipdolls/ADC\\_Friendshipdolls.html](http://www.antiquejapanesedolls.com/pub_friendshipdolls/ADC_Friendshipdolls.html).

<sup>2</sup>Pate, Alan Scott. *Art as Ambassador: The Japanese Friendship Dolls of 1927*. Alan Scott Pate Antique Japanese Dolls, 2016.

<sup>3</sup>Hottinger, Christine. Japanese Ichimatsu Boy by Takizawa Koryusai II- Antique Japanese Dolls.  
[http://www.antiquejapanesedolls.com/ichimatsu\\_pop/A18B006.html](http://www.antiquejapanesedolls.com/ichimatsu_pop/A18B006.html).

have been given new clothing to better suit their owners.<sup>4</sup> This is crucial in the understanding that the purpose of this doll might not correlate with the images on its Kimono, meaning that any suggestion of reason for the making of the

Ichimatsu doll is a postulation by the researcher.

The Fuji Mon symbol or better known as the Wisteria symbol is an image of a small crest depicting the wisteria tree flower in a wavelike or swirled pattern wrapped in a circle.<sup>5</sup> The Wisteria



plant is used in many Japanese family crests but also holds a great deal of symbolism. The first word of the plant, Fuji (藤), sounded so similar to the

Japanese word Fushi (不死) meaning “eternal life” or

the word Buji (無事) meaning “safety.”<sup>6</sup> This led the

samuri to use the symbol as a meaning of safety and eternal life.



Another set of symbols that are shown on the dolls clothing are the weapons including a battle fan,

battle wisk, an arrow quiver and Kabuto helmet. These are representations of a festival on May

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<sup>4</sup>Pate, Alan Scott. *Art as Ambassador: The Japanese Friendship Dolls of 1927*. Alan Scott Pate Antique Japanese Dolls, 2016.

<sup>5</sup>Hottinger, Christine. Japanese Ichimatsu Boy by Takizawa Koryusai II- Antique Japanese Dolls. [http://www.antiquejapanesedolls.com/ichimatsu\\_pop/A18B006.html](http://www.antiquejapanesedolls.com/ichimatsu_pop/A18B006.html).

<sup>6</sup>“Kimono Symbol Meanings.” Hunted and Stuffed. <https://www.huntedandstuffed.com/pages/kimono-symbol-meanings>.

5th called Tengu no Sekku (Boys' Day). This festival is a day to pray for the health and wellness for boys; it was changed to Children's Day in 1948 to promote gender equality between boys and girls.<sup>7</sup> The symbols of armor are shown during the festival as a protection for the boys and were used more often by samurai in the Edo period (1630-1868) as a gift.<sup>8</sup>

The provenance of this doll is very slim and there is no direct location from which the doll has been traced but a few theories have arisen due to the symbolism on the dolls' clothing. The Boys' Day symbols would seem to give away the purpose of this doll, but that can be far from the truth. Rather than taking the clothing at face value, this doll could have been a gift to a young boy, not as a play thing but more of a shelf doll to be admired. The themes of safety and eternal life from the Wisteria crest and the symbols of Boys' Day, meaning protection, suggest what the doll could have been proposed for. Still, this does not contradict the idea that this doll was a Boys' Day gift, which suggests that it was likely made in the 1930s before the shift to Children's Day, when the girls and parents became more of the focus. The Ichimatsu boy does bear a family crest, Fuji Mon. This symbol is used often in many family crests (the Fujiwara Clan) over the centuries, and he could simply be a family heirloom. Another use for the doll was

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<sup>7</sup>"Kimono Symbol Meanings."

<sup>8</sup>Tengu no sekku. <http://www.Ningyo-kyokai.or.jp/sekku/tango.html>.

a wedding gift with a boy and girl pair given to the couple as a blessing of health and happiness for their future children.<sup>9</sup>

Time should be taken to study the aesthetic touches to this doll. Due to the lack of information on Koryusais II's process of making his dolls there is no way to be sure how he went through his steps. Still, there is no lack of information on how the dolls are made in the general industry. The head of the dolls would start as molds and are covered with about 20 layers of gofun as well as the hands and feet.<sup>10</sup> Gofun is a white pigment made with crushed shells. In the early production of these dolls, gofun was pure white as a sign of nobility, but in the mid-1800s, naturalism moved into the art and the gofun became pigmented like the Ichimatsu boy.<sup>11</sup> After the coats of gofun are added, the mouth is carved and the eyes and ear are placed.<sup>12</sup> The hair, eyebrows, and facial expression are then painted on.<sup>13</sup> Everything that is carved, painted or molded is unique to the doll, the artist, and his style.



For this doll, art comes in many forms from the painting and to the carving of the hands, and a great amount of detail is put into this. Another one of these details is the clothing that the Ichimatsu boy is wearing. He is fashioned in a formal kimono, with a Haori jacket, silk brocade Hakama trousers, and white tabi socks. The

<sup>9</sup>Shoaf, Judy. "The Uses of Japanese Dolls" <https://people.clas.ufl.edu/jshoaf/japanese-dolls/doll-uses/>.

<sup>10</sup>Fulk, Shirlee & Skiles, Rosie. "Yamoto Ningyo" NIngyo Journal 6, no.1.

<sup>11</sup>Fulk, Shirlee & Skiles, Rosie. "Yamoto Ningyo" NIngyo Journal 6, no.1.

<sup>12</sup>Fulk, Shirlee & Skiles, Rosie "Yamoto Ningyo".

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

kimono, the word meaning “thing to wear” is a traditional Japanese dress wear.<sup>14</sup> The historical significance of the kimono is that it gives, or rather gave, a sense of identity to the Japanese. The very early ancestor of the kimono is seen in the Hein era (794 – 1192), made of straight cuts of fabric to fit any body shape.<sup>15</sup> It evolved over time to the kimono that is recognized today. The kimono itself is an art piece to be worn. It holds onto the traditional ways of the past and embodies the way of the Japanese.<sup>16</sup> It is a reminder to the Japanese of a time before foreign influence.<sup>17</sup>

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

When researching the Ichimatsu boy, one roadblock was that no universal name is used for the doll.

Names ranging from Ichimatsu Ningyo to Daki Ningyo (hug gable doll) to Furisode Ningyo (long sleeved doll) have been used for the Ichimatsu boy.<sup>18</sup>

The name of these dolls is important as the Japanese have a plethora of dolls and meanings for each doll.

The Ichimatsu name is not one of arbitrary use; the

name is the eponym of Sanogawa Ichimatsu of Osaka, a well known kabuki actor of his



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<sup>14</sup> Pate, Alan Scott. *Art as Ambassador: The Japanese Friendship Dolls of 1927*. Alan Scott Pate Antique Japanese Dolls, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Pate, Alan Scott. *Art as Ambassador: The Japanese Friendship Dolls of 1927*. Alan Scott Pate Antique Japanese Dolls, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Green, Cynthia; The Surprising History of the Kimono. <https://daily.jstor.org/the-surprising-history-of-the-kimono/>

<sup>17</sup> Green, Cynthia; The Surprising History of the Kimono.

<sup>18</sup> Fulk, Shirlee & Skiles, Rosie. “Yamoto Ningyo” *Ningyo Journal* 6, no. 1.

time.<sup>19</sup> He was known to use dolls in his performances and wore a checkered kimono in which the early ichimatsu dolls were known to wear though they had no facial resemblance to him.<sup>20</sup>

Another tricky aspect of this doll is how the doll is jointed. Many of these dolls had various amounts of jointing mechanisms. For example, some dolls use floated jointing or textile jointing in which the fabric between the torso and legs, as well as the arms, allow for better movement in and out of clothing.<sup>21</sup> Another form of jointing is the three bend jointing. There are a couple reasons why the jointing of these dolls matter: First is the ability to position the doll. More often than not the doll would be kneeling, as that is the traditional sitting fashion.<sup>22</sup> Second, the joints influence the ability to hold and cuddle the doll. Over time the Ichimatsu doll had changed from something to cuddle and be held to something that lived on a shelf to be admired. One large influence of this was the Friendship Doll Movement.



The Friendship Doll Movement was a pivotal point in the change of the Ichimatsu doll. Because the dolls were to be a symbol of Japan's respect and friendship towards the United States, the dolls were meant to be very beautiful. The Torei Ningyo were aesthetically pleasing and came with softer expressions than their counterparts at

<sup>19</sup>Fulk, Shirlee & Skiles, Rosie. "Yamoto Ningyo"

<sup>20</sup>Gygi, Fabio R. "Things That Believe: Talismans, Amulets, Dolls, and How to Get Rid of Them." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 45, no. 2 (2018). doi:10.18874/jjrs.45.2.2018.423-452.

<sup>21</sup>Fulk, Shirlee & Skiles, Rosie. "Yamoto Ningyo" *Ningyo Journal* 6, no.1.

<sup>22</sup>Fulk, Shirlee & Skiles, Rosie. "Yamoto Ningyo"

the end of the Meiji period and the beginning of the Showa period.<sup>23</sup> After this shift, the Ichimatsu dolls became more of a display doll admired for its beauty and technique.

The friendship doll movement of 1927 didn't just change how Ichimatsu dolls looked, it also increased the significance of the doll as a tool to develop diplomatic relationships. The United States sent upwards of 13,000 dolls to the Japanese children as a sign of goodwill after the Emperor Yoshihito had deceased.<sup>24</sup> A program was developed to send a set of dolls to the U.S. as a sign of appreciation.<sup>25</sup> At the time of the gifting of the friendship dolls there was a consensus that this was a move in the right direction.<sup>26</sup> Though after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor the relationship and the dolls' importance had waned away. These dolls held and still hold much of the culture that Japan had in the early 1900s. These dolls are a symbol of a somewhat forgotten past and when looked at with western eyes are pieces of handheld history.

## THE FUTURE OF NINGYO

Because the Japanese people have been around for many centuries, there is spiritualism that comes with tradition. The doll culture in Japan is a great example of how spiritualism can be placed on objects. A great many dolls were created for a connection to the spiritual world like the scapegoat doll that was given to mothers to hinder any evil spirits from coming to harm their children.<sup>27</sup> This doll was made very poorly and was given to children. It had two white disks for eyes, and if it answered the children's prayers it was promised eyes through the addition of black

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Pate, Alan Scott. Japanese Friendship Dolls of 1927 - Antique Japanese Dolls.  
[http://www.antiquejapanesedolls.com/pub\\_friendshipdolls/ADC\\_Friendshipdolls.html](http://www.antiquejapanesedolls.com/pub_friendshipdolls/ADC_Friendshipdolls.html).

<sup>25</sup>Pate, Alan Scott. Japanese Friendship Dolls of 1927

<sup>26</sup>"Doll Ambassadors of GoodWill." Herald of Gospel Liberty (1808-1930) 120, no. 1 (1928): 41.

<sup>27</sup>White, Gwen. *Dolls of the World*. Newton Centre, Mass: Branford, 1963.152



dolls.<sup>28</sup> Exorcisms were performed with dolls and thrown into a river or set on fire. The Ichimatsu doll, in a similar manner, was originally a gift tasked with the job of being a second body for the child of the doll.<sup>29</sup> The doll's body would take in wickedness, bad luck, illness, and anything that was of no good.<sup>30</sup> For this reason, many Japanese people felt it strange to hold on to Ichimatsu dolls as they were deemed "creepy" and possibly wicked due to their job previously as a "scapegoat doll."<sup>31</sup> Others felt that the dolls were too lifelike and would be uncomfortable with "another person" staring at you in your own home. These ideas are signs of the unwanted nature of the doll. The dolls, though, are not mistreated but housed carefully and safely in the home so the owners don't obtain a grudge from the doll.<sup>32</sup>

One item of importance noted from those interviews was the discomfort with housing these pieces of art because they are also viewed as spiritual pieces. This has caused a movement in Japan to want to rid themselves of these dolls by disposing of them. One method is selling to western collectors as the sellers know that the doll will be kept safe and taken care of.<sup>33</sup> There are also memorial services where the dolls are left at a temple.<sup>34</sup> Another reason the Ningyo are gotten rid of is because there is a lack of attachment to these dolls from the younger generation inheriting them.<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that Ningyo are no longer of importance; the growth in interest in western countries seems to be fueling the fire to keep them alive and circulating.

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<sup>28</sup>White, Gwen. *Dolls of the World*.

<sup>29</sup>Gygi, Fabio R. "Things That Believe: Talismans, Amulets, Dolls, and How to Get Rid of Them." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 45, no. 2 (2018). doi:10.18874/jjrs.45.2.2018.423-452.

<sup>30</sup>Law, Jane Marie. *Puppets of Nostalgia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. muse.jhu.edu/book/38301.

<sup>31</sup>White, Gwen. *Dolls of the World*. Newton Centre, Mass: Branford, 1963.152

<sup>32</sup>Gygi, Fabio R. "Things That Believe: Talismans, Amulets, Dolls, and How to Get Rid of Them." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 45, no. 2 (2018). doi:10.18874/jjrs.45.2.2018.423-452.

<sup>33</sup>Davis, Anita Y.K., "Ningyo: Destined for the Trash Can?" (2002). All Volumes (2001-2008). 114.

<sup>34</sup>Davis, Anita Y.K., "Ningyo: Destined for the Trash Can?" 114

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

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