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As I walked through the old style "machiya" houses that line the Tosa Road in the quiet town of Takatori, Nara, I couldn't help but wonder if this was how lively the area was back in this old town's heyday. Tosa, which comes from the old name for the Kochi area in Shikoku, is the name of this street because it is said that many people came here from Shikoku to help build the Asuka imperial palace.

In March this street comes alive once again because of the newly started tradition (from 2007) of displaying the Hina Dolls along the road in people's old style houses and shops. People began displaying Hina dolls in the Heian period and believed that the dolls could harness the bad spirits. Stemming from an ancient Shinto tradition called Hina Nagashi, they would float these straw dolls down the river and out to sea, taking with them the bad spirits and negative energies. Today in Takatori, you can see examples of both the Kansai (Kyo) style and the Kanto (Edo) style of displaying, which display the top two male and female dolls oppositely.

This road leads up to a famous temple called Tsubosaka Temple, which sits on the side of the overlooking mountain. Continuing farther into the mountains leads you to the Takatori Castle Ruins, which is one of Japan's three largest mountain castles. The structure of high stone walls still remain on top of the mountain, which commands a magnificent view of Nara and the Yoshino area. With CG enhanced images that universities have created from research, we can see how massive this castle would have been in the past.

Coming to this solemn place reminded me of the famous song "Kojyo no Tsuki" ("The Moon Over the Castle Ruins"). The composer, Taki Rentaro, used the Oka-jo castle ruins in Takeda City, Oita Prefecture, as his inspiration. The lyricist, Doi Bansui, was inspired by the Tsuruga-jo Castle Ruins in Fukushima Prefecture in the north. Personally, I have been inspired by the Takatori Castle Ruins and have composed a song called "Yamato no Tsuki" ("The Moon Over Yamato"), loosely based on the original.

I believe that tradition is something that should be preserved and passed on from generation to generation. There is much we can learn from the past. However, at the same time we need to remember that traditions were created by people, and they evolve along the way. The Town of Takatori started with a dozen houses participated in the Hina Dolls display. Now the whole town has embraced it, with well over a hundred houses and businesses displaying dolls. The town attracts people from all over the country; even some foreign visitors make their way to Takatori. Through the arts, I also believe that with a blending of the past we can create something new and interesting for modern people. "The Moon Over Yamato" is an example of the convergence between someone bringing their own experiences and expressions to a traditional piece of music.