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Komainu
The Birth and “Habitat Distribution” of
Shrine Guardian Lions**

Translated and edited by Detlef Köhn

This article examines the *komainu* (shrine lions) placed mostly at the entrance of approach ways (*sandō*) to Shintō shrines, but are found also in Buddhist temples. A survey of *komainu* in Japan clarifies that there are various *komainu* types according to different areas; they are called here “*komainu* cultural spheres.” Their styles show a variety of sculptural expressions, and the inscriptions provide interesting information about the donors and the changing times of dedication. Since the end of the Meiji period, the Ministry of Education fostered nationwide the distribution of a certain uniform type which now threatens to destroy the rich local pluriformity of the *komainu* cultural spheres.

Keywords: *Komainu* – Shrine lions – Shintō – Shrine approach way – *Sandō*.

1. *Sandō Komainu as a Cultural Phenomenon*

There was no clearly defined goal nor any fixed motif when I first started investigating *komainu* 狛犬¹ back in 1987. It was simply a matter of having noticed that these creatures come along in different forms, according to shrine location.

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1. *Komainu* – literally translated “Korean dogs,” sometimes also rendered as “lion-dogs” – are figures resembling lions. Since they are found mostly in Shintō sanctuaries, they may be called “shrine lions.” In pairs they are placed in the inner sanctuary of a Shintō shrine, at its porch, or on both sides of an entrance to Shintō shrines or sometimes to Buddhist temples. The former two called *jinnai komainu* 陣内狛犬 are older in origin and made mostly of wood or metal; the latter called *sandō komainu* 参道狛犬 (approach way *komainu*) developed from the former and are made normally of stone. They are believed to be protectors of the sanctuary. (Translator’s note, subsequently abbreviated as Trans.)

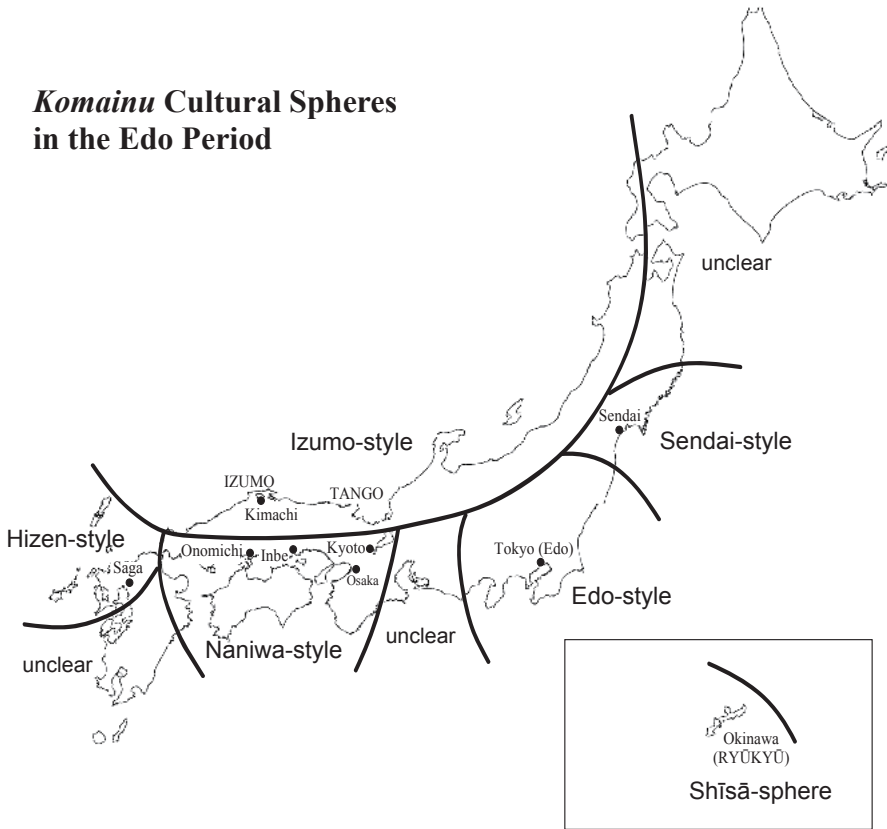
My studies began as mere coincidence. At that time, there were publications on the *komainu* of the inner sanctuary (*jinnai komainu* 陣内狛犬) of shrine buildings off-limits for the public from the perspective of art history. However, since there was no research on the *komainu* of the approach way (*sandō komainu* 参道狛犬) leading to the shrine I began to study them. In order to satisfy my intellectual curiosity I began to visit shrines and started collecting data, all this with a light-hearted attitude and very little scholarly poise. Contrary to expectation, I did not soon grow tired of these travels and travails; instead, when proceeding with my survey I was struck by the fascinating “riddles” of these *komainu*, and in the midst of my “discoveries” I got completely caught up by their deep fascination.

In the meantime, quite a number of publications and articles on *komainu* at approach ways have appeared and interest in them seems to have increased considerably. Each author finds his or her own special feature to take pleasure and interest in. Still, it came as a bit of a surprise to find that there even exists a “Society of the Connoisseurs of *komainu* Tail Tufts,” but then this just proves that there is more than one way of looking at these creatures. “*Komainu* in Nagasaki have human faces,” somebody wrote in a magazine article. Promptly I rushed to Nagasaki to investigate and found that the features of numerous Izumo-style *komainu* in Kyūshū on the side of the Japan Sea had eroded, and some parts of the heads had fallen off. Kind persons had patched them up with concrete. Most probably some had two left hands, like myself, and they had contrived by the very unprofessionalism of their patchwork to endow the patched-up faces with a rather human countenance. Of course, it feels good to point out the failures of others, yet it leaves a certain dissatisfaction. Would it not be much more interesting to find out, for instance, “Why have *komainu* from far-off Izumo migrated to Nagasaki?”² But then, on the other hand, it can be a pleasant pastime to compare faces of patched-up *komainu* with the faces of one’s acquaintances: “This one here looks especially weird, one wonders whom the sculptor had in mind when he did this face?”

Komainu do not just fall into the two categories of “Looks awful, doesn’t it,” and “This one is cute, isn’t he.” Different ways of approach provide different ways of amusement. When one views *komainu* as ‘a culture,’ I am sure they show us their multiform character and their wide extension. There are indications as to their character according to locality and historical period. The approach of most recent articles concentrates on the cultural aspect of *komainu*. Since this results from investigations based on thorough research especially of local *komainu*, I think that finally we have arrived at a stage enabling us to perceive *komainu* culture comprehensively in terms of the whole of Japan.

2. For the areas of the different *komainu* styles, later called here “*komainu* cultural spheres,” see the map in this article. (Trans.)

Komainu Cultural Spheres in the Edo Period



2. *Komainu on Approach Ways* (Sandō no *Komainu*)

Since I began my investigations, I noticed a significant number of gaps in *komainu* knowledge and understanding. It is ‘common knowledge’ in Japan – is it not?! – that “Shintō shrines *must* have *komainu*.” This ‘common knowledge’ may be promptly dispatched as common “disknowledge” if one just cares to look at Heian Shrine, for instance, or Kamigamo Shrine, both in Kyoto. Likewise, the understanding that “Buddhist temples never keep any *komainu*” is nothing more than another kind of common misunderstanding, as anybody who happens to stroll through Kyoto’s Kiyomizu-dera and Eikan-dō will soon find out.

Also there is the ‘common knowledge’ that “On the right is Agyō 阿形 (‘A’-form), with the jaws open, and on the left is Ungyō 吽形 (‘Un’-form) with the jaws closed.”³ This neither applies to *komainu* of Chinese descent where both of the pair are Agyō,

3. The combination of “*a*” and “*un*” derives from the first and last characters of the Siddham alphabet and came to symbolize the “beginning and end” of everything. (Trans.)

nor to those in the area stretching from Maizuru in the north of Kyoto Prefecture down to Kohama city in Fukui Prefecture. Right and left are interchanged here, convincing Fukui dwellers to hold tight to their 'common knowledge' that *komainu* on the right must have closed jaws and those on the left have open jaws. In Fukui city itself the position on the right is held in most cases by the open-jawed Agyō, yet in and around Maizuru city, a culturally different place, we mostly find what I would like to call the "Maizuru style." Let us imagine a devastating air raid hits Maizuru, resulting in a large number of *komainu* casualties, all broken and shattered. Now repair crews from out of town, how would they repair and reposition them? According to the tenets of what passes for truth and common *komainu*-knowledge in Maizuru, or would the repair crews follow other lines of habit? That would mean a disregard for local customs and would amount to imitation of an assumed nationwide standard. Better than using a harsh word like "disregard," connoting a sense of intention, we could say that "The workmen would probably assume *komainu* to be the same everywhere, would not pay attention, and therefore would not notice any difference." Then they would proceed with their distortion of local tradition.

Statements like "It is a fact of common knowledge that the male is on the right and the female on the left" are quickly dismantled as well. *Komainu* sculpted in the classical style, regardless whether they are sitting right or left, display male genitals only. This is an important feature because of the splitting into two genders and the apportioning of sides. Is it not strange then that only the male sports horns, and is it not possible that the one on the right hand side and the one on the left are sculptures of one and the same gender and animal? Furthermore, if we take a pair of *komainu* to be both males, with only one of these two males sporting horns, is it then not possible that we are not dealing with *komainu* and their differences in gender anymore, but with an altogether and wholly different species? In other words, we would have to rearrange our definitions along the lines of these following two equations: "If it does not have horns, then it is a lion (*shishi* 獅子)" and "If it has horns, it is a *komainu*."

Since lion (*shishi*) sculptures are found among the Imperial treasures kept in the Shōsō-in in Nara, as well as in the five-storied pagoda at Hōryū-ji, they must have been introduced into Japan already during the Nara period (8th century). They are just another example of the many imports from the continent. However, the horned *komainu* sculpture is a Japanese creation. Now, to call these Japanese-made creatures *koma-inu* 狛犬 (literally "dogs imported from overseas," *hakurai no inu* 舶来の犬) is indeed a confusion. The Japanese form of the pair of "hornless lions and horned *komainu*" developed during the Heian period (9th-12th centuries); they were for use inside halls and not positioned outside at the approach ways (*sandō*).

In his famous *Tsurezuregusa* (ca. 1330), Yoshida Kenkō transmits a story of the holy man Shōkai visiting the Izumo Shrine in Tango province.⁴ The holy man Shōkai

4. It is story number 236 of the *Tsurezuregusa*. Cf. Keene (1981: 192 ff). The Izumo Shrine

was deeply moved when seeing that the *komainu* had been placed so that their backs faced each other. It was simply a prank by some children, as the famous story goes. The sentence “The lion and *komainu* are placed facing each other’s back” in this story clearly distinguishes between lion and *komainu*. Interesting for us is the word of the holy man Shōkai “These lions (*shishi*) are placed most unusually.” Today we would perceive this as “these *komainu*,” however, the expression here is “these lions.”

If we summarize, during this early period, hornless lions and horned *komainu* became a pair, which then was called lion. However, the pair we are familiar with today and which we call *komainu* became the mainstream only in the Edo period (1603-1867).

Illustrations for the above mentioned passage in modern editions of the *Tsurezuregusa* mostly depict contemporary stone *komainu* (and present-day Classical Japanese Readers for High Schools show quite cute *komainu*). However, it would not be so easy to turn stone *komainu* around to face each other’s backs. What the holy man Shōkai saw were a lion and *komainu* carved from wood and placed inside the *kami* shrine (*shinden* 神殿) or on its porch. At this time it was common knowledge that in any case they were put under a roof, therefore Yoshida Kenkō did not specifically comment upon this. When reading this passage with our present-day perception, the misconception of stone “*komainu* of the approach way” appears in our mind’s eye.

Up to now I have visited 7731 Shintō shrines in Japan. I found *komainu* at just 4706 of them, which is nevertheless a high percentage of 60.9%. Of a total of 6738 *komainu* inspected and investigated, pedestal inscriptions and shrine records show that 1644 of these animals were installed during the Edo period. In only 79 instances were the recorded dates earlier than 1767 (Meiwa 4). This means that 95.2% of Edo-period *komainu* were donated during the one hundred years that passed between the Meiwa period and the Meiji restoration. And the donation of 1161 pairs, that constitutes 70.6% of the total number, is concentrated in the last fifty years of our time frame, between 1817 (Bunka 14) and 1867. Donors were merchants and farmers, with members of the samurai class taking prominence. Accordingly, we can say that only after 1817 the approach way *komainu* (*sandō komainu*) developed as a link with the culture of townspeople.

But the question is when did the *komainu* leave their place under the roof of the shrine and venture out onto the shrine approach way (*sandō*)? The oldest pair of *sandō komainu* with the date of donation I ever found sits on the grounds of the Fudō temple in Meguro, Tokyo. The inscription is carved from the chest down along the front paws and reads: “1654, third month” (of the old calendar). However, there are *komainu* older yet than this one. In his book *komainu o sagashite* 狛犬をさがして

in Tanba was built according to the model of the famous ancient Izumo Shrine in Izumo province (present day Shimane Prefecture). (Trans.)

(Searching for *komainu*) Hashimoto Manpei 橋本万平 (1985) develops a theory of the origin of the *sandō komainu* which guard Ieyasu's tomb at Tōshō-gū in Nikkō. This is a seminal and epoch-making study; nevertheless, I have been unable to locate a copy for perusal. In 1636 (Kan'ei 13), Hashimoto says, a pair of *komainu* sat guard in front of Ieyasu's tomb. After this fact became known among Edo merchants, a pair was installed at the Meguro Fudō temple, as mentioned above. From here develops the theory that subsequently *komainu* were donated to Shintō shrines throughout Japan, and when the tide reached Osaka, stone *komainu* made their appearance in 1736 on the approach way of Sumiyoshi Taisha in Osaka.⁵ However, I was never quite satisfied with this theory of "Osaka coming under the influence of Edo fashions and setting up *komainu*." Later I will touch upon the fact that *komainu* of Edo and those of Osaka differ considerably. When we observe the style of Naniwa *komainu* 浪花狛犬 found in Osaka Prefecture and investigate their historical development, we find that records strongly suggest that between 1615 and 1624 bronze *komainu* were installed on the approach way to Goryō Jinja at Osaka wharf.⁶ These bronze *komainu* may have served as models for the Naniwa type, as I have indicated in my monograph. (Kotera 2003) Here I did not mention the oldest approach way *komainu* at Ieyasu's tomb at Tōshō-gū since I was not yet aware of this fact.

It is of some importance that the Meguro Fudō *komainu* have the date of their donation engraved on their front paws. They are carved from Shakudani stone from Fukui Prefecture.⁷ Along the coast of the Japan Sea, such *komainu* made of this stone were often donated. Following local scholarly tradition, I will call them Hakusan *komainu* 白山狛犬 (White Mountain *komainu*). These *komainu* are originally found only inside the sacred precincts (*jinnai komainu*) and they have an ancient history. (Cf. Fig. 1 showing Hakusan *komainu* in miniature.) The *komainu* at Meguro Fudō is probably influenced by this type.

Let us take a look at the original model of the *komainu* which used to stand at the tomb of the Qing dynasty emperor Qianlong near Xi'an in China made in 706. (See Fig. 2) (They are also the model for those lions which grace the entrances of Chinese restaurants all over the world.) These Chinese original models influenced the Hakusan *komainu* at the end of the Kamakura period (1185-1333) when they took on bigger proportions (body length 1m) and were set up on the approach ways to sanctuaries. An example of these can be viewed at Kono Shrine at Amano-hashidate near Maizuru (see Fig. 3), designated an Important Cultural Asset.

5. Sumiyoshi is the patron of mariners and marine enterprises, also tutelary god of culture in general, poetry in particular, agriculture and industry. Sumiyoshi Taisha became the core and model for many other Sumiyoshi shrines in Japan. (Trans.)

6. Cf. Kotera 2003.

7. Shakudani stone is a kind of volcanic rock found in Japan only in Fukui Prefecture. It is often used for grave stones. (Trans.)



Fig. 1 – Hakusan *komainu* in miniature



Fig. 3 – *Komainu* at Kono Shrine (Ama-no-hashidate near Maizuru)

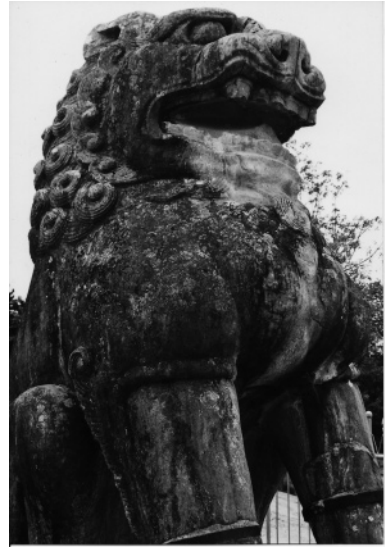


Fig. 2 – *Komainu* at the tomb of Emperor Qienlong near Xi'an

I think that the specimens at the Kono Shrine had an overwhelming influence on the history of approach way *komainu*, but the relation of the Kono Shrine type to those at the Southern Gate of Tōdai-ji in Nara (made in 1196, but installed as *jinnai komainu*) is still *terra incognita* and enveloped by riddles.

3. Cultural Spheres of Approach Way *Komainu*

I began researching *komainu* within the city limits of Uji, and then widened the scope to include Kyoto Prefecture in its entirety. There is no other reason than personal convenience since I live in that area. This seemed the natural thing to do and certainly does not carry any notion of partisanship or hidden agenda. And it turned out to be a lucky place to start. Kyoto Prefecture stretches in a north-south direction for quite some distance. Route 9 goes past Kameoka, Sonobe and Kannon-tōge (Kannon-ridge) towards Fukuchiyama. As an arbitrary division line I choose Kannon-tōge and, not unexpectedly, discovered differences. The scenery

changed, and so did the *komainu*. And I became quite excited. The Naniwa type is concentrated on the Pacific side of Japan, and the Izumo type on the side of the Japan Sea. If the types of *komainu* differ, each of them form their specific culture. Now, if these differences originated during Edo times, should the approach way *komainu* from the Edo period not have formed a number of cultural spheres (*bunka-ken* 文化圏) all over Japan? And should we not call this “*komainu* cultural sphere”? I decided not to follow the theory of a single strand evolution, but the more promising approach of a multiple habitat distribution of *komainu*.

The question of how to set criteria for these cultural spheres posed a big task. The Naniwa *komainu*, for example, appear within the confines of Kyoto Prefecture, and insignificant numbers may also be found along the Japan Sea. But in Osaka Prefecture where Naniwa *komainu* originate, we find that also Izumo-type *komainu* have been brought there. Famous shrines received donations of *komainu* not just from their shrine members (*ujiko* 氏子), but also from many believers from afar. Therefore to concentrate research on renowned shrines only might turn out to produce wrong conclusions. In any case, I believe that it is necessary to survey as many local shrines as possible and to determine which type of *komainu* is found to be dominant in given local areas.

In all these years of study and travel I have come to survey only 9.6 % of all the shrines in Japan. Therefore I write with self-confidence which is equivalent to this small fraction of the overall number of shrines: in other words, with very little self-confidence. Under such presupposition I will introduce a number of cultural spheres of *komainu*.⁸

3.1 The Cultural Sphere of Izumo Komainu

The town of Kimachi near Lake Shinji in Shimane Prefecture produces the Kimachi stone, once called *otodome ishi* (restricted stone) since it was illegal to move it out of the area without the *daimyō*'s consent. From this kind of stone the Izumo-style *komainu* were made which form the Izumo cultural sphere stretching along the Japan Sea from Aomori Prefecture to Yamaguchi Prefecture. Izumo *komainu* were carved in two styles: the placid sitting types, and those with the back arched and front paws low, seemingly ready to pounce. The sedentary kind are the Yaegaki-style *komainu* (cf. Fig. 4), named after the shrine of this name (see below), and the dangerous-looking ones are the Izumo-style *komainu* (see Fig. 5). Whereas their stances differ, the faces and tail tufts are of the same style.

8. Since there is a limit to the number of *komainu* types which can be introduced in this essay, for more details see Kotera 2002. Under the heading “Zenkoku sandō komainu meihin – Chinpin 50 sen” 全国参道狛犬名品・珍品 50 選 (Selection of fifty outstanding Approach Way *komainu*) are published 50 photographs of specimens ranging from Akita to Okinawa.

Fig. 5 – Izumo-style *komainu*Fig. 4 – Yaegaki-style *komainu*

Hiroe Masayuki (2005) writes in his article “Izumo no komainu ni tsuite” 出雲の狛犬について (On Izumo *komainu*) that in the area of Matsue city, Yaegaki *komainu* with donation dates inscribed were installed until 1733 and Izumo-style *komainu* until 1808. However, since the material used is brittle sedimentary rock weathering rapidly, the life span of *komainu* on the approach ways exposed to all kinds of weather is estimated to be one hundred years only. Presumably, many have fallen prey to the rapacious action of the beating rain and glaring sun.

Yaegaki-style *komainu* are the original model for the Izumo-style. When I first encountered this type mostly appearing along the Japan Sea I named them Nihonkai *komainu* 日本海狛犬 (Japan Sea *komainu*). Nevertheless, since they also appear in the north of Kyoto Prefecture as well as on the Tango peninsula, I changed the name to “Tango *komainu*.” There is a certain element of suspense involved whenever one meets one of them face to face, and the memory of the fifteen years I spent studying them lives quite vividly in my mind. Yaegaki jinja in Matsue City is an old shrine.⁹ Its *komainu*, measuring about one meter in length and being rather eroded, are placed at the *sandō*. The pamphlet about the shrine’s history states that “Exact dates on the precinct’s *komainu* are missing. Nevertheless, appearing in ancient colors and somber (*koshoku sōzen* 古色蒼然) they are also masterpieces, and scholars of antiquity usually heave sighs of great pleasure when they see them. It is said that they are one of only two existing pairs of *komainu* in Japan¹⁰ which confer such emotional response.” – The

9. The proximity of Yaegaki jinja to Izumo Taisha and the deities enshrined here, Susano-o and his spouse Kushinada-hime, providing support for marriage-related issues, make the shrine a veritable household word in Japan. (Trans.)

10. The second pair is that at Mefu shrine, also in Matsue.

description “appearing in ancient colors and somber” is not very convincing, especially since shrine publications tend to brush things up a bit. (This expression reminds me of somebody who once wrote about the “*komainu* of the Tempyō period” (749-766), which evoked in me a rather bitter smile. He obviously had no idea that approach way *komainu* were a rather new creation.) Nonetheless, these two figures at Yaegaki Shrine are masterpieces. When viewing them, I tend to judge that this pair conforms rather closely to the style and historical feeling prevalent in the middle of the Edo period. Still, the questions remain unresolved as to why Izumo *komainu* spread in such a wide area and overlap with the distribution of the Hakusan *komainu*, and also what the connections between these two could be.

3.2 The Cultural Sphere of the Edo *Komainu*

After *komainu* were donated to the Meguro Fudō temple, various other shrines of Edo received them too. According to the report *Sandō komainu dai-kenkyū* 参道 狛犬大研究 (Comprehensive research on *sandō komainu*) by Nihon sandō komainu kenkyū-kai 日本参道狛犬研究会 (Japanese research group on *sandō komainu* 2000), 144 pairs conforming to my definition of the Edo-type *komainu* can be found in the present day Tokyo area. They can be divided into new and old types, both of which can be seen in the whole Kantō plain.

The older one called Old Edo-style *komainu* is distinguished by the form of its tail tuft which stands up like a big brush. (Cf. Fig. 6) Examples of this type are at Tsukudo shrine in Chiyoda-ku, donated 1760, and at Ana Hachiman-gū in Shinjuku, donated 1755, both in Tokyo. The newer one is recognized by the (assumed) swishing motion of its tail between left and right and is called Edo-style *komainu*. (See Fig. 7)

Edo *komainu* combine a pair of lions, many of them holding a cub or a jewel.¹¹ Those equipped with a cub are called *kotori* 子取り and those holding a jewel are named *tamatori* 玉取り. This form is quite common in China. Furthermore, a special feature of this area is the carving of the Lion Mountain (*shishi yama* 獅子山), named after a legend according to which a lion parent pushes the cub into an abyss to harden it against the vicissitudes of life. Such statue depicts a lion placed on a rock and a cub beneath it. The material used for this type is normally Komatsu stone.¹²

The cultural sphere of the Edo *komainu* begins in the Kantō plain, but I do not know up to where it extends towards the North-East. Sendai is a center for the *komainu* type characterized by a slender body and a head with bushy eyebrows and wide open eyes. It is possible that the North-Eastern region (Tōhoku) forms a cultural sphere of its own, but this cannot be stated yet firmly. Towards the West, the

11. *Tama* 玉 symbolizes the ball of vital energy. (Trans.)

12. Komatsu stone is a kind of light gray tufa stone. (Trans.)

Fig. 7 – Edo-style *komainu*Fig. 6 – Old Edo-style *komainu*

Edo *komainu* area is supposed to touch the borderline of the Naniwa *komainu*, and I assumed the borderline for *komainu* to be the same as the borderline between the different tastes of *ramen* noodles in eastern and western Japan, namely somewhere around Lake Hamana. However, this does not appear to be the case. The cultural sphere of Edo *komainu* ends in the area of Shizuoka. But the cultural sphere of *komainu* further down in Nagoya, Gifu and Mie seems to be blank space.

3.3 The Cultural Sphere of Naniwa *Komainu*

Broadly speaking, one could say that the *komainu* manufactured in Osaka during the Edo period are called Naniwa *komainu*. There exist today in Osaka Prefecture alone 615 pairs of them donated and date-inscribed during the Edo period. The history of the development of Naniwa *komainu* made of stone can be divided into the following seven periods.

A. Period of the Sumiyoshi *komainu*¹³

The oldest *komainu* of this type sit in front of the Taiko-Bridge at Sumiyoshi Shrine in Sumiyoshi ward (Osaka). It was donated in 1736, is sculptured in granite and has unique features. (See Fig. 8)

13. The periods in this and the following sections start by the latest with the years provided in each section. The different types of *komainu* subsequently begin to coexist simultaneously. (Trans.)



Fig. 8 – Naniwa-style Sumiyoshi-form
komainu



Fig. 9 – *Komainu* at Kunijima Shrine
(Higashi-yodogawa, Osaka)

B. Period of the Frightful form of *komainu* (*kyōfu-gata komainu* 恐怖型狛犬)

The *komainu* at Kunijima Shrine in Higashi-yodogawa ward (Osaka) was donated in 1745 (See Fig. 9) This *komainu* was carved with a ferocious expression. Since it received little popular support, it is rarely seen and classifies as a minority.

C. Period of the Kumata form of *komainu*

The oldest *komainu* of this type are found at Kumata jinja, Hirano ward (Osaka) in front of the *kami* hall (*shinden*). They were donated in 1748; their legs are short and the body long.

D. Period of the Jōgū form of *komainu*

The oldest *komainu* of this type are found at Jōgū Tenmangū shrine, placed here in 1759. The head is probably modeled after the lion mask of the Lion Dance (*shishi-mai* 獅子舞). Part of the mane is carved for the first time as straight strands of hair.

E. Period of the Miwa form of *komainu*

The oldest *komainu* of this type are found at Miwa Shrine in Takatsuki city, situated before the prayer hall (*haiden* 拝殿) and donated in 1785. Whereas the mane of the Agyō side is composed of both curls and straight strands of hair (like in the case of the Jōgū *komainu*), the Ungyō side has been reworked into a mane of straight hair only.

F. Period of the Naniwa form of *komainu*
komainu with cute rounded facial features are found at Ikeda jinja in Ikeda city, donated in 1816. They represent the Naniwa type; they were modified during the Tenmei period (1781-1788) and served as main model for the *komainu* boom after the Bunka period (1804-1817). (See Fig. 10)



Fig. 10 – Naniwa-style Naniwa-form *komainu*

G. Period of the Bullfrog form of *komainu*
 The oldest *komainu* of this type were donated in 1836, they are placed before the Prayer Hall of Hakken Shrine in Jōtō ward (Osaka). The form of extended chin resembles a bullfrog (*gama*), hence the name.

These seven types, especially the Naniwa form of *komainu*, were widely distributed across southern Kyoto Prefecture, Nara Prefecture and along the whole coastal area of the Inland Sea (Setonai-kai).¹⁴

Within the cultural sphere of Naniwa *komainu*, in Okayama Prefecture we find the Inbe-style *komainu* (or Bizen ware *komainu*; see Fig. 11, Gion Shrine in Okayama Prefecture) being produced since the Bunka era (1804-1817), as well as the Onomichi-style *komainu* which have both front paws rested on a big jewel (*tama*). (Cf. Fig. 12, Otamahiko Shrine, Hiroshima Prefecture) Proceeding towards Shikoku and the South, we frequently find a combination of Izumo- and Naniwa-



Fig. 11 – Inbe-style *komainu* (Bizen ware *komainu*)



Fig. 12 – Onomichi-style *komainu* (Otamahiko Shrine, Hiroshima Prefecture)

14. For more detailed information, see Kotera (2003).

style *komainu*. The characteristic *komainu* of Hagi in Yamaguchi Prefecture can be seen as a combination of Hizen- (see next section) and Naniwa-style, but a lot of research still has to be done.

3.4 The Cultural Sphere of the Hizen Komainu

In the northern part of Kyūshū we find a special kind of *komainu* culture called Hizen *komainu* which is concentrated in Fukuoka and Saga Prefectures. (See Fig. 13; Suiten-gū, Kurume city; date uncertain.) In this area is a strong cultural influx from the continent because of its close proximity. Old arched stone bridges, for instance, are concentrated here. The fact that the distribution area of Hizen *komainu* overlaps more or less with that of Hizen shrine gates (*torii* 鳥居), characterized by unusual low height and thick beams, also deserves attention. The peculiarity of Hizen *komainu*, considered together with the prevalence of Hizen shrine gates in this area, should be taken into consideration for further study.

3.5 The Cultural Sphere of the Shīsā

Statues similar to *komainu* are the *shīsā* in Okinawa which are figures of lions (*shishi*). There are a number of studies on the *shīsā*, but the connection with *komainu* has not yet been investigated in depth.

4. Contemporary Style of Okazaki Komainu

Most of the present-day donations of *komainu* are of the type called Okazaki contemporary style. (See Fig. 14) They were made since the end of the Meiji period. After having won an award from the Minister of the Interior at that time, they spread rapidly all over Japan and, for the first time in the history of *komainu*, achieved a nationwide supremacy. They are simply in the style of a pair of lions (*shishi* – *shishi*) with the same expression all over Japan.¹⁵ This type destroys the local *komainu* culture spheres and is the main perpetrator of uniformity, which is utterly deplorable. Therefore, I strongly demand support for the resurrection of the rich local pluriformity in the *komainu* cultural spheres of each region.

5. The Komainu Culture Spheres – Some Conclusions

One should not expect that the motive to donate *komainu* derives only from a religious impulse. For instance, if we survey the donors of the Naniwa *komainu*, then we find the names of Osaka merchants inscribed on the pedestals as well as those of local power-holders acting as go-betweens. Merchants probably used

15. Thus they foster to a certain Pan-Japan homogeneity. (Trans.)



Fig. 14 – Okazaki Contemporary-style *komainu*

Fig. 13 – Hizen-style *komainu* (Suiten-gū,
Kurume city)

these donations as a means to foster a bond of trust with the villagers. In this sense, the activities of merchants inscribed on the *komainu* since the Bunka and Bunsei periods (1804-1830) also provide evidence for a wider regional development of merchandise economy.

Komainu were originally installed in order to protect sacred precincts against evil. Therefore, their essentially apotropaic role is the same as that of the Guardian Deva Kings (*niō* 仁王) at Buddhist temple gates. However, the *komainu* subsequently changed into charming creatures. For example, *komainu* performing a handstand are numerous, tending to suggest “Men and women of good will entering here are most welcome!” When they were donated and set up by merchants to strengthen the bond with localities, they certainly accord with the spirit of “doing business with a smiling face.”

I do not question here the pious religiosity of the donors. Yet there were also very human reasons for the donations as well. The inscriptions provide not only the donor’s name, but also information on his previous and present place of living, thereby strongly exhibiting the pride of a person having become successful somewhere else. For instance, there is a rather small *komainu* at the Kitano Tenmangū Shrine in Kyoto. Its body length is just 57cm and it was donated in 1839 by Mizuno Tadakuni. On its pedestal is inscribed in large letters: “Donated and set up by [Mizuno] Tadakuni, Lord of Hamamatsu Castle in Tōtōmi, Lower Fourth Court Rank, Governor of Echizen, Nobleman of the Minamoto [clan].”¹⁶ Even though at this time in Kyoto big

16. Mizuno Tadakuni (1794-1851) instituted reforms which included forcing *daimyō* around Osaka and Edo to leave their ancestral lands and take up residence in areas provided by the government, but distant from the power centers. (Trans.)

komainu were made of granite, Tadakuni chose a statue carved in much cheaper Izumi sandstone. The smallness of the statue and the large size of the inscription reveal his character as a stingy person, which makes us laugh.

When there were *komainu* in the shrine of the next village but none at one's own parish, this caused people to have inferiority feelings. Rather than indicating a sudden increase of religiosity in certain areas, such donations were deeds enabling a "rivalry consciousness of village against village." Those who were late in donating could always compensate by ordering a *komainu* made of more valuable stone; here we can see a feeling of "We don't want to be defeated by the neighboring village!" Such competition resulted in a boom of *komainu* donations in all regions.

When it comes to the Meiji period, directly after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) *komainu* inscriptions such as "In commemoration of the victory" and "In memory of our military expedition and return" increased. And after the inscription "In memory of the Imperial Enthronement Ceremony" of the Taishō Emperor (enthroned 1912), as well as that of the Shōwa Emperor (enthroned 1926), we find for the year 1940 (Shōwa 15) the inscription "Felicitations on the 2600th anniversary of the establishment of Imperial Rule." This very likely constitutes the year in which the most *komainu* ever were donated all over Japan. Then, during World War II we find the inscription "Long live our army – Surrender of the enemy country," but between the lines probably was written the wish for "Safe return." After the end of the war, inscriptions of wishes continue, such as the following: "For the safety of the shrine parishioners," "In commemoration of the company's founding in the year ...," "Pledges to make wishes come true," "In commemoration of having reached old age,"¹⁷ and "In commemoration of the silver wedding."

Thus we can see that the *komainu* which have been installed were dedicated with a variety of wishes. While reflecting on the hearts of the donors and imagining the proud figures of the times when they were set up, when thinking about the lives of the people who have now perished there in history, a sobering feeling overcomes me.

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17. Traditionally, this age was reached in Japan when becoming 40 years old. (Trans.)

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