

DARUMA, A SYMBOL OF LUCK

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The inhabitants of the village Sunagawa, in the western suburbs of Tôkyô, are mostly small farmers. To increase their cash income they are engaged in some secondary occupation, such as silkworm breeding, spinning and weaving at home, poultry and cattle raising. In one family I found the manufacture of figures of the Buddhist Saint Daruma. Of the Daruma figures, made all over Japan, one kind comes under the category of dolls and toys for children. When and where figures of this category were first made in Japan is not known, but it can be taken for granted that they are imitations of Chinese models⁽¹⁾. In form, colours and ornamentation they vary greatly from place to place. Outstanding for their originality are those from Northeast Japan.

The other kind of Daruma comes under the category of religious images and pictures. Of these too we do not know when and where they were first made in Japan⁽²⁾. With few exceptions the Daruma figures of this group look all alike. They are considerably larger than those made as toys. The religious Daruma figures show the Buddhist Saint praying or meditating. Their round shape is reminiscent of a tumbler (see Photo 1). The first Daruma figures were most probably carved in wood or chiselled in stone by Buddhist monks. Then the common people made them of clay which they hardened and rendered consistent with diluted rice paste. The weight and fragility of such clay figures forbade to make them larger.

There was at first no commercial mass production. People who had confidence into Daruma made his figure themselves, the products varying as much as the skill and imagination of their makers. Only when the worship of Daruma had grown popular among farmers were his figures manufactured by specialists on

1) Nishizawa Toshio: Japanese Dolls and Toys. Tokyo, Iwasaki Bookstore, 1957; p. 119 (in Japanese).

2) Arisaka Yotaro: Comprehensive Collection of Japanese Toys. Tokyo, 1935 Kensetsu Co., Vol. 2, p. 227 (in Japanese).

a commercial basis. In our days skilled producers are found here and there. Especially in the prefectures of Saitama and Gumma are farming families carrying on this old technique as a subsidiary work in the more restful periods of the year. The above mentioned family in Sunagawa is one of them; they were Daruma makers already when living in Saitama Prefecture, whence they moved later to their present home. When I visited this family for the first time late in the year of 1960, I found all adults busy with figure manufacture. The great-grandfather, almost blind and then 90 years old, was sitting on the verandah and examining a huge new figure by touching it with his hands.

The figures are manufactured in four stages as follows: 1) a wood-carved shape of Daruma serves as mould (see Photo 2, left figure). Most of the moulds used in Sunagawa have been carved long ago in the family. Their smallest mould measures 5 cm., the largest one about 70 cm. Other families have moulds of 1 m. and more. Over the mould the maker lays thin paper moistened in water and presses it tightly onto the surface with the hand. Over this layer, which must not stick to the wood, come many other layers of paper moistened in a very diluted rice paste, again pressed against the mould and smoothed by slightly rubbing them. When the paper layers amount to 2 to 3 mm., a last layer is applied, this time of a somewhat stronger paper. Then the figures are laid to dry on straw-mats. In Sunagawa the father and the female household-members are in charge of this first stage of the figure production.

2) In the second stage of figure making, when the paper layers have dried, the wooden mould is removed from under its paper cover. The maker cuts the cover with a sharp knife, beginning on the upper part of the face and coming down over the cranium and back to the frontal part of the bottom, without continuing the cut up through the face of the figure. Thus the two halves of the cover, although hinged by the face part, can easily be taken off from the mould. The two halves of the cover are brought together again by pasting paper over the cutting line. The Daruma of papier-maché is then strongly glued to a spheric plate of hardened clay with a hole through its center. Size and thickness of this plate are commensurate to the size of the figure. The plate makes the figure stand firmly. In Sunagawa it was the father of the family who took the Daruma figures through the second stage of production.

3) In a third stage a wooden stick of 15 to 20 cm. length is

inserted in the hole at the base of the figures. By this stick the figure is held as by a handle when it is undergoing painting. First a whitewash is applied, made of shell lime, to smoothen the surface. For drying, the figures, with their wooden handles at the bottom, are stuck on tightly bound straw-bundles about 1 m. high and 40 to 50 cm. in diameter. One bundle can carry 20 to 30 figures. When the white coating has dried, the figures are painted with a bright red distemper, the face being left white. Again they are dried on straw-bundles. In the family in Sunagawa the father and the grandfather did the painting.

4) The fourth stage is the completion of the face of the figures when the red colour has dried. With the exception of the eyes and nose the face is painted in a light-reddish yellow. Eyebrows, whiskers and beard are added in black writing ink with delicate strokes of the brush. Some linear ornaments in gold colour are added on the forehead, on the side of the face and below the face. These golden ornaments over the bright red underpaint give the figure solemnity. Among my informants the grandfather gave the final touches in painting (see Photo 3).

Daruma figures as toys are sold in toy-shops. Religious Daruma figures are not common merchandise, and can be procured only at Daruma fairs or in rare cases from the producers directly. On New Year's Day and a few days thereafter, when the Japanese make their first temple visit of the year, the Daruma producers bring their figures in huge baskets into the temple precinct and exhibit them on straw-mats. After having first prayed to the temple god, visitors take a look at the Daruma and many a farmer or a merchant takes one home. The seller never mentions a price for a Daruma, although he knows in his heart what "gift" has to be offered before he parts with a figure. The deal takes about the following course: a farmer picks out a Daruma and ask what he should give in exchange. The producer then states a forbiddingly high sum, let us say 100.000 Yen, implying that a religious figure cannot be bought as if it were a profane object. Thereupon the farmer replies that he finds the figure beautiful but that he cannot sacrifice more than 200 Yen (1 US \$ = 360 Yen). If this sum is lower than the producer has in mind, the latter will ask the farmer to add so-and-so much, and an agreement will finally be reached. During the deal the farmer had squatted down in front of the figures to examine them more closely and the maker had spoken to him in a bent position (see Photo 4). When they have come to an agreement

both stand up and clash their hands cheerfully. In the end the maker bows to the farmer and congratulates him. Farmers expect from a Daruma figure blessing for their silkworms in terms of a handsome cash income and good crops, but also businessmen, employees and workers too are eager to secure for themselves the benefits and favours bestowed by Daruma.

At home the Daruma figure is placed on the house-altar beside the miniature shrine of the house-god. On the fair the face of the Daruma figure is covered with a white strip of paper as a protection of the fresh colours. Before placing the figure on the house-altar this paper is removed. The eyes are still white, without pupil and eyelashes. Some families, before placing the figure on the house-altar, bring one eye to life by painting the pupil and the eyelash; other families do this only when some success has been granted to them by Daruma. The eye painting can be done only by the family head.

The faith in Daruma is wide-spread. According to recent press reports with photos, even leaders of political parties make Daruma their friend and ally. In the campaigning headquarters of a political party a huge Daruma was seen together with amulets from a known temple with prayers for victory. When the party had defeated its opponent in the campaign, the party leaders painted the eyes of their guardian Daruma. It is hard to say whether the politicians had some faith in Daruma or were only following an old custom, as indeed also many farmers do.

My informant family in Sunagawa makes every year several thousand Daruma; the exact number they keep secret, the production however is decreasing. When an old custom is losing its traditional meaning, its form is also losing ground. At the end of the year when the whole house is cleaned, the Daruma figure is removed from its place. It must never be thrown away with other rubbish however, but be burned. Better still it is to bring it to a temple, or to place it at the feet of a statue of Jizô, the guardian-saint of children and wanderers.



PHOTO 1: Finished Daruma figures



PHOTO 2: Left, the wood-carved mould; right, the mould covered with a paper layer



PHOTO 3: The painting of the figures



PHOTO 4: Daruma fair within the precincts of a temple