



Sagami Ningyo Shibai

About Sagami Ningyo Shibai

From the Edo period to Meiji, there were 15 *ningyo shibai* (puppet theatre) locations in the Sagami province. Five theatres continue their tradition to date: *Hayashi za* and *Hase za* in Atsugi, *Shimonaka za* in Odawara, *Sakitori za* in Hiratsuka and *Ashigara za* in Ashigara cities.

At the end of the Edo period, *ningyo shibai* (the common name for *ningyo joruri*) spread throughout Japan. *Sagami ningyo shibai*, too, became a familiar local entertainment. All five puppet theatres are designated as intangible cultural heritage by either the Japanese national government or Kanagawa prefecture.

The distinguishing characteristic of the *Sagami ningyo shibai* is *sanninzukai* (the three person method) in which each puppet is controlled by three puppeteers: *omozukai* (the main puppeteer controlling the right hand and head), *hidarizukai* (the left side puppeteer controlling the left hand) and *ashizukai* (the third puppeteer controlling the legs). The other characteristic is *teppou zashi* (holding the gun method) – a method where the puppet handled in a way resembling that of handling a gun.

About the theatres

Hase za

A puppet theatre of the Hase district in Atsugi City.

Hase za began 300 years ago, after a master puppeteer from Awaji Island had taught his craft to the locals. Awaji-style *okina* (old-man noh masks) for *shikisanbaso* screenplays kept at the local Segi shrine support this theory.

From the end of the Edo period to the Meiji era, the puppeteers were trained by masters from Osaka and Edo, and the shows were actively performed inside and outside the city even after the Second World War. There was later a stage when it was difficult to continue the performances due to a decrease in the number of puppeteers, but thanks to the cooperation of the city and the local community, *Hase za* is currently operating with 15 puppeteers.

Hase-za possesses 56 *kashira* (puppet heads) at the moment, many made by in-house puppeteers.



Sakitori za

A puppet theatre of the Shinomiya district in Hiratsuka City.

It is said that theatre started around the middle of the Edo period and was known as *The Shinomiya Puppet Theatre* at the time. Many *kashira* and costumes were burned down in the fire of 1902, but puppeteers went to Osaka and acquired new ones.

For a while, the puppet theatre was unable to function, but it was reconstructed in 1952 under the name of *Sakitori za*, after the Sakitori Shrine which is believed to house the *ujigami* (local gods) of Shinomiya.

Currently, 50 *kashira* are used at the *Sakitori za*.



Ashigara za

A puppet theatre of the Madarame district in Minami-Ashigara City.

The theatre began in the middle of the Edo period, after a master puppeteer from Awa (now Tokushima prefecture) had taught his craft to the locals. It was known as *the Fukuzawamura Madarame Puppet Theatre* at the time. Entering the Showa period, *Ashigara za* faced a period during which it was unable to function. However, thanks to the efforts of many people, *The Madarame Puppet Theatre Preservation Association* was formed and *Ashigara za* established.

Ashigara za currently possesses 66 *kashira*, some of which are extremely valuable.



Shimonaka za

A puppet theatre of the Odake district in Odawara City.

It is believed that in the middle of the Edo period the puppeteers from the then so called *Odake Puppet Theatre* got trained by puppeteers from the Kansai area, travelling to Edo. During the same period, the functioning of the theatre was prohibited by the *Tenpo reforms*. However, it is said that the performers continued practicing hid from the shogunate in ancient horizontal tombs, called *yokoana koufun*.

Shimonaka za currently possesses 92 *kashira*.

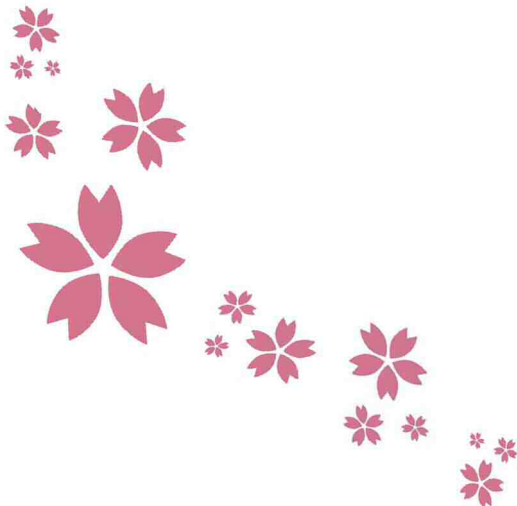


Hayashi za

A puppet theatre of the Hayashi district in Atsugi City.

The exact time of establishment is unknown, but it is estimated to be around 280 years ago. In the latter half of the Edo period, a famous Osaka puppeteer named Yoshida Asaemon, was appointed as the puppet master and continued to instruct the theatre until the Meiji era. In those days, the theatre used to be called *The Hayashi Puppet Theatre* or *The Yoshida Ren* (The Yoshida Troupe).

Hayashi za currently has 51 *kashira*.



About the synopsis

Keisei Awa no Naruto (A Courtesan at the Whirlpools of Awa) – *Junrei Uta no Dan (The Pilgrim Song Chapter)*

Jurobe comes to Osaka with his wife Oyumi to look for his stolen sword. They make their living as thieves. One day, they receive a letter. The letter says that their crimes, committed while looking for the sword, have come to light and they must face punishment.

A girl on a pilgrimage to find her parents from *Awa* (current Tokushima prefecture) approaches. *Oyumi* realizes this girl is her daughter *Otsuru*. As *Otsuru* talks about her feelings towards her parents, *Oyumi* is overwhelmed with feelings to tell her the truth and hug her tightly. However, she does not want her to know about her father *Jurobe's* crime so she resists telling her that they are the parents she is looking for. *Oyumi* tells her to go home soonest and makes *Otsuru* leave.

Oyumi hears *Otsuru's* pilgrim song outside. Soon after, *Oyumi* breaks down in tears and realizes she may never see her daughter again so she runs after her.



Hadesugata Onna Maiginu (A Tragic Love Triangle)

- Sakaya no Dan (The Liquor Shop Chapter)

This is based on a true story of a double suicide committed in Sennichimae, Osaka in 1695. *Hanshichi*, a son of a liquor shop owner *Akaneya Hanbe*, marries a girl called *Osono*, yet continues a relationship with a female entertainer *Sankatsu*. *Hanshichi* and *Sankatsu* have a baby. He neglects his wife *Osono* for three years and so her enraged father *Sogan* forcibly brings her back to his home, breaking her the relation with *Hanshichi*.

On New Year's evening of the following year, *Sogan* and *Osono* visit *Hanbe*. He apologizes for his attitude and begs him to make his daughter *Hanshichi's* wife again, telling him of how she grieved the separation ever since coming back to his home. However, *Hanbe* rejects his request. *Hanshichi* committed a murder in the evening of the day before yesterday and so *Hanbe* thought this would trouble *Osono*, were they to restore their marital relationship. In an attempt to protect *Hanshichi's* life, *Hanbe* receives punishment in place of *Hanshichi* after being summoned by the magistrate's office. *Hanshichi's* mother and *Osono* shed tears over the two fathers' affection towards their offsprings. The two fathers, too, begin to wail.

Osono leaves alone, bearing a heartache and thinking such tragedy would not have occurred to her husband, may *Hanshichi* had married *Sankatsu*.

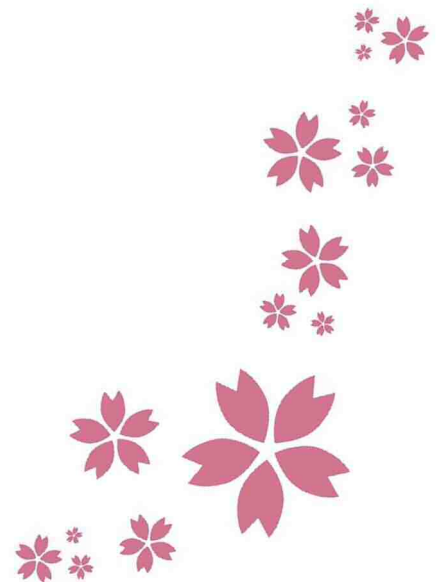


Shouutsushi Asagao Banashi (The Story of the Morning Glory)

- Yadoya kara Oigawa no Dan (From the Inn to the Oigawa River Chapter)

Akizuki Yuminosuke's daughter *Miyuki* had been dating a young samurai *Miyagi Asojiro* who she fell in love with when watching fireflies in *Uji* (a small city between Kyoto and Nara) together. However, they have to separate. After returning home, *Miyuki* has a marriage proposal from *Komazawa Jirozaemon*. He was actually her old lover *Asojiro* but *Miyuki* does not know this and chooses to run away from home. During her journey away, she becomes blind. Following this, she changes her name to *Asagao* (morning glory) and lives in *The Shimada Inn* with *Kaiya Tokuemon*, playing the *koto* (Japanese harp) and singing *Tsuyu no Hinuma* (Before The Dew Clears).

One day, *Komazawa* comes to the inn with *Iwashiro Takita*. They hear of a blind woman who sings *Tsuyu no Hinuma*. After meeting her, they realize she is *Miyuki*. *Komazawa* hands over a Japanese folding fan with a picture of morning glory and eye drops to *Tokuemon* and leaves the inn. Soon after that, *Miyuki* realizes that *Komazawa* is *Asojiro* and runs after him. She finally reaches the *Oigawa* River but *Komazawa* and *Iwashiro* are on the other side. What is even worse, heavy rain prevents her from crossing the river and so she wails loudly. She mourns not being able to see her longed for love and the misery of her fate.



Meiboku Sendai Hagi (The Great Tree of Sendai Flower)

– Masaoka Chugi no Dan (The Masaoka Chugi Chapter)

Yoshitsuna, the feudal lord of the *Oshu Date* clan falls in love with *Keisei Takao* of *Yoshiwara* (a famous Edo red-light district). He ends up being expelled from the clan for neglecting his duties as an official. A young lord called *Tsurukiyo* becomes his successor but there is a conspiracy to kill him and seize his position. His wet nurse *Masaoka* worries about assassination attempts so she keeps him away from other young men and feeds him only the food she prepares herself.

A lady named *Sakae Gozen* brings suspicious looking candy, on behalf of the military commander *Yoritomo*. As she is about to feed *Tsurukiyo* the candy, *Senmatsu*, the true son of *Masaoka*, comes running and eats some first. Immediately after, he is writhing in agony. A rogue named *Yashio* stabs him to death to disguise the poisoning. However, *Masaoka* does not cry for her son's death. Therefore, *Sakae Gozen* believes that she had switched *Senmatsu* and *Tsurukiyo*. *Sakae Gozen* tells *Masaoka* all about the conspiracy and leaves. As *Masaoka* is finally left alone with no one watching, her motherhood instincts overwhelm her and she cuddles her son's body, crying in deep sorrow.



Tsubosaka Kannon Reigenki (The Miracle at the Tsubosaka Kannon Temple) - *Sawaichiuchi no Dan (The Sawaichiuchi Chapter)*

A married couple *Sawaichi* and *Osato* live happily together in *Tosa* neighborhood of *Yamato Tsubosaka* (current Nara prefecture). *Sawaichi* is visually impaired. He teaches *shamisen* (Japanese guitar) and *Osato* works as a seamstress.

Ever since they got married three years ago, *Osato* goes to a temple every evening to pray for her husband's recovery from his impairment. As she always goes out at night, *Sawaichi* suspects infidelity. However, she explains to him about her visits to temple and he apologizes for doubting her. The two of them decide to go pray together and so they leave for the *Tsubosaka* temple.

