

## INFORMATION ON THE PAPER DOLL

Since ancient times in Japan it has been a popular belief that dolls assuming the shape of human beings contain a soul which can act as a substitute for one's own soul. Three dimensional paper dolls first appeared in the Shimotsuke district (located in the northern part of Kanto region,) and they came to be regarded as a means of evading grief and bringing happiness. Every year in July people from all over Japan used to gather in Shimotsuke with handmade dolls filled with their hopes for wealth, health, a rich harvest, and a thriving business. They then threw their dolls into the river.

People who were sick or in grief supposedly threw the dolls into the river and with it went their troubles. Those who had a special wish are said to have initially made dolls with no eyes and no nose and then when their wish was fulfilled, they expressed their thanks by adding the missing features to the dolls. They then put the dolls into a boat and as they prayed for good fortune, they sent the dolls down the river.

The paper used in making the dolls was brought to Shimotsuke from ancient China by Japanese envoys. It was handmade using a squeezing process. This "squeezed-out paper," as it is referred to in Japanese, is said to squeeze all evil out of the body.

The style of paper doll on which the Oto-hime character from Urashima is based comes from the Edo period (1615-1868.) The Edo period was the period of Japan's famed woodblock prints, and bright, beautifully patterned paper. This paper was known as chiyogami and so dolls made from that paper are known as chiyogami ningyo. Chiyogami was first produced by Ukiyo-e artists in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The word is a combination of chiyo (literally "a thousand generations") and kami (gami) or paper and is inspired by pine, bamboo and plum blossom motifs. The washi paper also included in this kit for the obi and is prized for its combination of strength and delicacy, being made from various plant materials.

Since the greatest emphasis in feminine styles in Japan has been put on the kimono, obi and hair-do, little attention has been given to the doll's face.