



The Legend of Kasajizou

ONCE upon a time there lived a poor but kind-hearted old man and his wife.

One year, on New Year's Eve, the old man and his wife were making straw hats called *kasa*. They intended to sell them in town and then use the money to buy rice cakes for New Year's.

"If I sell five hats, I can at least buy us some rice cakes," said the old man. "I'm looking forward to that!" the old woman replied, seeing him off. "It looks like it's going to snow tonight, so be careful!" The old man took the five hats and left.

Indeed, soon after the old man left the house, it began to snow, falling harder and harder as he walked on. When he reached the outskirts of town,

he came across six *jizou*—statues of Buddhas who protect the common folk—standing in a row. Snow was piling up on their heads and shoulders. The old man could not leave them as they were.

"Poor *jizou*, you must be cold in all this snow," he said. "Please take these hats." The old man brushed the snow off the *jizou* and put the straw hats he had intended to sell in town on their heads. Since he only had five hats, the old man removed his own head wrap and placed it on the final statue's head.

When he returned home, his wife was surprised. "My, you're home early," she said.



“What happened to your head wrap?” The old man told his wife about the *jizou*.

“That was very good of you,” said his wife, and she smiled.

That night, while the old man and his wife were sleeping, they heard a strange song coming from outside:

Where is the old man’s house?

We have come to thank him for his hats

Where is the old man’s house?

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The singing voices came closer and closer. When they finally arrived in front of the house, the couple heard a huge thud, as if something heavy had been set down. The singing suddenly stopped.

The couple slowly opened the door to see the backs of the *jizou* that had received the old man’s hats and head wrap moving away. They then discovered heaps of rice cakes and delicious food for the New Year’s holiday in front of their house. Thanks to the *jizou*, the old man and his wife were able to happily celebrate the New Year. 

THE HOME OF THE KASAJIZOU LEGEND

There are several places throughout Japan that are said to be the setting for “Kasajizou,” but one of them, Hanaizumi in Ichinoseki City of Iwate Prefecture, has installed six *jizou* at the entrance of its Shimizu Park to help preserve the tale for posterity.

Located in the Tohoku region in the northern part of the main island of Japan, Iwate Prefecture is the second-largest prefecture in Japan. Renowned as a particularly cold region, it receives heavy snowfalls in the winter. Near the city of Ichinoseki lies the popular tourist destination of Hiraizumi, one of the two World Heritage sites in Tohoku.

