

Chinkoro

Chinkoro are one of the most popular items for sale at the Sekki-ichi Market. These colored rice-flour figures of animals, flowers, or other auspicious or wintery motifs have long been treasured as New Year's good-luck charms.

The name *chinkoro*, which loosely translates to “dog” or “puppy,” is thought to derive from the Japanese Chin dog breed. Indeed, dogs are one of the most commonly depicted animals.

The precise origin of *chinkoro* is lost to history, but they have been sold at Suwacho's midwinter markets for more than 140 years as one of the many handcrafted items that local villagers once made for extra income during the snowy months. *Chinkoro* became popular good-luck charms to display at home during the New Year's holidays. As the steamed rice flour dries out, the *chinkoro* develop cracks, and supposedly the more cracks there are, the better one's luck will be in the coming year.

In the past, *chinkoro* were roasted over the charcoal hearth and eaten like mochi, although this practice is no longer common. Some modern versions made from durable resin clay are designed to be used as accessories.