



# Daruma— a bringer of good fortune

達磨

*As far as traditional characters go, the daruma must be one of the best known in Japan. Now considered a type of good luck charm, it's not unusual to see the daruma used as a design element on various items, including as souvenirs.*

While almost cartoon-styled daruma are common today, the origins of the daruma figure are to be found in Zen Buddhism. Daruma is a representation of the founder of Zen Buddhism in China, the Indian priest Bodhidharma.

Bodhidharma or (Bodai) Daruma in Japanese is said to have spent nine years meditating in a cave and lost his legs and arms in the process. In Japanese art, there are many images that depict the priest with a very serious or contemplative face as he mediates. There are images showing him standing or meditating where he clearly has both arms and legs. (Type in 'daruma' in the online collection search on the Art Gallery of New South Wales' webpage and you'll get a taste of the variety of depictions. There's even a woman 'daruma'!) However, it is the rounded form of the daruma that has become the main *fuku-daruma* or good-luck daruma today.



Darumas left at Darumaji Temple in Gunma to be respectfully disposed of

Takasaki City in Gunma prefecture [see p.8] is home to Darumaji Temple, the birthplace of the rounded *fuku-daruma* that has become so popular. The manufacture of the daruma figures is tied to the silk industry which was important in the area. Farmers made the papier-mâché charms during the winter months for sale at the *daruma-ichi* or daruma market around the New Year. One of the biggest is held at the

Darumaji Temple. Today Takasaki is the leading producer of daruma dolls in Japan.

The Takasaki daruma figures originally clearly showed a figure meditating, having a curve between the head and body. This later became an elongated shape like a silk cocoon. Over time, a more rounded figure which righted itself when tilted was favoured, and the modern *fuku-daruma* had arrived. The role of the daruma doll as a good luck charm can even be seen in the way the eyebrows and moustache are painted. Takasaki darumas have stylised cranes for eyebrows and, a little harder to see, turtles for moustaches—both animals are considered auspicious.

So, how does the charm work? When you purchase a *fuku-daruma* its eyes will still be blank. You make a wish and paint on the first eye. When your wish is fulfilled, you paint on the other eye. They are normally used for special wishes such as to pass an exam, for a successful harvest or even to win an election.

As a good luck charm, you are supposed to dispose of the *fuku-daruma* respectfully. There are temples in Japan that will accept them and later burn them at a special time of year. But if you're here in Australia, maybe a heartfelt 'thank-you' before you pop him in the paper recycling will do?

## The story behind the banner

You might have been wondering about this issue's banner image. It's a close-up of a traditional Japanese board game known as *sugoroku*. This particular version is *esugoroku* or 'picture' *sugoroku*.

The original *sugoroku* called *ban-sugoroku* is a type of backgammon that was introduced from China in the 6th century; *esugoroku* is a type of snakes-and-ladders which became popular in the Edo Period when printing developed.

The first *esugoroku* had religious themes and the players wanted to reach heaven and avoid hell, but they developed to include different themes such as travelling through famous tourist spots.



Today the game is rarely played except by children at the New Year. Still *sugoroku* lives on inspiring various computer games including in 2003 a Hello Kitty *sugoroku* game—there's one for Yu-Gi-Oh too!