

## ***Karakuri* Puppets**

*Karakuri* are mechanical puppets and clockwork automata that were a popular source of entertainment in the late Edo period (1603–1867). Three of the Takayama Festival floats are adorned with elaborate *karakuri* puppets, whose movements are controlled by teams of puppeteers. Each member of the team sits inside the float and controls a small part of the puppet, and each team must synchronize their movements to make the movement of the puppet as smooth as possible.

Although various forms of *karakuri* have been made since at least the seventh century, they were not common in Japan until the latter half of the sixteenth century and the introduction of Western clockwork technology. In many respects, the mechanisms used in *karakuri* represent the technological peak of the Edo period.

The development of *karakuri* was strongly influenced by the laws of the time. In the 1690s, the Tokugawa shogunate passed sumptuary laws that prevented the lower classes from having fine clothes, grand estates, or possessions that were overly ornate. Festival floats were granted exemptions under these laws, so townspeople who wanted to display their wealth could only do so by commissioning various items to be used in festivals, including intricately crafted *karakuri*.

From the early 1700s to the late 1800s, most of the Takayama Festival floats had at least one *karakuri* puppet, but many of them have been lost to fire and other circumstances. Only 4 of the 23 floats used in the Takayama Festival today still have *karakuri* attached. There are *karakuri* on the Sanbansō, the Shakkyōtai, and the Ryūjintai floats used in the spring festival, and on the Hoteitai float used in the autumn festival. This display includes *karakuri* previously used on the Sanbansō and Shakkyōtai floats.