This article aims to reveal how folk customs manifest themselves in the modern society. To this end, the Big Hina-doll Festival in Katsuura Town, Katsuura District, Tokushima Prefecture, is used as a case study to analyze how and why a folk custom has developed to an event that represents and revitalizes a community even though it is not original or indigenous to the community.

Katsuura Town, Tokushima Prefecture, was the first town in the prefecture to start orange cultivation before World War II and prospered as an orange-growing town until around the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Then, with the decline of orange cultivation, the town, like so many others, suffered depopulation. Against this backdrop, the Big Hina-doll Festival was held to revitalize the town in 1988, since when it has been held annually up to the present time except for one year. This was originally designed for town people and led by the town office staff who aimed to make it a nationally recognized festival. Although neither hina-doll festival nor hina dolls were unique to the town, the event distinguished itself by displaying a great number of hina dolls collected from households in and around the town on a huge red-carpeted staircase.

Then, with more town people joining the management, the festival was transferred from public to private hands, and a private association possessed premises as a venue for the festival. Thus, by privatizing the festival, a variety of limitations due to being a public event were removed. Moreover, the adoption of new creative ways of displaying hina dolls enhanced the flexibility for town people to participate in the festival. This novelty drew a large audience from in and around the town, and the festival gradually grew to an event that attracted tourists from all over the prefecture and the Kinki Region. Furthermore, the town increased the national recognition of the festival by providing its know-how, as well as collected hina dolls, for municipalities requiring revitalization programs all over Japan.

The reason behind this success was because the festival was recognized as a new opportunity to reuse hina dolls which had spread throughout the country since the end of World War II along with the custom of the Girls’ Festival in March and then been packed away at households as their daughters grew up. This also reflects the contemporary development of folk customs that hina dolls are shared through tourism after they were no longer used at home.

Key words: hina-doll festival, national rituals, community revitalization, non-profit organizations, seasonal festivals, Big Hina-doll Festival