

***KOKESHI: CONTINUED AND CREATED TRADITIONS***  
**(MOTIVATIONS FOR A JAPANESE FOLK ART DOLL)**

by

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This study will concentrate on the transformative nature of culturally specific folk art objects, and how they are contextualized within narratives of national tradition and regionalism. Utilizing the Japanese wooden folk art doll *kokeshi* as a vivid example, I will explore how tradition becomes embodied in objects, and in turn how the image of the *kokeshi* is actively used to define perceived traditional spaces under the umbrella of cultural nationalism and nostalgia. The establishment of folk art categories like *kokeshi* reflects the deeper dynamics of Japanese nation building, and the role that the Tōhoku region (the production area for *kokeshi*) plays in national cohesiveness. Tōhoku and the products within it act as perceived repositories of tradition and self-discovery in what are defined as *furusato* (hometown) spaces. Those landscapes and objects found within these hometowns become by association traditional and evocative of a past more simple and serene lifestyle. The classification, collection, and creation of works devoted to the perceived regional characteristics of *kokeshi* will be explored in relation to the larger topic of national cohesion and the formations of traditions.

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## **NOTES ON LANGUAGE**

All Japanese names within the body of the text appear as last name first and first name last, as they would in Japanese. In the Acknowledgments section, though, individuals are listed with first name first and last name last, as is standard in English.

While many people (See Acknowledgments) were consulted in the translation and re-translation of various pieces found throughout this dissertation, I assume full responsibility for all final translated products. All individuals were given the option of using a pseudonym, but none minded that their true names be used. In the event that something controversial or detrimental was mentioned, I used a more general identifier such as “artisan”. No pseudonym for location was used as it would be nearly impossible to describe *kokeshi* producing regions without their direct mention. The decision to use real names even after permission and real place names is primarily motivated by a need to identify individuals by their craft as this dissertation hopes to bring the accomplishments of artisans to light and their continued connection to very specific regions within Japan.



## INTRODUCTION

As a means to bolster national cohesion, define elements of cultural tradition, and map out localities of a true Japanese essence, Japan has creatively drawn from both its past, specifically from the Edo period (1600 to 1868), and the perceived bucolic image of the Tōhoku region (Northern Honshū). This study concentrates on the transformative nature of culturally specific folk art objects, and how they are contextualized within narratives of national tradition and regionalism. The classification of folk art and its image in the minds of the Japanese people has been highly influenced by the appropriation of past traditions during periods of creation, expansion, and periodic disruption of the Japanese nation. One result of this appropriation is the conception that Tōhoku and the products within it act as perceived repositories of tradition and self-discovery.

Accordingly, several main themes will be discussed in their relation to the formation of traditions and folk art categories. First, Japan, like other nations, has fostered periods of national pride and cohesion by celebrating the philosophies and lifestyles of specific historical periods, encouraging a disconnected and discontented urban-dwelling populace to seek ideal lifestyles in perceived rural landscapes. Periods of increased cultural nationalism within Japan have encouraged, albeit an idealized, rural lifestyle found in Tōhoku and have in part been propagated by several travel campaigns promising self-discovery through the experience of a *furusato* (home

town).<sup>1</sup> *Furusato* can be perceived to be found in northern regions like Tōhoku, and those landscapes and objects found within these hometowns become by association traditional and evocative of a past more simple and serene lifestyle. The Japanese creation of emic categories of tradition is a dynamic process that directly impacts the image of the Tōhoku region in both positive and negative ways, and helps to form relevant meanings for the products therein. The establishment of folk art categories like *kokeshi* reflects the deeper dynamics of Japanese nation building, and the role that the Tōhoku region plays in national cohesiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> “*Furusato* literally means ‘old village,’ but its closer English equivalents are home, heritage, and native place” (Robertson 1995: 89).

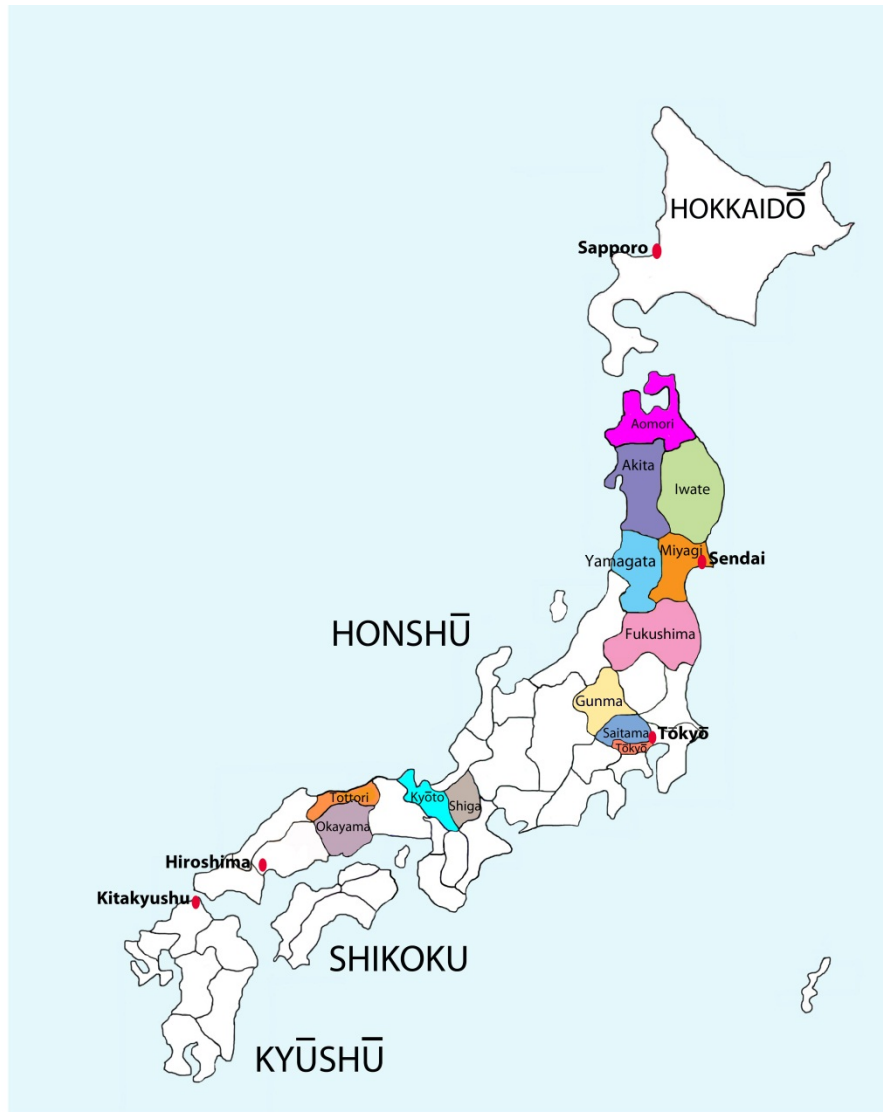


Figure 1. Map of Japan with Mentioned Prefectures. Created by Michael A. McDowell

## 1.1 TRADITION AND NATION

Utilizing the Japanese wooden folk art doll *kokeshi* as a vivid example, I will explore how tradition becomes embodied in objects, and in turn how the image of the *kokeshi* is actively used to define perceived traditional spaces under the umbrella of cultural nationalism and nostalgia. The *kokeshi* was first produced in the Tōhoku region between 1804 and 1811, fully developing into a toy for children and souvenir during the Tenpō period of the Edo era, between 1830 and 1843 (Hirai 2003: 3). As handmade toys fell out of favor as the preference for factory made ones developed in the 1920s, *kokeshi* were redefined as traditional folk toys by collectors enchanted by past playthings. These collectors were also eager to preserve this doll from supposed demise, emphasizing that *kokeshi* were worth preserving as they were symbolic of Japan's unique national heritage and the character of its people.

The cohesion and continuance of a nation in part rests on the ability of its people to trace themselves back to a common origin located in a tangible time period, creating a history, the details of which can be passed down through the generations to continue cultural existence and a cohesive national landscape. This history passed down can become cultural traditions, or, as defined by Hobsbawm (1983), invented traditions. Invented traditions reflect the differing options and actions of creation a country or community may turn to in order to legitimate their claim to a more desirable past, evoke nationhood, and draw attention to an aspect of cultural heritage that has been neglected by industry. The malleable nature of tradition then can allow for certain groups to accentuate and highlight specific aspects within a nation that are perceived representative of an ideal historical timeframe. Nations, often looking for an existing model to unite a disparate populace, promote an idealized rural lifestyle. Individuals who participated in

Industrial Revolutions of Europe felt disconnected from non-industrial landscapes, promoting recreational activities to regain a sense of these landscapes through the consumption of handmade objects, handmade by people imagined to still belong to this more simple and natural world (Phillips 1998: 10). In a similar vein, American and English disillusionment with their industrial revolutions produced a nostalgia movement that sought for a simpler life, “. . . these needs were displaced onto a special category of exotica, tourist art, which was constructed not just to represent the idea of the handmade, but also to display iconographic motifs and forms that signified ‘old’ ways of life imagined as simpler and more satisfying” (Phillip & Steiner 1999: 13). In the case of England, this old way of life, or new Englishness, was not found in a “dead past”, but an easily accessible “south country” (Howkins 1986: 72). The Southern countryside of England was, therefore, imagined as the authentic site of the Elizabethan golden age and Merrie England (Howkins 1986: 71). For Japan, a concern that rapid modernization at the end of the Meiji Restoration, coupled with the disappearance and replacement of what were considered to be historical and cultural material assets of the country, prompted the government to eventually construct a national image linked to a perceived positive period in Japan’s history and matching idealized landscapes. The Japanese government and scholars looked to the not so distant past, the Edo period, to create a cultural space and repository of traditions (*dentō*) for the Japanese people to construct their lives around and to serve as a blueprint to organize the Japanese nation (Gluck 1998: 263). Similarly, Kinichi proposes that the ambivalent feeling the Japanese had about their own culture and the rapidity of outside cultural influences during the early half of the *Meiji* period, “. . . slowly developed into cultural and politico-economic nationalism” (2004: 77). Japan’s nation building campaigns can clearly be traced to specific time periods and, as Traphagan suggests, produced for the Japanese a homogeneous Japan with homogeneous

traditional values (Traphagan 2006: 6). The Edo period and the Tōhoku region continued to serve as a unifying image for the Japanese nation, most notably during the *Mingei* Movement during the Taishō period (1912-1926), and the nostalgia travel campaigns and folk art and folk toy collecting booms in the Shōwa period (1926-1989).

While the nation building campaigns in Japan, as well as more recent nostalgic tourism campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s, have pitted the industrial, crowded and fast-paced conditions of city life with the natural, open, and slow-paced lifestyles of the countryside, scholars have expressed that through the process of commercial campaigns and creation of traditional places and images, “tradition” becomes a modern process. It was only through the preservation of the rural that would enable the Japanese nation as a whole to function successfully. Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962), Japan’s first ethnologist, argued that if modern Japan could not maintain its rural essence then true modernity could not be established in its metropolitan center (Hashimoto 1998: 135). “Here, he [Yanagita Kunio] was rereading the geographical distinction between center and periphery as a temporal distinction between modern and ancient. Because the peripheral/ancient sphere preserved Japanese beliefs in their purest form, it was only by using it as a base that the ‘true’ Japan could be recuperated in the modern sphere” (Hashimoto 1998: 137). Although Yanagita was writing primarily in the early 1900s, Handler and Linnekin (1984) similarly state that the appropriation and reconstruction of tradition is not a consequence of modernity, but a necessary condition for the construction of human culture – we seek out elements of the past to create a sense of self and belonging to a larger social whole (In Chambers 2000: 97).

Japan’s emphasis on certain rural localities, especially in Tōhoku, has created a form of cultural tourism that caters to the Japanese tourists’ need to find an authentically traditional Japan. Tourism’s continued connection with perceived traditional landscapes, performances, and

souvenirs enables tourists to interact simultaneously in the times and the traditions of their own choosing, and ones that enhance their modern lifestyles. Tourism within Japan is one of the few venues where traditional structures and objects remain because they are not separate from the modern dynamism, but recreated and reconstructed traditions with contemporary meanings that have adapted to “an ever-changing present” (Guichard-Auguis 2000: 107). Ivy (1995), seemingly to predict the changing qualities of tradition and tourism in Japan as discussed by Guichard-Auguis, emphasizes the paradox of Japan in that it is simultaneously both a modern nation and a nation that maintains traditional practices. She differs from other discussions of the maintenance of traditional culture, though, by stating that it is not just a rendered down version of the concept of “invented tradition.” Instead of an overly simplistic dichotomy between authentic and inauthentic culture, the process of creating a national origin evokes phantasmal qualities of an ephemeral idea of the past that can fluctuate in its comings and goings. Events, cultural practices, and sites seen as vanishing and materialized within the growing modernization of the nation are suspended at moments of impending disappearance. The unifying ideal and the embodiment of what it is to be Japanese were created from multiple images not necessarily connected, an illusion of something that existed, but never really did, facilitated by the idea that the past can appear and disappear through the participation in constructed moments of its reawakening. These constructed moments are ever present in the touristic consumption of folk art objects, and regional products discovered on trips, presumably reawakening a connection to a traditional moment.

The ways in which different generations within Japan have defined self-hood in connection with disparate tourist landscapes further complicates how tradition is represented in time and relationships to landscapes defined as *furusato*. “Deliberately invented by the Liberal

Democratic Party in the 70's and 80's as a means of 'cultural administration', *furusato* were formulated as remote repositories of traditional Japanese virtue" (Rea 2000: 642). For Japanese populations living in the modern cities of Japan, it was stressed that they had lost touch with their true sense of Japanese self and national home. To regain these lost features, they could travel to a perceived older, more distant, Japan located primarily in the countryside of Tōhoku. A traditional experience and traditional objects often are secluded in the distant northern regions of Japan, and, as Yano (2002) has experienced with Japanese songs, the further north the better in evoking feelings of traditional longing. Creighton states that this process of equating rural areas with the traditional past is indeed a process that replaces a temporal distance with a geographical one (1997: 252).

The term "*furusato*" is used to define and label those places where Japan's tradition could be found. *Furusato* is often associated with a "special past", usually that of the Edo period, and in its connection with the term *mukashi*. "*Mukashi* alludes to the Good Old Days, as in the expression, *mukashi no omokage* (an old feature). . . . It refers to modes and contexts of sociability long since transcended, abandoned, or dismantled in the wake of urbanization, but reconstructable and revivable in a selective form through nostalgia and tourism" (Robertson 1995: 91). One could not find *furusato* in one's own neighborhood, only in the furthest reaches of Japan's northern region where it was assumed that people were still living as Japanese did during the Edo period and earlier. Creighton, in her exploration of *furusato*, states that travel to rural areas became a way to ". . . return to the 'womb of Japan,' and to a Japanese *kokoro*" (1997: 244). From Zen philosophy, "the *kokoro* (heart/mind) is one's spirit before existence, one's pure state before the world, culture, and other influences penetrated one's being" (Creighton 1997: 244). The term *furusato* is a repository of childhood memories despite an



urban childhood home; *furosato* is imagined as a rural landscape (Creighton 1997: 242). It is no wonder, then, that the collection of folk toys heightened as individuals sought ways to reconnect with their *furusato*.

Perhaps it is the unattainable nature of finding *furusato* that allows for many Japanese to feel comfortable briefly interacting in a rural environment, but never having to live within one permanently. To just experience a festival, folk performance, or to see folk art being constructed, acts as evidence enough that *furusato* has been glimpsed and a portion of one's *kokoro* has been repaired. For these campaigns, the theory of travel and origins of the self, constitute an original Japanese self and an authentic heart which can be found in rural, remote, non-American landscapes (Ivy 1995: 42). "Travel is the operator which connects the terms [of self and heart] by allowing the displacement of discovery, as it permits a temporary recovery of a lost self" (Ivy 1995: 42). These feelings are summarized in the phrase *kokoro no furusato* which, according to Reader, ". . . equally denotes a spiritual sense of belonging, a cultural and emotional home intrinsic to the Japanese experience" (1987: 290). Photographic advertisements for the Discover Japan Campaign of the 1970s and 1980s meant to encourage travel, emphasized a landscape that was no longer passively viewed by an observer, but provided a repository of the past (Ivy 1995: 42). Martinez (1990), in her study of *ama* (woman divers), contrasts the realities of the *ama* and the mass-media image of them where they exist in an idealized pre-Meiji time frame. Tourists, drawn by this media image of a pre-Meiji landscape filled with samurai values, including beautiful *kimono* clad women, strong and brave men, and happy simple peasants, seek self-discovery and lost Japanese values (Martinez 1990: 101).

It should be noted that Tōhoku embodies a more primal tradition, in direct contrast to the refined traditions of Nara, Kyoto, and Tokyo. These regions exhibit a long history of cultural

traditions evident in their ceramics, lacquer ware, and other fine folk arts. A result of its late incorporation into the already established Southern and Central regions of Honshū, Tōhoku has seemingly retained its status as a wild mountainous countryside. Low populations in Tōhoku prefectures in relation to Tokyo or other large Japanese cities also add to its *inaka* (countryside) status. The region's supposed wild and backwards character is imagined as a perfect repository of Japan's fetal beginnings, when it was fresh and pure, unsullied by modernization and westernization.

## **1.2 TRADITION, OBJECTS, AND, TRAVEL**

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century nostalgia-based tourism in Japan set the stage for the consumption of objects that fit in with new definitions of tradition. Kurita notes that the initial stages of what he calls “growing uniformity” among cultures stimulate an awareness of the traditional arts. In time, this interest dictates the definite shape of those traditional art forms (1983: 132). Specific objects, then, become carriers and signifiers of tradition. Brant notes that as tourism in Japan during the 1920s and 1930s evolved to accommodate an ever increasing public, a demand for local services, experiences, and objects also increased (2007: 75). Once regarded as an elite past time, or esoteric, collecting objects associated with the rural past, specifically folk toys, became popular with middle-class men and women (Brandt 2007: 75). Government sponsored publications in the late 1920s, provided this public with portable guides to folk art and folk toy production locations throughout the archipelago, encouraging the traveling to traditional landscapes and the consumption of “local” traditional culture.

It has been argued by Yoshino that cultural nationalism is propagated by intellectuals or thinking elites, and it is not surprising that middleclass touristic consumption in Japan was in part inspired by what Brandt terms the “agrarian picturesque” tastes of established elites (2007: 76). To say that intellectuals were the sole motivators of such behavior, though, would be to ignore the strong sense of attachment Japanese at the time felt towards villages they or their parents had left behind and the increased awareness by this public that old-style rural community life was rapidly disappearing (Brandt 2007: 76). As tourist populations changed, the souvenir culture in Japan took on a new meaning and importance. Many traditional art forms continue to be allied with traditional tourist destinations and became souvenirs that represented the tradition of the places visited. According to Graburn, one main goal behind Japanese tourists’ travels is to prove through the purchase of *omiyage* (souvenirs) the actual travel to a distant location. “The conceptual nature of travel is to pick a site, or a circuit of approved sites, to know what to expect when one gets there, to confirm through on-site markers that one is there, to record in material form that one is there, and to carry back home material evidence that one has been there” (Graburn 1983: 47). This material form is often in the form of *kinen* or souvenir. It is also important to note that one cannot just purchase any type of *kinen*, but one that specifically points to the site being visited. “Each tourist area is known for its meibutsu, literally ‘the things for which it is famous,’ its specialty or special attraction, a key part of the set of on-site markers. It is from among these that omiyage and kinen must be obtained” (Graburn 1983: 47). The result of this cultural practice of purchasing specialty souvenirs means that for the general Japanese public, there is more than likely some form of folk art in their homes. Even if there is not an active interest in folk art, the presence of these objects in the home signifies the participation in

and a commitment to perceived traditions, albeit a less intense commitment than that of those who obsessively collect traditional objects.

Souvenirs are not just markers of a completed trip, but also represent distance and time. Stewart, in her work on the meanings behind souvenirs, states, “[t]he souvenir seeks distance (the exotic in time and space), but it does so in order to transform and collapse distance into proximity to, or approximation with, the self. The souvenir therefore contracts the world in order to expand the personal” (1993: xii). The souvenir becomes for the Japanese tourist a way in which to remain in contact with their traditional past as they return to their own modern lives. They are able to return again and again to their traditional experiences through their souvenir. In Appadurai’s discussion of what Simmel calls economic objects, these objects, which I would say include folk art, exist in a relationship between buyer and seller in which the object is distant from the buyer and, therefore, desirable (2000: 3). Distance in location becomes intimately tied with tourists’ perceptions of authentic traditions. The ability to exist in distant parts of a community also plays out in the concept of *flâneur* (wanderer) that emphasizes distance as a prime motivator for tourists to seek out authenticity by using their liminal identities within visited communities to search for and then hang out in the marginal corners of communities to experience a supposedly real and more authentic life uncluttered by the dominant visual images of that place (Urry 2002: 126). “In seeking authenticity people are able to use commodities to express themselves and fix points of security and order in an amorphous modern society” (Spooner 1986: 226). For the collector of objects that can also be defined as souvenirs, the same processes are involved in creating a temporal connection between the self and the object. Collectors travel in the footsteps of tourists in their quests, though more likely to stay longer and learn more about a particular object. In the end, though, it is about the distance traveled, the

rarity found, the information gathered, and the displays that result from their acquisition rituals that enhance a sense of self and cultural meaning.

Intersecting with, and influencing the Japanese government's agenda to form a cohesive nation state during the Meiji and following Taishō period (1912 to 1926), Yanagi Sōetsu, an art theorist, social critic, philosopher, and folk art collector, created a new term, *mingei*<sup>2</sup> (art of the people) around 1925, as an effort to find an equivalent term in Japanese for peasant or folk crafts. *Mingei* is a combination of the Chinese character *min* (people) with the character *gei* (arts, accomplishments) (Moes 1995: 7-8) or literally translated as “popular art” (Moeran 1981: 46) and “popular crafts” (Brandt: 2007: 48). The term was used to classify traditionally made objects and encompasses certain types of everyday use items Yanagi thought were being destroyed in the wake of the modern industrial development (Leach 1972 and 1989: 94 & Moeran 1981: 43). Yanagi emphasized the importance and potential demise of traditional art forms, stating, “Today, having our way, we need the capacity of those who can show us how to properly appreciate beauty in work. In the world of crafts we hunger for this leadership. If the artist-craftsman does not rise to this task, our horizons will darken” (1972: 201). By labeling everyday items found in rural households as *mingei*, and through recognition of those who continued to make it, these items were constructed as representing an important and disappearing part of Japan's tradition and as unifying force for the Japanese nation.

The *mingei* movement was not only a means of preserving perceived traditions of Japan, but was in direct contrast to the views of orientalism and romanticism prevalent towards Japanese crafts in England. “For Yanagi and his supporters, on the other hand, *mingei* was a

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<sup>2</sup> Collectively these objects are also called *mingeihin*. *Hin* means products in a category.

means by which the Japanese could reassert their ‘true’ in other words, ‘invented’ traditions and thereby begin to assert the moral superiority of Japan over the materialism of Western civilization” (Moeran 1989: 143). Craftspeople, as they were now called, were thrust into a world of Japanese tourism and collection that encouraged the consumption of *mingei* as a celebration of Japan’s perceived cultural traditions and national achievements. The classification of and increased interest in folk art during the 1930s and 1940s, was encouraged by new strains of nationalist thought and feeling (Brant 2007: 2). It should be noted that Yanagi and others played an important role in the manipulation of folk art design by teaching and encouraging artisans to produce wares that could be used in the modern Japanese home (Brandt: 2007). Only those objects that were thought to enhance everyday living and, by default, national cohesion were defined and marketed. Yanagi did not include toys in his classification as they seemingly could not be adapted for such ends, but this did not stop scholars and collectors from using the Mingei rhetoric of cultural appreciation and preservation.

In 1939, an English volume on Japanese folk toys was produced by the Board of Tourist Industry and Japanese Government Railways as an introduction to this broad cultural topic for non-Japanese tourists and scholars, and as a continuance of nationalistic pride in folk toys and the need to preserve them as a cultural resource. In the introduction to this volume, Nishizawa defines the character of folk toys as being linked to a national consciousness and the unique life ways, traditions, modes and manners, legends and products of each locality within Japan (Nishizawa 1939: 9). Nishizawa continues to promote Japan as a nation equal if not above others by making the observation that as toys are not a necessity of life, then a nation must have “abundant economic resources” and a “wide economic margin” to be able to produce so many toys (Nishizawa 1939: 9). But, Nishizawa fears his sentiment is clouded by the reality that many

of the toys listed on the pages of the guide are in danger of disappearing due to lack of interest and modernizing practices that made the hand-made and all forms of folk art and local culture obsolete. “Signs of this are rampant everywhere in the life of today, giving rise to the opposition of the hand to the machine, of craftsmanship to wage-earning, of the state to the world.” He concludes, “Such conflicts are the evils of this century” (Nishizawa 1939: 11). The term folk art and the classification of folk toys, like the *kokeshi*, from everyday use items to those of a traditional collectible, was constructed to create and preserve a distance from Western toys introduced to Japan during the Meiji Restoration. The term *kyōdo gangu* (folk toy, or literally hometown toy) appears to be a formal creation in reaction to and contrast to modern factory toys. The essential features of traditional Japanese toys highlighted by collectors are the very opposite of those of the modern toys that have invaded the Japanese market since the Meiji Restoration. These toys were mechanically mass-produced from such industrial materials as tin, rubber, celluloid, and plastic (Saitō in Kyburz 1994: 6). Folk toys, though, have not shifted in meaning and use purely from a commercial and modernizing perspective, but have become representative of regional identity and the atmosphere of their production area.

### 1.3 METHODS

Sendai (Miyagi Prefecture) is the largest city in the Tōhoku region of Honshū, with a current population of one million. The city developed historically into a metropolitan center, and has figured prominently in development of the region’s folk arts, serving as a residence for various artisans including wood turners (*kijishi/kijiya*) who created *kokeshi* on the lathe as an aside to

turning wooden bowls and everyday use items on the lathe. The *kokeshi* collecting culture that rose in Japan during the beginnings of the *Mingei* movement and continued as an expression of the *mingei* boom starting in the 1950s through the mid-1970s has waned greatly in present times.

I began research in Sendai and the surrounding production locations during a period of transition in which the primary collector population, now in their late 60s and early 70s, had already accumulated, along with their collections of *kokeshi*, a vast array of *kokeshi* associated products, including posters, stamps, and trinkets once given out at festivals. One collector said that at least half of his collection had come from the now defunct Sendai Marumitsu Department store that devoted an entire floor to the sale of *kokeshi* throughout the months of July and August, during the collecting booms of the 1960s and 1970s. The Fujisaki Department store still located in Sendai had a *kokeshi* corner about thirty years ago, a testament to the popularity of the doll. Today, as you exit the station, there is a bit of a letdown as the Sakurano Department store that replaced the Marumitsu store has no *kokeshi*, the four shops dedicated to the sale of *kokeshi* so prominently advertised in a 1973 *kokeshi* guide book have now dwindled to one, and the sound of the lathe so eloquently described by a friend who lived in the city during the 1945 Occupation is seldom heard. Despite this decline, the city is still considered by many Japanese to be a prime location for *kokeshi* culture, and the place to purchase *kokeshi* as a specialty souvenir. As you exit the *shinkansen* (bullet train) platform and enter the main terminal of the Sendai Station, visitors are greeted by two small *kokeshi* statues, symbolic reminders of the city's long history with this folk toy.



*Kokeshi* collecting associations were formed as early as 1923 in Sendai and the Sendai *Kokeshi* Association continued to meet until the death of its chairman in 1999. An alternative collecting association, the Aoba *Kokeshi* Association, which was formed by previous members of the Sendai *Kokeshi* Association in 1984, still holds bi-monthly meetings.

During a two-year research period between April 2007 to April 2009, following a three month preliminary research period in the summer of 2006, I lived in this city located about four hours Northeast of Tokyo by car. As it turns out, there is only a small group of artisans living within the city center now, and a faint trace of what must have been a bustling *kokeshi* culture during the 1930s to 1980s before the economic down turn. Several artisans now live at the Akiu Handicrafts Village which opened in 1988, about a 45 minute bus ride from the Sendai Station, while others live in more distant wards of the city, about 30 minutes by train from the main station.

During fieldwork, I utilized the 2003 traditional *kokeshi* artisan guide published locally in Sendai by the Kamei Memorial Pavilion. This is one of several traditional *kokeshi* guides published for *kokeshi* enthusiasts, and provides basic information on *kokeshi* strains, production locations, brief artisan biographies, and photos of artisans and their dolls. Many artisans live in communities near hot spring locations throughout the Tōhoku region, including Narugo, Tōgatta, and Yajirō. From Sendai I would travel one to three hours by train or bus to *kokeshi* production regions primarily in Miyagi, Fukushima, and Yamagata Prefectures. In these production locations, I would visit local shops, artisan workshops, and museums. As you travel west from the city into the mountains towards Yamagata, the city gives way to small towns and remote wooded landscapes. On the way I would stop by Sakunami or Yamadera where several artisans live, or travel to Yamagata City to visit the *kokeshi* museum or converse with the second

generation owner of a *kokeshi* shop located on the ground floor of the department store where the museum is located. Traveling about an hour north from the city by bus or train, I would reach the most accessible Narugo Hot Springs. The hot spring's narrow main street is lined with *kokeshi* artisan workshops, and souvenir shops selling a variety of souvenirs including *kokeshi*. About a fifteen minute walk from the Narugo Station, along the highway and up a steep hill, is the *kokeshi* museum that opens every April, weather permitting. Several artisans' shops and homes also are located along the highway, while other artisans live up an even steeper hill about a thirty to forty minute walk from the station. Traveling south about 45 minutes from Sendai by train you reach Shiroishi City; at the station a bus takes you to the Yajirō *Kokeshi* Village in about 40 minutes. Thankfully several long distance buses ran from the Sendai Station area daily to Fukushima, Tōgatta, and, in the last year of my research period, Narugo. Within Sendai City, I visited the Kamei Memorial Pavilion frequently to see the *kokeshi* on display and utilize their vast collection of *kokeshi* publications. Sendai was the home of Amae Tomiya, who was the first person credited with publishing a work solely on *kokeshi*, and his influences have continued on in the large population of collectors and *kokeshi* book authors who live in the city.

As part of the traditional ethnographic process of participant observation, I interviewed 68 artisans and collectors, attended 21 *kokeshi* events including competitions, festivals, and memorials, and became an active member of the Sendai Aoba *Kokeshi* Association. Interviews lasted on average three to six hours while intermittent casual conversations with artisans and collectors took place on and off over the course of two years. Currently there are approximately 205 active *kokeshi* artisans living in the six prefectures that make up the Tōhoku region. Almost half of these artisans live in Miyagi Prefecture, while Narugo Hot Springs is home to 44, the highest number of active artisans living in one area. An estimated 21 women are actively

producing *kokeshi* at this time. I say approximate numbers as while the *kokeshi* artisan guide served as an important research tool, during the interim between the guide's publication date and 2011, several artisans retired or passed away. According to the Japan Association for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries, there are currently 17 men who are government-recognized master *kokeshi* artisans and four cooperative *kokeshi* unions in Miyagi prefecture. At this time, there are no women who are certified as master *kokeshi* artisans. Although I will define four types of *kokeshi*, during the research periods I concentrated on traditional *kokeshi* artisans and collectors of this type of *kokeshi*. Others types of *kokeshi*, like creative and modern do not currently have collector associations and artisans do not necessarily live in as cohesive communities as traditional artisans do. There is a larger population of creative/modern *kokeshi* artisans in Gunma Prefecture, but the lack of public transportation in the area made it difficult to access artisan workshops. I did interview several artisans, collectors, and attended two gallery showings and one festival. While these interactions were not as in-depth as I would have wanted, they did help to clarify certain collector factions, connections to traditional *kokeshi* artisans, and provided pilot information for possible future research.

Interviewing collectors proved challenging as there are no outward signs of their hobby, but, after being accepted as a member of the local collector's association, I was able to interview several members and was introduced to other collectors by the staff at the Kamei Memorial Pavilion. Purchasing *kokeshi* at artisan shops or souvenir shops in various production locations also served as introductions to *kokeshi* collectors or artisans. During my second year in Sendai, the chair of the *kokeshi* association would occasionally travel with me to festivals, or introduce me to other chairs of *kokeshi* associations in Fukushima and Akita Prefectures. It should be noted that it was only after attending six meetings during my first year in Sendai that I was

considered a permanent enough member to receive my own name pin, and, after the second year, I was given a perfect attendance award on behalf of the entire association in commemoration of my commitment to *kokeshi* research.

My main concentration during research was the lived experiences of artisans and collectors. I also engaged in the textual analysis of *kokeshi* publications including all manner of printed material, artisan and collectors' blogs, and association and museum web pages. There are currently some 300 works devoted to traditional *kokeshi* focusing on doll classification and tools, production zones, artisan history, festivals, and wood turning history. The translation of many of these works proved instrumental in the understanding of the historical framework of *kokeshi*, and the interests of collectors for the last 87 years.

## 1.4 ORGANIZATION

The dissertation chapters are arranged by broader concepts of tradition as they relate to *kokeshi*, and the intersecting themes of nostalgia, *furusato*, and regionalism as they figure prominently in discussions of Japanese nation formation, and continued perceptions of the Tōhoku region as a repository of a true Japanese essence. The first chapter (second section) will explore how concepts of tradition operate in relation to *kokeshi* as well as the formation and classification of *kokeshi* following the Meiji Restoration. The position of artisans and consumers of *kokeshi* is central to this analysis, as collectors of this folk toy were greatly influenced by the *mingei* philosophies and actively sought to distinguish traditional *kokeshi* from other types of *kokeshi*

and dolls through specialized collecting and publication practices. As collectors concentrated on preserving or emphasizing perceived traditional attributes of this doll, artisans continued to produce *kokeshi* outside of the realm of tradition in order to attract customers who were not collectors and to satisfy artistic desires. The climate in which *kokeshi* were produced during the 1920s to the 1940s was one in which multiple definitions of tradition came to represent this folk art doll, resulting in divergent ideas of what was and was not a traditional *kokeshi*.

The second chapter explores the motivations for *kokeshi* consumption and collection, and why ultimately certain artisans are more popular than others. Collector and consumer behavior appears to be very much influenced by *mingei* and *furusato* philosophies. The difference between these two consumer populations, though, is that collectors appear to be seeking *kokeshi* to complete their personally conceived collections, and will go to great lengths to procure a special needed doll while non-collecting consumers are looking at dolls on a separate aesthetic level.

The third chapter describes the dominant theories surrounding the *kokeshi*'s origins and its relation to infanticide and memorials for infants lost to miscarriages or abortion. The false etymology of the *kokeshi*'s name has created an un-questionable and much-cited connection to infanticide in both scholarly and non-scholarly literature. This is coupled with the *kokeshi*'s seemingly infinite ability to serve as a blank canvas for artisans' ruminations of loss, grief, and death. Despite the positives extolled by scholars like Yanagi and Yanagita, the negative perceptions of Tōhoku has perpetuated the commonly held myth by the general Japanese public that *kokeshi* were first created as memorials for children killed or aborted during times of famine and hardship. The very name collectors had created from the many local dialect names used for the doll - "*kokeshi*" - was falsely interpreted as being *ko-keshi* (child-extinguish/erase). Despite

vast regional accomplishments, including the mastering of lathe technology used in *kokeshi* production, the harsh climate and regional famines have resulted in the commonly held belief that the *kokeshi* was first produced as a memorial for the great numbers of children speculatively killed during these times.

*Kokeshi* in this sense is part of a landscape imagined as distant and therefore possibly full of strange and terrifying cultural practices. These positive and negative traditions are supported by a third perception of *furusato*, also a term with positive and negative meanings. This flexible nature of *furusato* is one way that the *kokeshi* maintains its traditionalness and home décor status, despite the commonly held belief that historically it was a memorial for children. Even as the Northern regions of Japan are cold and backward countryside (*inaka*), this area is also perceived to hold Japan's true sense of self through both continued and recently reconstructed traditions. *Kokeshi*, because they are only produced in the area, are advertised as embodied with the positive traits of *furusato* and all of the traditions that lie within. Locally, the *kokeshi* is a symbol of pride and regional technical accomplishment. Artisans themselves celebrate their professional connection to lathe technology, brought to the region in the Heian period (794-1185).

The final chapter returns to the question of how the *kokeshi* fits into the local Tōhoku landscape and the overall national landscape via the heavy use of *furusato* images and corresponding nostalgic and tradition invoking vocabulary. The creative works featured in this chapter are in great contrast to those featured in the previous chapter, as they talk about the loss of children not from death, but from leaving their hometowns. The authors of these creative works ask for the care and respect of *kokeshi* taken from the region as souvenirs while simultaneously evoking an atmosphere of nostalgia and longing for *furusato*. The makers and collectors of what are defined as the eleven strains of traditional *kokeshi* emphasize a long and

continuous lineage that each type of doll has with each prefecture located in Tōhoku. Makers will even go as far as to state that they hope that the buyers of their dolls will take them home, and when they look at them they will be reminded of the place in which they bought them.

Woman's place in *kokeshi* culture runs the gamut from the female form presumed to be reflected in the *kokeshi* itself, to the feminization of the landscape (feminine imagery in the wilderness, in the mountains, in the railway, advertisements in hotels and entertainment and tourist attractions), to the impact of women *kokeshi* artisans who speak from their hearts in making and decorating their *kokeshi*, many of which are modeled on their own children. The doll itself carries the essence and atmosphere of the place from which it originated. The facial designs of traditional *kokeshi* have also been likened to the broader regional characteristics of the Tōhoku people, and the overall female form has been used as well to inspire a more feminine and therefore more traditional image of the Tōhoku landscape.

The anthropological focus of my dissertation is on how culturally specific folk art objects are transformed and transfigured both perceptually and corporeally under the guise of tradition, specifically Japanese tradition (*dentō*) through the process of consumption, collection, and popular speculation. The Japanese concept of tradition is given form with the word *dentō* (伝統), where the two *kanji* characters *den* (伝) and *tō* (統) mean tradition or the transmission of tradition. Objects like the *kokeshi* are described as being “*dentō*” because the skills needed to make them are presumed to have been passed on from teacher to apprentice for many if not hundreds of years, thereby maintaining form and design. I am not arguing for a singular unchanging tradition, though, but describe the ebbs and flows of traditions as they come to define a well-recognized folk art object. These traditions do not have any one origin, nor is this an historical ethnography that offers a chronology of *kokeshi* from inception to present, but I rely

on several divergent timeframes in my analysis of how *kokeshi* continue to capture the imaginations and hearts of the Japanese people. Yoshino's discussion of the aims of cultural nationalism, ". . . regenerating the national community by creating, preserving, or strengthening a people's cultural identity when it is felt to be lacking, inadequate or threatened" (1992: 1) is a useful place to start in the discussion of folk art as it helps to shed light on how these objects are conceptualized within the framework of nationalism and become lodged in the consciousness of the populace. However, while cultural nationalists themselves emphasize the perceived or actual historical and cultural uniquenesses that putatively form a solid nation, I am interested in the important byproducts of cultural nationalism, namely the invention of tradition and nostalgic motivations that have influenced anthropological studies of folk art, material culture and tourism. I wish to pursue what Moeran (1997) describes as the "expressed experiences of art", where art objects are produced, distributed, marketed, appreciated, interpreted and discussed, a similar concept to Appadurai's "social life of things", rather than defining whether those objects are to be considered art or craft. The focus, therefore, is on art as process rather than simply art as a product.

The *kokeshi* is one symbol among many that constitutes an imagined nation state and regional tradition. Those who collect and study this folk toy utilize the rhetoric of past tradition and preservation to enhance its status within the national *milieu*, while those outside of this collecting and scholarly world in effect imagine the *kokeshi* as at once traditionally Japanese, Tōhoku specialty, and tragic historically. The social processes that surround the *kokeshi* are in keeping with the continued reliance on folk art to fuel and enhance the Japanese sense of place. More importantly, these processes form a solid image around which tradition is sculpted.



## 2.0 *KOKESHI*: CATEGORIES OF TRADITION AND CHANGE

### 2.1 TRADITIONAL *KOKESHI* DEVELOPMENT

Japanese *kokeshi* collectors and the general Japanese public emphasize that when the word “*kokeshi*” is used, most Japanese envision one of the eleven strains (*kei*) of traditional *kokeshi* (*dentō kokeshi*). After inquiring of an author how he wished to describe the traditional *kokeshi* in his book for a non-Japanese audience, he responded with slight irritation, “We do not say traditional *kokeshi*! When Japanese people think of *kokeshi*, this is what they are thinking of!”<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, as this form of *kokeshi* has a longer production history, around 1804-1811(Hirai 2000: 3), at the end of what is known as the Japanese Doll Renaissance,<sup>4</sup> and is linked to the even earlier wood turning craft in Japan, Japanese still envision this form first before modern *kokeshi* (*kindai kokeshi*) that were produced after World War II. Artisans and collectors have worked hard to facilitate the continued production and to honor the maintenance of design of traditional *kokeshi* by highlighting particular characteristics of each strain and region of origin. Despite this tremendous effort to divide traditional *kokeshi* from other *kokeshi* types by

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<sup>3</sup> For clarification and in keeping with collectors, artisans, and researchers in Japan, *kokeshi* and traditional *kokeshi* will refer to those dolls that can be identified as the eleven strains of traditional *kokeshi*. All other types of *kokeshi* will be referred to by name such as creative *kokeshi*, new style *kokeshi* or souvenir *kokeshi*.

<sup>4</sup> During the Edo period, as Japan was in relative isolation, many arts and folk arts flourished and construction techniques for these items were perfected and improved upon. During this period, several Japanese dolls, including *gosho-ningyō* (palace dolls), *hina-ningyō* (Girl’s Day dolls), *musha-ningyō* (warrior dolls for the Boy’s Day display), *ishō-ningyō* (fashion dolls) and *karakuri-ningyō* (mechanical dolls), came into vogue (Pate 2005: 12).

collectors, most traditional *kokeshi* artisans, while maintaining traditional designs passed down to them, have historically made modern *kokeshi* and, on some level, make creative versions of their traditional *kokeshi*. Modern *kokeshi* artisans do not make traditional *kokeshi*, but they use the same narrative of wood turning tradition as traditional *kokeshi* artisans do to give context to and to define their art work as a *kokeshi* for the consumer.

Basic distinguishing features of traditional *kokeshi* are that they adhere to specific forms and designs which have been handed down from instructor to apprentice. In the most extreme interpretation of this specification, the passing down of form and design can only be from family member to family member. Several artisans declared that *kokeshi* were *dentōteki mono* (traditional things) and therefore it would be difficult for an outsider to enter such an exacting profession. Family lineage is important for most *kokeshi* artisans, and they can often trace their family's history in traditional *kokeshi* production to three, four, or five generations back. One artisan said in a more extreme vein that he did not like self-taught artisans because their dolls were too close to *sōsaku* (modern) in feel. He felt they were not *kokeshi* artisans in the true sense. Another artisan added that the absence of generations of *kokeshi* artisans in one's family was a bad thing unless the dolls were made with "soul". This artisan's father, though, had been what he termed a "*kokeshi* designer", and, therefore, unlike the former *kokeshi* artisan, saw the value in dolls made by outside artisans. These feelings of acceptance are shared by *kokeshi* artisans who may have trained with a *kokeshi* artisan outside of their family, and, in the rare instance, have independently trained and created variations on design within a particular strain. In these cases, an artisan will acknowledge a famous artisan as their teacher, stating with pride their place in a long line of apprentices who came before them.

In my naiveté, I initially asked *kokeshi* artisans how they retained traditional elements while adding unique elements of their own to their *kokeshi*, seeing innovation as the key to commercial success. A large part of what makes traditional *kokeshi* traditional is the respect and maintenance of design, and the continued work of the artisan to make those traditional designs as skillfully as possible. One artisan told me that he thought of making a “tiny” innovation to his dolls, but he had not yet thought of what that would be. This was emphasized when he pointed out his grandfather’s doll, saying that the small lathe decoration (*kanamizō*), a decoration along the neckline of the doll traditional to this strain of *kokeshi*, was the only innovation he thought his grandfather had added to the original design. Many artisans acknowledged that to move beyond a small innovation would push a *kokeshi* into the realm of new style, creative, or just wooden doll. The maintenance of traditional designs is also important as it reflects “local character”, as strains are regionally named and reflect recognizably unique features.

Historically there has been criticism of traditional *kokeshi* that did not conform to or strayed too far from perceived notions of the traditional. In 1928, the first book dedicated to the study of traditional *kokeshi* was written by Amae Tomiya. During the latter half of the Meiji period, around 1910, *kokeshi* had experienced a “Golden Age” (Hirai 2000: 3) during which designs were improved. During this same time, Japan’s rapid industrialization also brought economic opportunities to the Tōhoku region. As the area grew economically, hot spring resorts also flourished as respites for the overworked or economically well off and the traditional *kokeshi* became a popular hot spring souvenir. However, this golden age was followed by the introduction of celluloid and tin toys, which were rapidly replacing folk toys like *kokeshi*. This displacement prompted collectors around the closing of the Taishō period (around 1920) to research, collect, and promote the preservation of *kokeshi*. This increased dedication to *kokeshi*

research also sparked the first traditional *kokeshi*-collecting boom which lasted for the next ten years (Hirai 2000: 3). The essays contributed to and the descriptions of doll strains in Amae Tomiya's first work reflect the anti-modern sentiments of the *mingei* movement, critiquing *kokeshi* that appeared to have features like mass produced toys. In a contributing essay, Mr. Takei Takeo (children's book illustrator, and illustrator for Amae's volume) writes about his first encounter with *kokeshi*, stating, ". . . this is the first time I had ever seen a *kokeshi*, but unfortunately that *kokeshi* was quite new and the color and drawing was very poor, also the vivid gloss of the wax makes it look like celluloid, so I had been very disappointed and cried 'oh *kokeshi* is such an uninteresting thing' " (Takei in Amae 1928: 46-47). Mr. Amae, in his descriptions of thirty-six individual production areas and nine identified strains of traditional *kokeshi*, did not spare the feelings of artisans if he perceived their works to reflect more modern design elements in form, features, and materials used.<sup>5</sup> For dolls produced in the Shinchi, Tōgatta region, he states, "I have a very good feeling about the red pattern that was drawn from the head to the body and also the red plum pattern on the body. This *kokeshi* was made in the early age of Meiji [1868-1912], but the present *kokeshi* do not have a good feeling, and the features of it will have a square head" (1928: 22). Concerning the Sakunami region, he continues his criticism stating, "I found one interesting fact, that Hiraga [name of *kokeshi* artisan] who was taught as an apprentice had made interesting *kokeshi* that have a traditional feeling, but Kobayashi, who was his teacher, had made *kokeshi* that were extremely uninteresting after he moved to Yamagata and made the head with entirely black inked hair -- this fact was very outrageous!" (1928: 23). For Yajirō, he states, ". . . the *kokeshi* produced by Eigoro Nīyama is

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<sup>5</sup> Full translation of Mr. Amae's words appear in this section as they give a vivid picture of how collectors of traditional *kokeshi* viewed mass-produced toys and how they dictated the evolution of proper traditional *kokeshi* forms.

interesting in the feeling it has in the eyes and the nose as I feel it is peaceful and calm, but think [one] should avoid the *kokeshi* that have a transformed head” (1928: 25).

Just as his friend Mr. Takei laments over the celluloid appearance of his first encountered *kokeshi*, Amae also is critical of any doll that appears overly waxed and artificial, stating for *kokeshi* in Iwashiro-kuni in Tamayama, Fukushima, “The *kokeshi* artist Sanai Niyama came from Yajirō and his *kokeshi* are merely beautiful, and it has the same feeling as the doll made of celluloid because of the painted wax, so I feel they are not interesting” (1928: 28). Further, in his description for the *kokeshi* in Izaka, Fukushima, “The iris pattern on the body is a characteristic of this group, especially for this small *kokeshi* it has an original feeling, but this *kokeshi* is drawn with too much vivid color, and is waxed too strong and painted with gelatin on the larger *kokeshi*. Someone described [it as like] ‘a candle decoration’ and I agree with his description” (1928: 28). For certain *kokeshi* in Tsuchiyu, Fukushima, “The features of the Tsuchiyu *kokeshi* is a large red pattern that was drawn on the head, but the faded color of the lathe pattern on the body is also interesting because I do not see it in any other *kokeshi*. In another, there is one kind of *kokeshi* that is colored with oil paints like enamel -- this is so bad I cannot stand looking at it” (1928: 29). Amae takes a particular dislike for using too vivid colors, or not the right colors as in his description of *kokeshi* in the Atami region of Fukushima. “The artist Haruji Satō came from Yajirō and his *kokeshi* have a bad feeling more than any other *kokeshi* especially the purple color. He also uses paint material like gelatin that also increases the unpleasantness” (1928: 29-30).

While the collectors who followed Amae in the pursuit of *kokeshi* research were not so openly critical of certain dolls and their artisans, they did, and in some cases compete to, uniquely classify each strain of *kokeshi*. Early publications focused on specific regional

differences, creating sub-strains of *kokeshi* that matched unique localities as is evident from titles of these early works: *Kokeshi Fudoki (Kokeshi a local/regional history)*: (Nishida 1943), *Kokeshi Kagami (kokeshi model)*: (Kikufuokaed 1943), and *Kokeshi Hito Fudo (Kokeshi People [Cultural/Spiritual] Climate)*: (Shikama 1954). As years progressed, revealed in various publications, many of the sub-strains were replaced with broader regional strain categories until the current eleven strains of *kokeshi* were described. (For the complete list of publications and strain name development, please see Appendix A) Around 1940, five years after the start of the first *kokeshi* boom and a year after the formation of the Tokyo *Kokeshi* Association, the sense and design values of traditional *kokeshi* became firmly fixed for each district in Japan (Hirai 2000: 3). The second traditional *kokeshi* collecting boom started around 1955, and the renewed interest in *kokeshi* spurred the writing of the *Kokeshi Jiten (Kokeshi Dictionary - こけし事典)*: (1968). While this book was accurate, the basic information given was received with great disappointment as many collectors already knew about production location, doll characteristics, and artisan lineages, and they longed for a true dictionary of all things related to *kokeshi*. In 1972, after three years of research by five Tokyo University graduate students, who traveled throughout the Tōhoku region in their spare time interviewing artisans and gathering data, the 570 page *Kokeshi Jiten (こけし辞典)*: (1972) was completed. This work is now considered the “bible” for *kokeshi* collectors, and influenced the creation of the 25 volumes titled “*Ko no hana*” (木の花)<sup>6</sup> which included the more personal antidotes of *kokeshi* artisans and specialized information gathered during the research for but not included in the 1972 *Kokeshi Jiten* (Related

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<sup>6</sup> The pronunciation of *ko* for the *kanji* usually pronounced as *ki* - 木 (tree) is a forced reading of the *kanji* as *ki no hana* would indicate a modifier and *ko no hana* is read as one word more indicative of a title, and acts as a metaphor for *kokeshi*. The title of the work literally translates as flowers that bloom on trees or tree’s flower, specifically cherry and plum.

in conversation by Takahashi, one of the five researchers for the 1972 *Kokeshi Jiten*, contributing author to “*Ko no hana*” and continued *kokeshi* researcher).<sup>7</sup>

A continuity in formatting and contents for publications on *kokeshi* is evident in the ever-present detailed description of differences between strains, biographies of individual *kokeshi* artisans, their pedigrees, history of *kokeshi* production, and highlights of each production area with reference to area hot springs. As a result, very specific vocabulary has been adopted and retained in the description of traditional *kokeshi*. The artisans and collectors of traditional *kokeshi* distinguish these *kokeshi* from other forms by currently describing eleven distinct strains (*kei* - 系).<sup>8</sup> The use of *kei* to describe these *kokeshi* instead of using the word “type” (*gata* - 型)<sup>9</sup> is important as *kei* is used exclusively with traditional *kokeshi*, encompasses all of the traits and forms of dolls produced with a particular family of artisans, and connects the doll to a particular production place in Tōhoku. New style (*shingata*), creative (*sōsaku*), and souvenir (*omiyage*) *kokeshi* types do not rely on such a classification system as they are found throughout Japan, and change in style and design at the whim of the artisan. For the general Japanese public who are not collectors, descriptions of the eleven strains of traditional *kokeshi* are used to illustrate the visual and regional differences that correspond in name to specific hot spring locations in the Tōhoku region in which these dolls are produced.

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<sup>7</sup> An index was created for “*Ko no Hana*” and published by Mr. Hiyané (Second generation used book store owner in Tokyo, well-respected seller of traditional *kokeshi*, and publisher of *kokeshi* texts). The four re-printings of this index illustrate the popularity and importance of this publication to *kokeshi* collectors in Japan. The first time the index was printed, he made 300 copies, the second and third times 200 copies, and the fourth printing of this index was so popular that he printed 500 copies. Hiyané related to me that many of the older collectors he knows have memorized the information in all 25 volumes of *Ko no hana* as it gives detailed biographical information on artisans and specific characteristics of doll strains produced by these individual artisans.

<sup>8</sup> *Kei* can be used to describe a system, line, or lineage.

<sup>9</sup> *Gata* while used in early descriptions of *kokeshi* is now used to describe sub-strains, meaning a model, style, or type.

Characteristic descriptions are also a prominent portion of any text on *kokeshi* and in places where *kokeshi* are displayed as they help to distinguish strains and highlight regional diversity. The often detailed paragraphs on design characteristics of each strain further allow for ease of identification for collectors and, again, illustrate to the novice the sheer diversity of the doll as, upon first encounter, many *kokeshi* tend to look the same as most are painted using red, green, and black ink. As a rule, anyone who is interested in studying traditional *kokeshi* must know the distinguishing features of the eleven strains, and, as a new face to this world, I was quizzed repeatedly by artisans and collectors. Before I could get out the first strain, like a mantra all names of the strains would be repeated to me, driving home that this was thought necessary for even a rudimentary understanding of traditional *kokeshi*. This emphasis may stem from the fact that despite being a prominent symbol of Japanese culture, most Japanese who do not collect *kokeshi* have only a vague idea of how many *kokeshi* strains there are. Most, when asked, usually knew of two strains, but did not necessarily know the names of the strains or the design diversity of dolls within a strain. While translating several sections of a *kokeshi* book, the woman who was helping me, perhaps hoping that we were coming to an end of our task, asked me with some exasperation in her tone how many strains there were. She had grown up in Sendai near several main *kokeshi* production areas, but because of a lack of personal interest could only describe what she thought was one strain of the *kokeshi* her parents had in their home.

Those who make *kokeshi* are also called by a special title and, while *shokunin* (crafts person) is still used, the more exact and often exclusive professional term *kokeshi kōjin*, (*kokeshi* artisan or crafts person) has been adopted. Often the inclusion of *kokeshi* is unnecessary as *kōjin* usually refers to those who only make *kokeshi*. *Kōjin* is used in contrast with *kijishi* or *kijiya* (turner of wooden bodies, or the wooden bases used for everyday use items and lacquer-ware) as



these two terms could only refer to the turning of the *kokeshi* body and not the painting. *Kōjin* are related professionally and ancestrally to *kijishi/kijiya*, and reference materials as well as many traditional *kokeshi kōjin* themselves interchange these terms when referring to those who make *kokeshi*.<sup>10</sup>

Forty-nine years later, in the 1977 addition to his first work, Amae talks about what he calls the state of traditional *kokeshi*, and the need to preserve their unique forms. He asserts that the *kokeshi* is a traditional doll, and those *kokeshi* that are not traditional, are not “pure” *kokeshi*, but an imitation even if they look like a *kokeshi*. He goes on to say, “We cannot think about *kokeshi* without its tradition. My theory, ‘the *kokeshi* which has no tradition is valueless’ came from the reason that it is easy to make imitation *kokeshi*. Especially recently, so many impure *kokeshi* have been circulated. Well, more than ten years after who will be able to judge whether it is a legitimate *kokeshi* or an impure *kokeshi*” (Amae 1977: 12). He continues by declaring that the use of *kigata ko* (wooden bodied dolls), a term used to describe all wooden dolls including *kokeshi*, does not honor the *kokeshi*’s tradition, and insists that *kokeshi* should always be written in *hiragana* (Japanese syllabary for native words) as (こけし), while the use of *kigatako* (キガタコ) written usually in *katakana* (Japanese syllabary for foreign words/modern words) should cease to be used. His proposal of “*kokeshi dō*” (The *Kokeshi* Way) is now fully accepted among collectors and researchers in Japan as the proper way to refer to this type of wooden doll. It is obvious that the exclusionary intent of *kokeshi dō* as *kokeshi* was used to define as something

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<sup>10</sup> The term *kōjin* is used within circles of artisans and *kokeshi* researchers within Japan, but many Japanese and foreigners outside of this circle have never heard the term, do not use it, or do not know what it necessarily means. Several Japanese with whom I spoke had never heard of the term *kōjin*, and questioned if I had perhaps misheard what was being said. In non-Japanese texts like Henrichsen 2004: 138, *kijishi* and *kijiya* are used instead as they generally refer to those who turn wood. I noted that while watching the 1971 version of the television program “*kokeshi no uta*” (details of which will be given in Chapter 4) that *kōjin* was used, but in the 2006 re-visit of the television program, *shokunin* (crafts person) was used instead, presumably a more universally understandable term.

truly Japanese, while other wooden dolls similar to *kokeshi* and modern *kokeshi* were relegated to foreign or “new” Japanese culture. This type of exclusion is not unusual among collectors, though, as they tend to distinguish “authentic” goods as those that are old from the “inauthentic” new goods. In 1950, during a large *kokeshi* exhibition sponsored by the Mitsukoshi Department store in Sendai, Amae described the traditional *kokeshi* he displayed simply as “*kokeshi*” and newly designed *kokeshi* as new *kokeshi* (*shin kokeshi*), and displayed them in a separate room, officially cementing a difference between *kokeshi* types (Amae 1977: 12-13).

Traditional *kokeshi* collectors and scholars have continued to define what is authentic for each strain of *kokeshi* and what makes the *kokeshi* unique among other Japanese dolls. Literature included with *kokeshi* sold at a prominent shop in Sendai emphasizes how the *kokeshi* is made using a lathe. This small fact precludes other wooden and paper dolls that have a *kokeshi* shape but as they are not turned on the lathe cannot be defined as *kokeshi*. While Amae and others saw more creative wooden dolls, and even other lathe-turned dolls, as a threat to Japanese tradition, modern *kokeshi* artisans celebrated their artistic creativity and the ability to express their personalities in their works, and in turn generated the defining characteristics that separated their dolls from traditional *kokeshi*. Traditional and modern *kokeshi* artisans have continued to show their works at separate venues and, at the only competition that judges both types of dolls, they are displayed in separate areas as well.

## 2.2 TRADITIONAL *KOKESHI* STRAINS

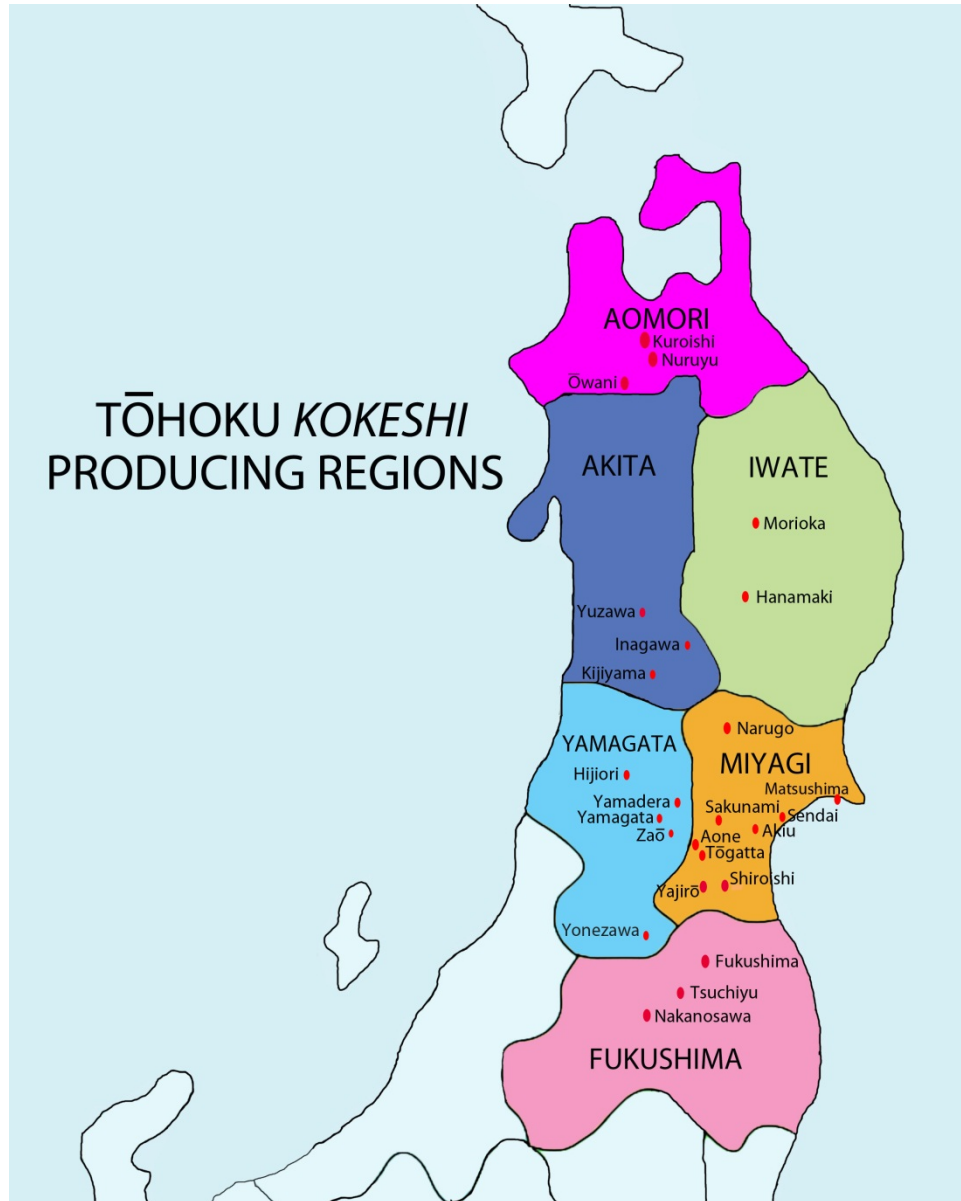


Figure 2. Map of Tōhoku Prefectures and Main *Kokeshi* Production Areas.  
Created by Michael A. McDowell

The eleven strains of traditional *kokeshi* are:

<i>Tsuchiyu</i>	(土湯)	Figure 3.
<i>Tōgatta</i>	(遠刈田)	Figure 5/6.
<i>Yajirō</i>	(弥次郎)	Figure 7/8.
<i>Narugo/Naruko</i>	(鳴子) <sup>11</sup>	Figure 9.
<i>Sakunami</i>	(作並)	Figure 10.
<i>Hijiori</i>	(肘折)	Figure 11.
<i>Zaō</i>	(蔵王)	Figure 12.
<i>Yamagata</i>	(山形)	Figure 13.
<i>Kijiyama</i>	(木地山)	Figure 14.
<i>Nanbu/Nambu</i>	(南部) <sup>12</sup>	Figure 15.
<i>Tsugaru</i>	(津軽) <sup>13</sup>	Figure 16.

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<sup>11</sup> The region named dialectically is *Narugo*, but the standard Japanese use of the written word, *Naruko*, is used for the train station signs for this region. Locally in the Miyagi Prefecture, this region, and the *kokeshi* produced there are called *Narugo*. While I will use *Narugo* to describe these dolls and the region in which they are produced, both pronunciations and spellings are used in various texts describing *kokeshi*.

<sup>12</sup> The *Nanbu* strain of *kokeshi* is also called *Nambu* in non-Japanese texts on *kokeshi*.

<sup>13</sup> The descriptions for each of the eleven individual *kokeshi kei* were related to me by artisans, collectors, and museum staff. Two main sources, Shibata: 1999 and Takahashi: 2003 were used for clarification of terms and descriptions. These two texts were referenced as they are more current examples of strain descriptions. Direct translation from the Takahashi essay was completed with permission from Mr. Kamei Shogo, Senior Advisor of the Kamei Corporation: publisher and editor of the *kokeshi* guide in which Takahashi's descriptions appear. Translated material will appear in a pending English publication of the original Japanese text.

The *Tsuchiyu* strain originated in Fukushima City, at the Tsuchiyu Hot Springs in Fukushima Prefecture. The founding maker of the *Tsuchiyu kokeshi*, Sakuma Kamegoro and his son, Yashichi, called this *kokeshi* “*deko*”. Yashichi’s son, Asanosuke, developed the unique and skillful techniques for making the *Tsuchiyu* strain which are still practiced today (Shibata 1999: 23 and Takahashi 2003: 12). The distinguishing characteristics of the *Tsuchiyu kokeshi* are a tightly fitting head to the body (*hame komi*), and black circles called snake eyes (*hebi no me*) which are painted on the top of the head of the doll while it is still on the lathe. While the forms of the *Tsuchiyu kokeshi* vary greatly from artisan to artisan, in general the doll’s face is comparatively smaller compared with other *kokeshi* strains, and the torso is thin. The bangs painted on the front of the face of the doll are comb shaped (*kushi gata* - 櫛形), resembling the teeth of a comb, with the addition of red designs called *kase*<sup>14</sup> on both the right and left sides of the head. The eye lids are generally double layered/edged and the nose is round. The body of the doll is thinner than the head and may be wider in the middle as the body tapers from the neck down. This *kokeshi*’s striped designs on the body are painted while still on the lathe (*rokuro sen*), either straight lines (*rokuro moyō*) or reverse lathe lines (*kaeshi rokuro*) that zigzag on the body, and, occasionally, flowers are painted after the doll is taken off the lathe.

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<sup>14</sup> *Kase* are red decorations painted on the top and sides of the hair. The name means skeins of yarn or thread wrapped at certain lengths. The four types of *kase* are: *nonoji* (*hiragana no/〇*), *tamakase* (ball shaped), *urokode* (fish scale), and *mizuhikide/mizuhikite* (tied ribbon).



**Figure 3. *Tsuchiyu Strain* from Left to Right: 1) Lathe Lines and Iris, 2) Reverse Lathe Lines, 3) Lathe Lines and Flowers, 4) Lathe Lines and Flower, 5) Reverse Lathe Lines with Umbrella Hat.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

In the final years of the Taishō period (late 1920s) at Inashiro Town in the Nakanosawa Hot Springs in Fukushima Prefecture, a *kokeshi* maker named Iwamoto Zenkichi introduced a new form of *kokeshi* into the *Tsuchiyu* strain, now called the *Nakanosawa* sub-strain, with the pet name of *tako bōzu* (Saitō 1989: 38). This form is easily recognized by the pink circles surrounding the large eyes of the doll, and has continued to be made by several of Iwamoto's successors. Characteristically the *tako bōzu* group is similar to the *Tsuchiyu* strain but the facial expression can be considered grotesque, and there are some dolls that have different colors of snake eyes drawn on the top of the head (Saitō 1989: 38). Zenkichi's *kokeshi* design was continued by his son, Yoshizō, who trained about ten apprentices. After Yoshizō passed away,

his apprentices made a group called *Tako Bōzu no Kai* (*Tako bōzu* Association) and continued to keep this form alive. As this form of *kokeshi* differs greatly from the other *Tsuchiyu* strain *kokeshi*, collectors and the *Tako bōzu* Association may recognize this form as a new strain (Saitō 1989: 38). Shirley Funk states that this doll is based on a *papier maché* dance figure Iwamoto Zenkichi used in his performances (Funk 2003: 9). However, Iske Stern prefers the alternate interpretation that it was thought that, during the Edo period, a street dancer danced upside down on his hands. This dancer had a cushion on which a face with large eyes was painted. Due to its popularity, people demanded a doll with the same face painted on it (Stern 2003: 50). Both of these sources' suppositions are correct in that Iwamoto Zenkichi, as part of his family's *geikoya* performance, used a *papier maché* pillow placed between his knees while he did "upside down leg dancing" (Shikama & Nakaya 1971: 54). On this *papier maché* form he had painted a "grotesque" face (Sikama & Nakaya 1971: 54 & 391. Collectors' affectionate name for this sub-strain -- *tako bōzu* -- means Buddhist monk's shaved head, or, more generally, anyone who has a shaven head.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Tako bōzu* can also be said *Tako Nyudō*, *nyudō* referring to a Buddhist priest. *Tako* is read as octopus, and jokingly people with shaved heads are called *tako* as their heads look like the smooth top of an octopus' head.



**Figure 4. *Nakanosawa* Sub-Strain from Left to Right: 1) Honda Hiroshi, 2) Seya Jūji, 3) Seya Jūji, 4) Arakawa Yōichi, and 5) Arakawa Yōichi.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

The *Tōgatta* strain's origins are from Shinchī in the Tōgatta Hot Springs in Zaō Town of Tōgatta County, Miyagi Prefecture (Shibata 1999: 24 and Takahashi 2003: 13-14). The center for production is in Aone, in Tōgatta. A long history of lathe work and the making of wooden products in Shinchī, Tōgatta, can be traced back to the middle of the Edo period from records left in woodworking villages there. From this history it was found that woodworkers created *kokeshi* to be sold as souvenirs at the nearby, then developing, Tōgatta Hot Springs. The distinguishing



characteristics of the *Tōgatta kokeshi* are a large head, rather thin straight body, crescent-shaped eyes and eye brows, and radiating designs symbolizing hair decorations painted on top of the head and along the sides of the face of the doll. The head is connected to the body in the *sashikomi* style with a wooden peg (*hozo*) either inserted into the head or body, or made as a separate piece used to connect both the head and body of the doll tightly together. For dolls smaller than 6 *sun* (18.18 cm), called *kogesu gata*, the head and body unit is often carved as a single piece (*tsukuritsuke*) and the shoulders are sloped. There is a tendency in recent years to make the doll wider in order to stabilize it, as the head is top heavy. In most cases, radiating lines (*tegara*)<sup>16</sup> are painted on the whole top of the head with large wave shapes (*name gata*) or mountain-shaped lines (*mitsuyama*) on back of the head (Shibata 1999: 37). Smaller dolls might have butterfly decorations on the top of the head and, very rarely, they sport an all-black head (*okkapa*). A *kanji* numeral eight-shaped decoration (八) is drawn from left to right on the front of the face, and bangs which are split in two. The eight-shaped decoration usually ends at the bottom of the bangs, but there are some dolls on which these lines continue as thick parallel decorations. This head decoration is unique to the *Tōgatta* strain.

The primary decoration on the body is the layered diamond or triangular shaped chrysanthemum pattern (*kasane-giku*). Other dolls are decorated with a rising sun chrysanthemum pattern (*asahi-giku*); a top view of the chrysanthemum, often with red or yellow dots in the middle of the red petals (*omote-giku*); underside of the chrysanthemum, often with a green dot in the center of the flower (*ura-giku*); soft or long petals of the chrysanthemum fluttering in the breeze (*bota-giku*); weeping chrysanthemum (*shidare-giku*); and diamond-

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<sup>16</sup> *Tegara* originally were pieces of cloth that women wrapped around their hair.

shaped chrysanthemum (*hishi-giku*). In addition to the chrysanthemum patterns, plum designs are popular, including plum flowers and branch (*eda-ume*) and scattered plum flowers. The tumbling cherry flowers (*kuzure-zakura*) design used is unique to Tōgatta and can differ from artisan to artisan. This cherry pattern usually occurs with the painted neckline of a kimono (*kin*). Non-floral designs include wood grain design (*mokume*) and a wooden frame shaped like the kanji “i - 井” called (*igeta* - 井桁). This strain still features a few dolls with just lathe lines as well. In addition to designs on the fronts of dolls, some larger dolls also have designs on their backs featuring plum flowers (*ume*), iris (*ayame*), or peony (*botan*). Tōgatta strain *kokeshi* produced at the Akiu Hot Springs in Miyagi Prefecture feature the unique design elements of thick green lathe lines on the top and bottom of the doll’s body, sometimes lending these dolls the specialized label *Akiu* form (*Akiu gata*).

After the Meiji era, Shinchi (near Tōgatta) developed into an advanced production site for woodworking in North Eastern Japan, greatly influencing the creation of the *Yajirō*, *Zaō*, *Hijiori*, and *Nanbu* strains of *kokeshi*.



**Figure 5. *Tōgatta* Strain from Left to Right: 1) Layered Chrysanthemum, 2) Layered Chrysanthemum (*Kogesu* form), 3) Plum Flower with Branch, 4) Plum Flower with Branch (*Pekke* Form), 5) Tumbling Cherry, 6) Tumbling Cherry (*Kogesu* Form), 7) Wood Grain with Plum Flower and Branch, 8) Miniature with Wood Grain, 9) *Igeta*, 10) Lathe Lines with Tumbling Cherry.**  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell



**Figure 6. From Left to Right: Back Sides of *Tōgatta* Kokeshi with Iris and Two Sizes of *Akiu Tōgatta* Kokeshi with Layered Chrysanthemums.**  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell

The *Yajirō* strain originated in Yajirō in Hachinomiya (Fukuoka, Shiroishi City) in Miyagi Prefecture, with the Yajirō Village as the production center where *kokeshi* are mainly sold to the nearby Kamisaki Hot Springs. The *Yajirō* strain is said to have diverged from the *Tōgatta* strain around the end of the Edo period (Shibata 1999: 25). Originally it was thought that *kokeshi* were sold to visitors as souvenirs at the Kamasaki Hot Springs in *Yajirō*. These early *kokeshi* were roughly made, but, by the late 1800's, *kokeshi* artisans honed their techniques and developed this *kokeshi* into a unique strain of its own. The form of the *kokeshi* used to be *hamekomi* (tight fitting with turned wooden insert) but currently it is *sashikomi* (loose insertion with peg). The shape of the body varies with some having a straight body line, tapering at the waist (*kubire*) with widening at the bottom of the body, and smaller dolls less than 5 or 6 *sun* (approximately 18 centimeters) uniquely called *pekke* (ぺっけ), which have the appearance of *kimono*, opening at the bottom literally forming a swelled out hem (*suso no fukuranda*). This form of *pekke* is unique to the *Yajirō* strain. The torso of the *kokeshi* is often painted with wide lines using the lathe, and with various designs, such as:

- 1) chrysanthemum (*kiku*),
- 2) branch (*eda*) • plum (*ume*) • collar (*kin*),
- 3) cherry blossoms (*sakura*),
- 4) chrysanthemum (*kiku*) • collar (*kin*),
- 5) collar (*kin*) • hem of a kimono (*suso*) • pine needle (*matsuba*),
- 6) iris (*ayame*),
- 7) peony (*botan*) • butterfly (*chyō*), and
- 8) tied cord (*musubihimo*).

The mainstream design for this strain has a yellow body with wide lathe lines and red brush strokes indicating the collar and lower opening of a *kimono*. The makers of the *Yajirō* strain are known for their use of two or three color combinations on the torso and a multi-colored beret pattern (*bere bōjō*) on the top of the head of the doll. These designs and the thickness of lines used vary from family to family. Also, “ear shaped” half circle decorations (*hojō hanenkei*) are painted along the bang line of the doll. In the past, a very thin *okappa* hair decoration was painted below the beret decoration, but recently this design has been omitted on many dolls. Mainstream dolls for this strain feature half-moon (*hangetsujō fusakazari*) decorations painted along the bang line of the face, but some feature small bangs, red vertical bars (*akai tate sengun*), or the *kanji* eight-shaped hair decorations (*hachi no ji no kami kazari*) that resemble those of the *Tōgatta* strain (Shibata 1999: 40). The side hair decorations are mostly three to four red horizontal lines, but there are some with lines added, or ear designs (*mimi-gata*). More elaborate dolls may feature a scarf (*eri maki*), top knot (*mage kashira*), or umbrella hat (*kasa suki*).

The *Yajirō* strain of *kokeshi* in Figures 7 and 8 shows a broad range of the *kokeshi* produced in the area and traits passed from family member to family member and teacher to student. In Figure 7, the first doll on the left is by Satō Yoshiaki, a member of the same family under whom Inoue Yukiko (second *kokeshi* from the left) trained as an apprentice. Similar facial characteristics can be seen in *kokeshi* created by her daughter, Inoue Harumi (fourth *kokeshi* from the left), who trained under her mother and father. The last two dolls on the right are by Nīyama Mayumi (smaller *kokeshi*), who trained with her husband Nīyama Yoshinori (last *kokeshi* on the right).



**Figure 7. *Yajirō* Strain from Left to Right: 1) Plum and Branch, 2) Rising Chrysanthemum with Lathe Lines and Collar, 3) Rising Chrysanthemum with Lathe Lines, 4) Cherry Blossom, 5) Lathe Lines, 6) Plum with Branch, 7) Collar with Hem of *Kimono*, and 8) Collar with Hem of *Kimono*. Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**



**Figure 8. *Yajirō* Strain from Left to Right: 1) Layered Chrysanthemum with Saucer Shaped Collar, 2) Layered Chrysanthemum and Lathe Lines, 3) *Pekke* with Collar and Lathe Lines, 4) Pine Needles, Lathe Lines, Collar, and *Kimono* Opening 5) Iris, Umbrella Hat, and Collar, 6) Lathe Lines and Top Knot, and 7) Miniature with Lathe Lines and Top Knot. Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

The *Narugo* strain originated in Yumoto (one part of Narugo Town) in Tamatsukuri County, Miyagi Prefecture, with the production center being Narugo (Shibata 1999: 26 and Takahashi 2003: 14-15). It is said that the *Narugo kokeshi* was founded by Ōnuma Matagorō in the late Edo period. Distinctive features of this *kokeshi* are a somewhat thick body with slightly tapered shoulders and narrow eyes. The head is generally *hamekomi* which allows for the head to be twisted back and forth making a *kyu-kyu* or *ki-ki* sound. This type of connection is created by first turning a small ball-shaped connector on the neck portion of the head. Next, a hole is drilled into the upper part of the body. The entrance to the hole is made very tight so that the head can barely squeeze in as it is being pushed into the body as it is spinning on the lathe at high speed. The high speed of the lathe creates the friction needed for the ball neck connection to be pushed into the body as the body expands. As the body of the doll cools down, the head and body connection shrinks and the head cannot be pulled out. The sound that the head makes may be slightly unpleasant to some ears, but it is a major selling point and recognizable feature of the *Narugo kokeshi*. On the train and bus there are announcements about this specific feature, and while I was sitting down to breakfast at an inn there, I found that several women had painted their own *kokeshi* the day before. The women ran up to their rooms and came back carrying their *kokeshi*. These women had traveled to Narugo via Tokyo for a vacation, and while they had been unaware that there was a *kokeshi* festival going on, had joined in and painted *kokeshi* as a typical souvenir of the area. One of the women's *kokeshi* was silent when she turned its head back and forth and she openly expressed disappointment. Another woman took the doll and, after some time, was able to get it to make the *ki-ki* sound. The doll's owner was so happy her doll finally squeaked that she exclaimed, "I was glad" (*ureshikatta!*).

Soon the entire breakfast room was filled with the *ki-ki* noise as others got out their *kokeshi* and began to turn the heads back and forth. This sound is such an important feature of this *kokeshi*, that without it, in many ways, the *kokeshi* ceases to have value.

Smaller *Narugo kokeshi* have a “built-in style” (*tsukuritsuke*) either called a standing child (*tachiko* - 立ち子) or *Jizō* form (*jizōgata*). The body is generally wider at the bottom with one or two painted lathe lines. The top of the body features semi-circular shaped shoulders with color enhanced tool marks or lathe line decorations (*kanamizō*) adding a decorative detail to either the neck of the doll or creating an *obi* (sash for the *kimono*) effect in the center of the body (Shibata 1999: 43). Stylized chrysanthemum flowers, uniquely designed by each family in the region, are often painted on the front of the body, each flower painted below the next so that the design can be seen vertically. The most prevalent chrysanthemum pattern, as for the *Tōgatta* strain, is the layered chrysanthemum (*kasane-giku*). Other chrysanthemum patterns used are the pin wheel pattern (*kazaguruma-giku*), chrysanthemum seen from underside (*ura-giku*), front side of the chrysanthemum (*shōmen-giku*), three painted chrysanthemum (*sankaku-giku*), gathered chrysanthemum (*yose-giku*), water chestnut chrysanthemum (*hishi-giku*), Itō family chrysanthemum (*Itō-giku*), and wheel (old style cart wheel) chrysanthemum (*kuruma-giku*). Maple leaf designs (*kaede*) are also prevalent, while flowers such as Dianthus (*nadeshiko*)<sup>17</sup>, Bell flowers (*kikyō*), Iris (*ayame*), and peony (*botan*) may be featured on the body as well. Traditionally, *kokeshi* with just lathe lines were made. For the head design, the bangs are thinly separated and there are red decorations in the center called *mizuhikite*. The sitting down *kokeshi* shape representing a baby in a basket (*ejiko* or *ijimeko*) can be seen in all strains of traditional

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<sup>17</sup> The flower is more specifically *Dianthus monspessulanus*, commonly known as Fringed Pink.



*kokeshi*, but the *nemariko*, an elongated *ejiko* form, was uniquely created in Narugo. Due to the large numbers of artisans making this strain of *kokeshi*, Narugo is also recognized as a major region of *kokeshi* production, and, for many, these artisans provide the image of what a *kokeshi* is. The overall stable form of this *kokeshi* makes it a popular decoration among Japanese because it does not easily fall over during earthquakes, and because its solid craftsmanship can be seen as a metaphor for the stability of the home.



**Figure 9. Narugo Strain from Left to Right: 1) *Hishi-Giku* Chrysanthemum, 2) Front Side of Chrysanthemum with Lathe Design, 3) Front Side of Chrysanthemum with Lathe Design, 4) Front Side of Chrysanthemum with *Okkapa* Hairstyle, 5) Maple Leaf, 6) Dianthus, 7) Bell Flower, 8) Iris, and 9) Peony.**  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell

The *Sakunami* strain originated in Sakunami (also the production center) in the Aoba Ward in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture. Early on in the study of *kokeshi* history, it was recorded that Kuraji Kobayashi, the founder of the *Yamagata* Strain, studied in Sakunami but, more recently, greater evidence of Sakunami's woodworking industry in the last years of the Edo period and coupled with clarification on *kokeshi* artisans' genealogy, Sakunami is now recognized as the earliest production center of *kokeshi*, also making it the oldest strain of *kokeshi*. Historically *kijishi* made *kokeshi* in this area, but production lapsed until its reintroduction by Hiraga Kenzō who, along with Kobayashi Sōji, trained in Yamagata with Kobayashi Sōkichi. Hiraga Kenzō, after returning to Sakunami, revived the old *Sakunami kokeshi* unique from Kobayashi's *Yamagata* strain, according to older residents in the region (Shibata 1999: 27).

The *Sakunami kokeshi* can be distinguished from other strains by its top-heavy construction with a large head and thin tapering body. This design, while impractical for displaying on a shelf for a collection, echoes its original purpose as a wooden doll for play which was easy for children to grasp with their small hands. Now, some dolls will include a small wooden stand that can be attached to the thin bottom of the doll so that it can be displayed along with other *kokeshi*. The *Sakunami* strain is similar to the *Tōgatta* strain because of this top heavy form and *sashikome* connection. On the top of the head there is one black hair drawn with red ring decorations (a form of *tegara*) surrounding this one hair. Sometimes these red ring decorations are omitted for an all-black *okappa* hair style. On the body of the doll various flowering plants (*kusabana* - 草花) that resemble crabs (*kani*) are painted with purple and green stems and leaves. This design is said to have been revived by Hiraga Kenzō from the old *Sakunami kokeshi* (Shibata 1999: 46). Now, there are many with thin lathe lines and wave-

shaped lines (*nami gata*) painted on the upper and lower body. Recently, some artisans omit hair decorations for smaller versions of the doll and *ejiko*, and instead paint wide “hat” shaped red lines (*akai boshi*) in rings to represent a beret pattern (Shibata 1999: 46).

In Sendai, Takahashi Hōkichi is said to have continued his Father’s tradition of making another form of *Sakunami* strain *kokeshi* with chubby red and black peony-like flowers painted thickly (*bottari to kaku*-ボツタリと描く)<sup>18</sup> on the body of the doll. The design of the head and body resemble the Hiraga family’s *kokeshi* with its top heavy-ness and thin tapering body.

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<sup>18</sup> *Bottari* can also be written *botteri*, which has the same meaning of fleshy, plump, or chubby.



**Figure 10. *Sakunami* Strain from left to right: 1) Crab Flower with Green Leaves and Stems, 2) Crab Flower with Purple Leaves and Stems, 3) Chubby Peony, 4) Small Shallot-Shaped Head with Chubby Peony, 5) Thin Body with Obi and Collar, Chubby Peony, and Stand.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

The *Hijiori* strain was first produced in Ōkura town in Mogami County at the Hijiori Hot Springs (the production center) in Yamagata Prefecture (Shibata 1999: 22 and Takahashi 2003: 16). The *Hijiori* strain was said to have been started by Kakizaki Denzō who learned to make *kokeshi* in Narugo, later returning home to start his own *kokeshi* business around the late 1870s (Meiji 10) (Shibata 1999: 48). Inoue Tōgorō, an apprentice of Kakizaki Denzō, also trained at the Tōgatta Hot Springs to learn new techniques. This collaborative training resulted in a unique

*kokeshi* which has the upper body of the *Narugo* strain with wider shoulders, straight body, and thicker bottom, and the color motifs and body construction (*sashikomi*) of the *Tōgatta* strain (Shibata 1999: 48). The use of radiating decorations at the top of the head (*tegara*) as well as the eight-shaped face design and decorations that graduate along the head like a mountain range resemble the *Tōgatta* strain. Like the *Narugo* strain, this doll also features raised or recessed painted lathe lines and a slightly “stretched” shape at the bottom of the doll. In the Taishō period (July 1912 to December 1926), red and green radiating lines were added (Shibata 1999: 48). Many dolls also have several design elements such as green painted shoulders, red lathe lines on the top and bottom of the body, or yellow painted bodies. The body decorations consist of layered chrysanthemum flowers (*kasane kiku*), “confused bloom” (*midarizaita*) chrysanthemum pattern, or Dianthus (*sekichiku* - 石竹).<sup>19</sup> The appearance of all the confused or seemingly jumbled chrysanthemum flowers is often referred to as called *Hijiori* chrysanthemum (*hijiori-giku*) as this pattern is indicative of this doll. In Figure 11, the last two dolls on the left, which were created by Satō Kiku and her son Satō Shōichi, are similar in design and facial features, while the second doll from the left was made by Satō Shōnosuke, uncle of Shōichi.

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<sup>19</sup> The flower is more specifically *Dianthus chinensis*, commonly known as Chinese Pink.



**Figure 11. *Hijiore* Strain from Left to Right: 1) Dianthus, 2) *Hijiore* Chrysanthemum, 3) *Hijiore* Chrysanthemum, 4) Layered Chrysanthemum. Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

The *Zaō* strain was first produced in Zaō Hot Springs in Yamagata City, Yamagata Prefecture, when professional wood working began in the region during the late 1800s, after Eijiro Okazaki returned from training in Aone (near Tōgatta) and opened his business (Shibata: 1999: 29). The *Zaō* strain's resemblance to the *Tōgatta* strain is not a coincidence as Mr. Okazaki, during his training in Aone, worked closely with wood turners who specialized in this *kokeshi* strain (Shibata 1999: 29). Gradually, wood turners in Zaō gave their *kokeshi* a unique style with a profound fat body, red linear decorations radiating on the top of the head (*tegaru*), or a black *okappa* hair style. The head is *sashikomi*, but, unlike the Tōgatta strain, it does not feature the “eight” shaped decoration on the front of the head. While the center of production is still in the Zaō region, this strain is also produced in Uenoyama in Yamagata. Unique wind-blown cherry blossoms (*sakura kuzushi*) are also painted on this strain, similar to but unique

from the tumbling cherry blossoms painted on the Tōgatta strain. The design of this strain is also influenced by the *Tsuchiyu* strain, as some dolls have snake eyes painted on the top of their heads and some are narrow at the bottom of the body or waist. Occasionally, various plants, grapes, corn, or peonies are painted on the body (Shibata 1999: 29).



**Figure 12. *Zaō* Strain from Left to Right: 1) Peony, 2) Layered Chrysanthemum with *Okkapa* Hairstyle, 3) Layered Chrysanthemum, 4) Wind-Blown Cherry Blossom, 5) *Ejiko* with Wind-Blown Cherry Blossom, 6) Wind-Blown Cherry Blossom with Chrysanthemum at Base, 7) *Pekke* Form with Peony, 8) Chrysanthemum with Cat Eyes. Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

The *Yamagata* strain was founded by Kuraji Kobayashi who traveled to Sakunami around 1860, to study wood working with Iwamatsu Naosuke, later returning to Yamagata in the early Meiji period (around 1868) to produce his own *kokeshi* (Shibata 1999: 30). Mr. Kobayashi had

many apprentices, and his teaching influences are still reflected in current *Yamagata kokeshi*. While the *Yamagata kokeshi* is based on the style of the *Sakunami kokeshi*, utilizing similar cherry blossom motifs, floral patterns of the Yamagata plum are also painted on the bodies of the dolls, reflecting a deeper Yamagata connection and evoking the atmosphere of Yamagata City (Takahashi 2003: 15-16). The head is *sashikomi* and on the top of the head is painted the single black hair and ring-shaped decorations (*tegara*) surrounding it like *Sakunami* strain, but there are a greater number of rings, more similar to the radiating lines of the *Tōgatta* strain. Originally the characteristic of this line was a doll with comparatively narrow body compared to the head, but lately the body is wider and lathe lines may be drawn on the top and bottom of the body. Some artisans still do not use the lathe lines as the old styles do not have them, and instead create incised lathe lines (*kannamizo* - 鉋溝).





**Figure 13. *Yamagata* Strain with Cherry Blossoms and Two Center Dolls with Layered Chrysanthemums. Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

The originators of the *Kijiyama* strain can be traced back to the Ogura family who migrated to the Akita area around the late 1800s (Meiji 30) (Shibata 1999: 31 and Takahashi 2003: 18). The center production area is Kijiyama in Minase, Okachi County, in Akita Prefecture. Artisans spread throughout Akita Prefecture are also making this strain, especially in Kawazura (Inagawa Town) and Yuzawa (Shibata 1999: 31 and Takahashi 2003: 18). The defining characteristic of this *kokeshi* is that it is made from one piece of wood forming both the head and body (*tsukuritsuke*). Some say that the body used to be *hamekomi* as older dolls exist in this style and some artisans still produce this style. The head is either ball or shallot shaped

(*rakkyō gata*), with bangs in the shape of a half-moon (*kamaboko gata*),<sup>20</sup> and the red radiating finger designs. The torso was first and still is decorated with a simple chrysanthemum pattern, as originally designed, but a *kimono* apron pattern (*maedare moyo*)<sup>21</sup> with plum flowers was created in Kijiyama and Imagawa (Akita Prefecture), along with cherry and chrysanthemum flowers to create a vertical striped *kimono* pattern (Shibata 1999: 31).

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<sup>20</sup> *Kamaboko* is a type of pressed fish paste that is often formed into a half cylinder, and, when cut, reveals layered colors, usually pink and white, inside.

<sup>21</sup> *Maedare* is an older word for apron. Usually one would say *maekake* (前掛け) or *epuron* (エプロン).



**Figure 14. Kijiyama Strain from Left to Right: 1) Apron *Kimono* with Chrysanthemums, 2) Apron *Kimono* with Plum Blossoms, 3) Chrysanthemums, 4) Vertical Stripped *Kimono*, 5) Plum Blossoms, 6) *Kimono* with Chrysanthemums, and 7) Chrysanthemums.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

The *Nanbu* strain was developed in the old Nanbu territory which is now part of Iwate Prefecture. Iwate Prefecture production centers can be found in the cities of Hanamaki and Morioka City. The head of this doll is the loosely fitting *hamekomi* and is characteristically called *kina kina*, a name used for wooden baby toys and pacifiers. The *kina kina* style is well known for its loose-fitting head which is inserted into the body, allowing it to move freely back and forth like a rattle, making a sound Japanese describe with the onomatopoeia, *gura-gura*. These basic types are called *sōboku no kishi* (simple style) and were developed from *oshaburi*

(pacifiers), but were not colored so as to not harm children when they played with them. It was only later that form and coloring influences from *Narugo* and *Tōgatta* were added, though many dolls remain unpainted today. It was mainly the artisans of Hanamaki who developed the dolls with color (Shibata 1999: 32). In Tono, Miyako, in Shidōtaira, the dolls have heads that can be twisted back and forth like the ones in the *Narugo* strain (Shibata 1999: 32). Several artisans living in Iwate Prefecture producing *Nambu* strain also produce several other strains of *kokeshi* as well. Takahashi states that *Nambu* strain is too narrowly defined as it contains makers who make several strains at a time and may need to be revised (2003: 17).



Figure 15. *Nanbu* Strain from Left to Right: First Three *Kina Kina*, 4) Layered Chrysanthemum, 5) Lathe Lines, and 6) Lathe Lines with *Kimono* Snow Cape.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell

The youngest strain of *kokeshi*, first procured in the Taishō period (1912-1926), is the *Tsugaru* strain which was born (and is centered) in Nuru Hot Springs in Kuroishi City, Aomori Prefecture, and Oowani Hot Springs in Oowani Town, Southern Tsugaru County, as well as in other areas nearby (Shibata 1999: 33 and Takahashi 2003: 18). As with other *kokeshi*-producing regions, Tsugaru has created an origin story for its *kokeshi*, making it unique from other *kokeshi* strains. The Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Museum's pamphlet states that in Tsugaru there were wooden children's pacifiers called *nameribō* and an object of folk belief (*minkanshinkō no taishō*) called *yama naka sansuke ningyō* which may be considered as the origin of *kokeshi*, but at this point in time there wasn't anything in the world recognized as a *kokeshi* (Tsugaru *Kokeshi Kōjin* Association 1994: 3). This strain, though, has many of the features of the *Narugo* strain as there

were exchanges between artisans there. The two main designs or sub-strains are the *Nuruyu Mori* sub-strain with a straight body and widening bottom, and the *Ōwani* design with a straight body and visible shoulders. For both designs, one piece of wood (*tsukuritsuke*) is used and the head may be black with the *okkapa* hair design, painted with red decorations, or *tegara* that resemble the *Narugo* strain. The body design may have hand-drawn chrysanthemums, peony, camellia, or iris (*hayama*) designs, but there are also dolls with the *nebuta daruma* design, lathe lines, *kogin moyo* (small cloth or clothing design from the Aomori area) or design motifs from the Ainu culture.



**Figure 16. *Tsugaru* Strain from left to right: 1) Lathe Lines with Daruma, 2) Layered Chrysanthemums with Lathe Lines, 3) Lathe Lines, 4) Fabric Motif with Cherry Blossom, 5) Lathe Lines with Iris, 6) Lathe Lines and Obi, and 7) Lathe Lines with Peony and Fabric Motif.**

**Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

While not the original birthplace of traditional *kokeshi*, Sendai is the largest city in Tōhoku and there are many markets that make and sell toys as there is a demand for wooden wares (*kijimono*), such as bowls, trays, and toys, such as spinning tops. The *kōjin* who learned the woodworking industry (*kijigyō*) came to Sendai and started businesses.

Traditional *kokeshi* that are made in Sendai City (including the surrounding areas) are described by the Master's strain from which they learned. Currently the strains of traditional *kokeshi* made in and around Sendai City are the *Tōgatta* strain in the Aoba, Taihaku, Izumi and Akiu, and Wakabayashi Wards; the *Yajirō* strain, made in the Taihaku Ward; <sup>22</sup> the *Sakunami* strain, made in Akiu; and the *Hijiori* strain made in the Aoba Ward near Nakayama (Shibata 1999: 34).

## 2.3 TRADITIONAL *KOKESHI*: MATERIALS, MATERIAL PREPARATION, LATHE CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN

### 2.3.1 Wood

On a rather cold grey day while sitting in the workshop of Mr. Nīyama, a *kokeshi kōjin* in Yajirō, the conversation turned to wood used for *kokeshi* production. Nīyama sat perched on a stool on the opposite side of the workshop grinning as I peered at him from the side of the wood burning stove between us. He insisted, much to my chagrin, on quizzing me about various aspects of *kokeshi* culture. When it came to naming the trees used for *kokeshi*, together we began to say the obvious ones, *Mizuki* (Dogwood), *Sakura* (Cherry), *Itaya* (Maple), and, after a long pause, I suggested *Nashi* (Japanese Pear). Nīyama's face lit up as he declared that he used *Nashi*! He promptly excused himself to go out into the snowy air, and brought back a rather large scruffy-looking tree branch. I did not hide my skepticism about the usefulness of this

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<sup>22</sup> Tragically during this field work period (2007-2009), the one remaining Yajirō artisan living in the Taihaku Ward passed away.



branch as it did not have any core wood on it, only thick uneven bark. Nīyama, seeing my doubt, with his arms outstretched in a circular position said that he did not use the branch for *kokeshi*, but rather the lower trunk of the tree, pantomiming lifting a large tree trunk off the ground. Nīyama went on to explain that a Japanese pear farmer in Fukushima, an area famous for growing this type of fruit, was retiring and had asked him if he wanted to come and harvest the wood. I did not have to ask what he did with the branch as he casually chucked it into the wood burning stove. While Asian pear wood historically was not used to make *kokeshi*, several artisans have begun to use this wood as it becomes available. This type of wood came to mind while sitting in Nīyama's shop, as a collector, during an interview the previous summer, had pointed out to me "the oldest strain" of *kokeshi*, but he had seemed a little bothered that the *Sakunami kokeshi* he was indicating were made with Asian Pear wood. He muttered that the artisans must be doing something new and quickly moved on to show me other dolls. Later, I found out from the son of the artisan who was selling these *kokeshi*, that he had been given the pear wood by Nīyama, a not uncommon act as artisans often support each other when there is a surplus of materials. Fruit tree woods are also becoming more available as a recycled resource for *kokeshi* artisans, as all trees in an orchard become too old to produce fruit, and need to be replaced, or as in the case of the Fukushima pear farmer, these older farmers retire and wish to sell their land.

Wood, the material used to make traditional *kokeshi*, is a continual topic among collectors and artisans alike as collectors always want to know which type of wood a *kokeshi* is made from (according to *kokeshi* artisans, this is the number one question they hear about their dolls) and artisans attempting to maintain the quality and heritage of their works. The Tōhoku region solely developed traditional *kokeshi* production primarily because it had the timber,

climate, and tourism to support it. Artisans living in the area also trained in groups to pass on information, techniques and materials, so these production areas served as a support station for artisans early on, and remain as production centers today.

There is also practicality in the types of woods being used to make *kokeshi*, as the straight trunk of the dogwood tree makes it good for turning the body and head shape of the *kokeshi*. Dogwood has a neutral grain (does not show tree ring growth) so it does not compete with the minimalist paint patterns. The dogwood also grows back when cut down, making it a renewable resource for artisans. Hard woods, like cherry and dogwood, also have a less porous surface which allows for ease of painting after turning as the ink is absorbed more readily, inhibiting color bleeding. While at the Shiroishi *Kokeshi* Concourse, an artisan showed me a large doll made from what he said was a very rare type of wood. He went on to say that *kokeshi* artisans do not buy rare wood types; they only use cheap woods available or which used to be available in the areas in which they live. A *kōjin*'s breadth of wood that they use for their craft is also predicated on what their teachers used, and the advice of surrounding *kōjin*. One young *kokeshi* artisan said that he was advised that Cherry was easier to use than other wood types. Several artisans also received wood from relatives who had cut down trees in their yards, or harvested from cooler mountainous regions in which they lived. Customers will bring rare woods to the artisans, and ask them to make a doll for them, hoping to get a unique *kokeshi* to add to their collection. Sometimes they will bring many types of wood, and the artisans will pick and choose what they want to work with, the rest of the wood circulated among the *kōjin* living in that area, continuing the potential for the production of unique *kokeshi*. *Kokeshi* artisans are concerned with quality of the lumber they receive, and know from lathe turning experience which woods are of greater quality. At one festival, I was called over by an artisan who gave me two

miniature spinning tops because “I come to everything!” He said that my tops were made from expensive Japanese Boxwood (*tsuge*) usually used for Japanese wooden comb construction. These combs, called *tsuge gushi*, are named after the wood from which they are made. He compared these tops to those made from less expensive Maple (*itaya*), saying that this wood was “no good” as its cheapness limited the spinning time of the tops. Though I did not see much of a difference in their rates of spinning, there would be a difference in how the two woods turned on the lathe as maple would have a high tendency to tear out (dent or chip in wood caused by gouge hitting soft wood while turning), and the softer maple could easily wear down or become damaged over time from use.

As a side note, Hokkaidō (Japan’s northern-most island) does not have a history of wood turning, nor does it produce *kokeshi*. The main explanation for its lack of *kokeshi* production is its fairly late incorporation into Japan and Japanese culture (Ano 1992: 9). Before 1868, the *shogunate* and local *Ezo* (Hokkaidō) governors, the Matsumae clan, enforced a monopoly over the distribution of *Ezo* products like salmon, dried herring, fish fertilizer, abalone, sea-mammal products, and timber (Ohtsuka 1999: 92). With the opening of Hokkaidō during the Meiji Restoration, which began in 1868, the Ainu (indigenous population living in Hokkaidō and Northern Honshū, but not related to the Japanese) were forced to assimilate rapidly into Japanese society, and the practice of Ainu customs, religion, and language was forbidden (Dubreuil 1999: 336). The second reason for a lack of wood turning culture in Hokkaidō is that while Japan has historically attempted to practice sustainable timber harvesting, an increased need for timber during the Meiji Restoration’s rapid industrialization and following World Wars forced the Japanese government to look to Hokkaidō’s rich forests (Totman 2009: 5). In Honshū, as the Japanese government controlled access to harvesting rights by changing regulations during the

1870s-1890s, owners of forested land clear cut, as they suspected they would lose ownership of their land as new policies took effect (Totman 2009: 5). This practice of clear cutting continued in Hokkaidō as Japan looked outside of the already depleted mainland for timber, resulting in the loss of hard wood old growth forests. Today, Hokkaidō contains 22% of Japan's forests, but while much of this is fast growing, it is composed primarily of low quality conifers, planted to replace those old growth forests that were harvested.

The Ainu people did have a custom of wood carving, and produced two figurines for religious purposes. One ceremonial figure, called a *nipopo* doll, was carved and use by shamans as amulets for curing or warding off disease. Some dolls had two heads and may have been used as a charm to increase the probability of giving birth to twins, who were believed to bring luck in fishing and hunting among the Sakhalin Ainu and neighboring Eastern Siberian groups (Wanda 1999: 236). In 1924, the Ainu began to carve *nipopo*, now called Ainu dolls, for the tourist trade even though making human images for non-religious purposes was against Ainu traditional beliefs; the Ainu had little choice but to engage in this work because they were financially dependent on the government (Ishijima 1980b: 3 in Dubreuil 1999: 337). A second ceremonial caving called an *inaw* is imagined as a bird that acts as a messenger to the gods. These ceremonial figures are made from tree limbs which are finely shaved and tufted at one end. It is estimated that there were several hundred types of *inaw* made by the Ainu, each for a specific ceremonial purpose (Dubreuil 1999: 296).

The *nipopo* doll has been compared to *kokeshi*, as later versions for the tourist trade in the 1920's were rounded in shape and sold in male and female pairs, but these dolls are carved and not lathe-turned as *kokeshi* would be. It should be noted, though, that while Hokkaidō does not produce *kokeshi*, souvenir *kokeshi* representative of Ainu couples were sold in the area, primarily during the 1940s to 1960s, as were other souvenir *kokeshi* throughout Japan.

There is a certain format followed at *kokeshi* museums throughout the Tōhoku region emphasizing *kokeshi* strains, the materials used to make *kokeshi*, and the steps followed in *kokeshi* production. At the Yajirō *Kokeshi* Village (established 1993) where Nīyama has his workshop in the outside courtyard, you enter the museum's *kokeshi* display area through a forest of tree limbs of various woods used for *kokeshi* production. The effect is very visceral as the space is tight and you brush up against the branches, each emitting a spicy scent and clicking as you pass. Nīyama told me that he himself had cut down and installed these branches, the intent of immersing the visitor, at least for a few seconds, in the life of a *kokeshi* artisan. A five-minute video specifically about *kokeshi* production in Yajirō, titled "From Forest to *Kokeshi*", shows the harvesting of wood from forests, the removal of the bark, and the process of drying it for one year. At the Japan *Kokeshi* Museum in Narugo (established 1975) there is also a video that plays for visitors which features how wood is harvested and stored, and you can watch *kokeshi* artisans turning dolls on lathes in two display areas. In Tōgatta, at the Miyagi Zaō *Kokeshi* Museum (established 1984), the museum pamphlet and a comprehensive on-site exhibit illustrate how wood is processed and each step in the *kokeshi*-making procedure. There is also an area there where artisans demonstrate on the lathe. The Yamagata Traditional *Kokeshi* Museum (establishment 1994-1995) has a more tactile display of trunk sections of commonly used trees in *kokeshi*-production labeled with corresponding species information.

### 2.3.2 Wood Preparation

The primary material used in the production of *kokeshi* comes from the Giant dogwood tree (*mizuki* - *Cornus controversa*). The wood from the Painted maple (*Itayakaede* - *Acer mono Maxim* or *Acer pictum*) and “Melon-skin” maple (*Urihadakaede* - *Acer rufinerve*)<sup>23</sup> is also widely used. Other wood types used along with those mentioned above are:

Cherry (*sakura*)

Japanese zelkova (*keyaki* - *Zelkova serrata*)

Japanese camellia (*tsubaki*)

Japanese spindle tree (*mayumi* - *Euonymus sieboldianus*)

Japanese liden<sup>24</sup> (*shinanoki* - *Tilia japonica*)

Styrax or Japanese snowball tree (*egonoki* - *Styrax japonicas*)

White-bark Magnolia (*hoonoki* - *Magnolia hypoleuca* or *Magnolia obovata*)

Japanese pagoda (*enjyu* - *Styphnolobium japonicum*)

Prickly castor-oil tree (*harigiri* - *Kalopanax septemlobus*)

Japanese Yew (*ichi* - *Taxus cuspidate*)

Japanese hornbeam (*shide* - *Carpinus japonica*).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This form of maple is referred to as the “Melon-skin” maple in Japanese while it is also known as the Redvein maple or the Honshū maple.

<sup>24</sup> Liden is known as Lime in Britain; therefore, sources may list this tree as a Japanese lime.

<sup>25</sup> Tree information was gathered from personal conversations with collectors and artisans, and museum displays at the Yamagata Traditional *Kokeshi* Museum, Yajirō *Kokeshi* Village, and Miyagi Zaō *Kokeshi* Museum. Scientific names of these species were checked with the help of the Japanese language book, Handbook of Bark, by Hayashi: 2006.

In the Autumn, around September and October, physically-able *kōjin* with timber resources or lumber companies harvest trees when the leaves change color and the trees have ended their growth period. The trees are left where they are cut to facilitate drying as excess water will be re-absorbed into the leaves. Artisans who order their lumber from companies usually order around 30 *koku* (8.34 m<sup>3</sup>) of Dogwood, Maple, Cherry, and Camellia (most expensive) for around 300,000 yen. After the wood has partially dried, the branches are cut off of the logs and then are cut by hand saw or chainsaw into approximate lengths of two meters, a length that is easy to carry by hand. For lumber that has been delivered by a company, the branches have already been removed, and the artisan only has to cut them with a chain saw into more usable lengths. For each tree harvested that is about 10 cm in diameter, six smaller lengths can be cut. The lumber is then carried to a place to dry (*kansoba*) and the bark is taken off with a stripping tool (*kawahagiyōgu*). About 20 cm of the bark will be kept on the cut end of the log in order to avoid cracking and to deter stains from getting inside the wood. After the logs are stripped, they are leaned, cut side up, and will dry naturally for about a half a year. In the Narugo area, they layer the wood in piles placed in a well-ventilated space, often outside, and put corrugated metal sheets between the layers to avoid water pooling on the wood from rain and melting snow. The curing wood must also be covered or placed in a spot out of direct sun light, as the wood will dry too quickly and crack. Many *kōjin* do not have the space for their wood stores near their homes so they must share a communal space with other artisans, or rely on the kindness of someone to use their land to store the lumber. While in Narugo, the artisan I was interviewing felt it imperative that I see where his wood was stored, so I was taken by car about a half a mile from the artisan's home. It was snowing heavily, and the wood was covered under a bright blue tarp to protect it. The artisan was allowed to store his wood on his friend's land, and

when the wood had aged properly, came by small farmer truck to pick it up and bring it back to his workshop. As I attempted to see through the snow, the artisan's wife, who had come along for the ride, asked if I was going to take a photo of the covered woodpile. She rolled down the window, and I leaned out to take a snow-blurred photo, knowing that this was a rare moment to see what many artisans viewed as a mundane though important facet of their profession, and, therefore, had not considered it to be important to give me the opportunity to photograph this material resource previously.

Many *kokeshi kōjin* have expressed difficulty finding appropriate timber for their profession, as lumber companies are going out of business due to a labor shortage, and climate change has decreased winter temperatures, making wood growth unsuitable for lathe work. In order to form even concentric and tight growth rings, a tree needs to grow in a region that has a long cold winter and consistent temperatures in spring and summer. If there is too much temperature fluctuation and the tree is not able to go dormant in winter, the growth rings will be too wide and uneven. This type of growth causes the wood to be unstable on the lathe, often splintering, cracking, or bursting, and it is near impossible to turn the cylindrical body and round head of the *kokeshi*. When the tree is growing in the spring and summer months, it produces soft wood, but while it is dormant in the late autumn and winter months, the rings are hard. It is important not to have too much soft wood as during the turning process the gouge can “tear out” these soft spots. Trees that grow very fast (low dormancy period) produce wood with widely spaced rings or uneven ring growth so it turns poorly and has poor strength. The smaller or tighter the growth rings, the less likely for tear out. A point of pride for artisans is a well-balanced wood form to the body and skilled display of wood grain. A second issue with wood grown in warmer climates is that there is an increase of insects living in the wood, another



deterrent to making a solid and well-formed *kokeshi* and, possibly a greater threat, these insects have a tendency to eat their way out of the *kokeshi* after it is made as it is sitting on a collector's shelf. Dr. Toshio Hirai, *kokeshi* collector and scholar, published a rather large 600-page tome entitled The insects that eat *kokeshi* (*kokeshi wo kū mushi*) on the various insect species that have been known to destroy *kokeshi* by living in and consuming them. In his home, safely in an isolated location, he still has the *kokeshi* he used for this book on display. Now, timber is fumigated more thoroughly and artisans take extra care to store their wood to minimize potential insect issues. Despite this diligence, one artisan said that 30 % of the lumber he orders is bad as it has insects or defects in it.

Current global climate changes have had an impact on the timber industry in Japan, so as winters become warmer, *kōjin* living in Miyagi Prefecture have had to go further up north to Iwate and Akita Prefecture to purchase wood. Another issue is that the lumber jack profession is waning in Japan as many young people do not want to do such dangerous and low paying work. Several *kokeshi* artisans with whom I talked had on several occasions needed to find new companies that would supply them with lumber as their old supplier had gone out of business due to labor shortages.

### **2.3.3 Turning *Kokeshi***

When the time comes to actually turn a *kokeshi*, the artisan chooses a piece of lumber with the appropriate thickness for the *kokeshi* he plans on making and then cuts the wood about 1.5 cm longer for both the head and body. If the lumber is too thick, he will divide the log into quarters. First, four pucks of wood are cut off of the main log using a circular saw (*maru noko*), hand axe

(*chōna*) or a wood axe (*moku ono*). After the lumber is cut into smaller pieces it is dried further, and in some cases boards are placed on the cut end of the logs to avoid cracking. Recently, many artisans are asking wood cutters to do this process for them as it is very labor intensive and many *kōjin* are reaching the age of seventy and eighty, and the use of the circular saw can be dangerous. At a party I noticed that the artisan who sat across from me had his hand bandaged up. He later explained to the party in general that he had slipped while cutting logs on the circular saw, jamming the wood into his fingers. This prompted other *kōjin* to display missing and shortened digits as it can be a hazard of the job. As part of the interview process, when I asked female *kōjin* if they had ever felt discriminated against, all said no in regards to male-female relationships, but added that they did feel discriminated against when it came to processing the wood before they could make the *kokeshi*. Lifting the logs onto the table saw was impossible and none was willing to hurt herself in the process.

One of the characteristics of traditional *kokeshi* is the use of the lathe (*rokuro*). Traditionally the lathe was turned manually with one person pulling a cord by hand while another person turned (*tebiki/hatsubiki rokuro*; used from 1800 to 1890), but soon after the foot lathe was introduced (*ashibumi rokuro*; used from 1890 to 1945) so that one person pumps the lathe mechanism with both legs as they turn the wood. After World War II, the motor lathe was introduced. In *Tōgatta*, *Yajirō*, *Sakunami*, and *Hijiori*, the artisan stands while turning at a right angle to the lathe (*tatebiki rokuro*). In *Narugo*, they stand parallel to the lathe (*yokobiki rokuro*). An older method for putting the wood on the lathe was to attach it to a claw with three or more spikes (*tsume*). While some artisans still use this type of lathe, most lathes have a thin round shaft (*usui marusume*) or the wood is inserted into a tightly fitting shaft (*hamekomigata*) to avoid the holes left by the claw lathe. Many early *kokeshi* have indents on the bottom of the body or in

the rare case in the head left by the claw of the lathe. Most artisans either cut off or sand the lathe-punctured areas. While visiting with the owner of a *kokeshi* shop in Shiroishi, I was shown a doll with small indents in the head where it had been attached to the lathe. The owner of the shop felt this was amusing as artisans now would take great care to not damage any visible portions of the doll as they are bought by collectors. He speculated that this earlier doll was an example of how *kokeshi* were once toys and less care was taken to make them esthetically pleasing as they are now for collectors.

In most cases, the head and the body of the *kokeshi* are turned separately on the lathe using tools that the *kōjin* has made by hand. The tools used for *kokeshi* construction cannot be bought at a store. Only the steel rods can now be purchased, and these are then forged into the shapes used for each specific turning task. Even the wooden tool handles and tool rests are created by the artisan. Many tool handles bear the scorch marks from when the tool is re-forged and the metal rod of the tool progressively gets shorter in length as the tool is continually sharpened or re-shaped. Artisans also use hand-made gauges to ensure that the body of the *kokeshi* is of a certain diameter and length. One gauge used is a piece of flat wood that has a semi-circular shape cut out of it in the desired diameter. This is placed along the entire surface of the wood after it is turned with the roughing gouge and then the artisan will continue to turn the wood until it reaches the correct diameter and the gauge fits along the entire length of the wood. The second gauge I have seen being used is a piece of wood with either a nail or metal pin placed at the desired measurement which is used to scribe the desired diameter on the wood before it is turned. Interestingly, these gauges are checked against wooden rulers with either

centimeter or *sun* (3 cm) increments.<sup>26</sup> Tools are sharpened continually during the turning process using several types of wet stones, including diamond-embedded, or metal rasps. About five small doll bodies or one large doll body can be made before the gouge needs to be sharpened again.

To make the head for the *sashikomi* (insertion style) of the *Tōgatta*, *Yajirō*, *Sakunami*, and *Hijiori kokeshi*, first a ball shape is turned with a roughing gouge (*arabiki kanna*) and then a hole is inserted in the center of the ball using a “ditch” shaped gouge (*mizo kanna*).<sup>27</sup> As the artisan turns the wood, the gouge is rested on a hand-made wooden tool rest called a horse (*uma*) aptly named for its front and back leg. Next, a tapered pin that is the same diameter of the drilled hole is attached while the head is still on the lathe.<sup>28</sup> The head is smoothed using a finishing gouge (*shiage kanna*) and then a hand hoe-shaped thin curving blade with a handle (*bankaki*) is held against the spinning wood with both hands in a downward motion to smooth the surface of gouge marks. Next, the wood is polished using horse tail plant (*tokusa*) and rice straw (*inenai kusa*). *Tokusa* is harvested at the end of fall and then boiled in rice water (*togijiyu*) with salt. It is then dried outside in the frost until it loses its green color and then is bundled into about ten pieces. The rice straw is dried in the shade after the rice is harvested in the spring and then

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<sup>26</sup> Traditional *kokeshi* are measured using either *sun* (3 cm) or *shaku* (30 cm) increments. Artisans will convert these measurements into centimeters, but usually the doll’s measurements will be listed in *shaku* or *sun*. This traditional measurement system originates from the Chinese *shakkan-hō* system developed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC. The name originates from two units, the *shaku*, a unit of length, and the *kan*, a mass measurement. This system was replaced in Japan by the metric system in 1924, but certain professions such as wood turning, carpentry, and agriculture still use these measurements. Japanese tools like chisels, saws, and hammers are also manufactured in *sun* (3 cm) and *bu* (.30 cm) sizes.

<sup>27</sup> *The Complete Manual of Wood Working* (Jackson, Day, and Jennings 1989: 194-196) was consulted for English equivalent tool names. If no English equivalent existed, direct translation of the Japanese was used. Two programs from PBS Create were also used for consultation: *American Woodshop* with Scott Phillips and *Woodturning Workshop* with Tim Yoder. Shibata 1999: 55-75 was consulted for clarification of Japanese tool names.

<sup>28</sup> The pin used to attach the head to the body for these forms either can be made separately or turned as part of the body while it is still on the lathe. Most large dolls have a separate pin attaching the head to the body as it would be difficult to turn one on a doll larger than 30 cm while still on the lathe.

gathered into 15 cm long by approximately 3 cm wide bundles. Recently, there are many artisans who use very fine grade sandpaper (100 to 1000 plus) and it is estimated that for each piece of sandpaper, 20 dolls can be sanded. With *tokusa*, a bundle can be used for three to five days when working on small dolls. For larger dolls, the bundle of *tokusa* first must be placed in water as there is more exposed wood grain and the *tokusa* must be made more pliable to move over the surface, or the artisans wet their fingers and move them over the piece of wood before sanding. Observing *kōjin* in several production areas revealed that most first use fine grade sandpaper, then *tokusa*, and finally rice straw. Occasionally an artisan will use a cloth instead of rice straw. I was told by a Tōgatta *kōjin* that if only *tokusa* is used then the grain of the wood will be rough and raised so the ink will bleed more than if rice straw is also used to smooth out the wood surface. Some artisans will also use two types of fine grade sandpaper (grade 100, then 180) before moving on to use the *tokusa*. Usually the finer grade sandpaper (180) is reserved for small hard wood dolls while 100-grade sandpaper is good for sanding larger dolls made from Dogwood. Other artisans said that they only used 180-grade sandpaper regardless of wood type as it is the most versatile. Some collectors, though, would like artisans to only use the “traditional” *tokusa* and plant materials instead of sandpaper as the introduction of sandpaper has literally smoothed over the desirable roughhewn quality that older *kokeshi* possessed.

Some large-headed *kokeshi*, except for the *Narugo* strain because they are easily broken, are hollowed out and beans or pebbles are inserted inside.<sup>29</sup> It is said that these dolls will be harder to break if the beans and pebbles are added. After these items are put into the hollowed out head, the hole is closed with another type of wood. Many *kokeshi* with beans in the head

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<sup>29</sup> While I have not come across a *Narugo kokeshi* with beans in the head, this method is prevalent for *Tsuchiyu* and *Yajirō kokeshi* made in Fukushima Prefecture that also have a delicate *hamekomi* insertion like the *Narugo* strain.

also act as rattles for babies, or the head and attached handle can be lifted out of the body like a *maraca* (*marakasu*) to be shaken (Figures 17 and 18).



**Figure 17. *Maraca Kokeshi* from Left to Right: Satō Masahiro (*Yajirō*) and Kakizawa Koretaka (*Narugo*). Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**



**Figure 18. Maraca with Kokeshi Body from Left to Right: Just Maraca with Beans in Head and Hat Decoration and Maraca with Beans in Head and Whistle at the Base.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

In the *Narugo* strain, the wood is placed on the lathe and hammered into the chuck with a rubber hammer so as to avoid denting the wood. The shape is carved with a roughing gouge and then left to dry for about one week in order for the insertion part (*hamekomi*) to be perfect. In this case, the gouge is placed on a tool rest (*dima*) called locally a *shimeki*, the same as the tool rest used in other areas called an *uma*. The angle of the *shimeki* is changed by hand to make the shape of the head. The heads that have finished drying will be attached to the lathe and will be turned with the finishing gouge (*shiage kanna*). At the end, the lathe lines (*hikime*) from the finishing gouge will be smoothed using a thin blade (*usuba*), essentially the same as the *bankaki*, and then the wood will be polished using the *tokusa* and rice straw. While the head is still attached to the lathe, the artisan will use a small gouge (*kokanna/koganna*) to carve the small part (*sorobandama*) that is well-balanced with the body insertion point. After the head is attached to the body, the excess wood is cut off with a hand saw.

The basic shape that is turned for the *Narugo* strain is a body with a narrow center and wide shoulders and lower body. Some dolls are turned with a completely straight body, though. The top of the shoulders is often dome-shaped and first turned on the body before being attached to the head. *Kōjin* make the shoulder dome or rising part (*mori agari bubun*) by turning this portion so that it is balanced with the center and bottom of the body. After this area is smoothed further using the finishing gouge, thin blade, sand paper, *tokusa*, and rice straw, lines are painted on the shoulders, dome, and bottom of the body while the doll spins on the lathe. At this time, decorations using the small gouge (*kanna mizo*) are turned on the top part of the shoulders and along the bottom of the body. Especially on the top of the shoulders, a wave design (*zara biki* or *utera kasha*) will be turned using a special gouge (*biri kanna*) that bends or springs along the wood surface as it is turning. While this technique is usually only used in *Narugo* for the body of the *kokeshi*, it is also used for *Tōgatta ejiko* and wooden toys from various regions. Examples of these decorations can be seen in Figure 9 (*Narugo* strain, third doll from the right), Figure 12 (*Zaō* strain, fourth *ejiko* from the right), and Figure 17 (Maraka *Kokeshi* Hat).

The body of the *kokeshi* is turned in much the same way as the head, depending on the specific strain that it represents. First the body is shaped using the roughing gouge and then the shape is refined further using the finishing gouge. The surface is then smoothed of the lines created by the gouge by using a *bankaki*. For *Tōgatta*, *Yajirō*, *Sakunami*, and *Hijiori* strains, the wood for the body portion of the *kokeshi* is hammered onto the lathe and the roughing gouge is placed on the wooden tool rest (*uma*). The artisan stands at about a 40 degree angle and will turn the wood into a pillar shape (*enchujo*) by moving the gouge level to the wood. The shoulders of the body will be turned next, and then the area where the neck peg will be inserted is carved at about 1.5 cm. above the shoulder area.



For each strain, unique body shapes are created. The *Yajirō* strain is generally straight, but many have a narrow center with a bottom that flares out. It can narrow naturally from the shoulders, or the lower back is narrowed, and some dolls have a belt-shaped area (*fushi*) turned in the center of the lower back. Others are turned with a saucer shape (*ukezara*) at the neck. For the *Tōgatta* strain, the upper body and sloping shoulders are turned so that they balance each other out. In the *Sakunami* strain, the upper part of the body is thick and narrows towards the base of the body, forming a stylized cone shape. The bottom of the body is so narrow on some dolls that artisans will turn a separate stand for the doll to sit in to make it stable. The *Hijiori* strain is turned with both the straight body of the *Tōgatta* strain with steps (*dan*) that are turned similarly to the *Narugo* steps at the tip of the shoulders, called *mizo*. Lathe lines in one or two colors are drawn on the shoulders and bottom of the body. Traditionally, a thick colored belt was painted on the center of the body, but, more recently, thin green and red lines are painted together.

In Tōgatta, I met a *kijiya* who turned the wooden bodies of new style *kokeshi* back in the 1960s. Later, after retiring from the dairy business, he came back to the *kokeshi* village there and asked one of the *kōjin* families if he could turn *kokeshi* once more. This family hired him to work during the tourist season as they are the only household in the village who has contracted with tour buses. The man sits in the glass-fronted workshop, turning specific size dolls for the family and demonstrating to tourists how to make miniature tops. To make a doll about 10 cm in length, the following tools are used in succession: tool rest, gauge, two different diametered wood planes, roughing gouge, finishing gouge, small gouge, *bankaki*, two grades of sandpaper, *tokusa*, rice straw, two widths of paint brushes, saw, rubber hammer, two colors of ink, and three different sharpening stones. The explanations in more traditional *kokeshi* books often overlook

the more mass-produced side of *kokeshi* making. When working to produce large numbers of dolls, a certain number of steps are taken for ease of production. On the day of our interview, Mr. Kamiyama was preparing about 60 doll bodies in rapid fashion. He used a special wood plane, pushing it over each wood piece on the lathe so that they were all the same size and shape. On the first pass through a larger plane is used, and, on the second pass, a plane with a smaller diameter is used to achieve the desired diameter of the wood without having to turn as much of the wood surface with a gouge as would be needed to achieve similar results. While I have not seen all artisans use these types of wood planes, they are occasionally used for smaller dolls and for making straight bodies.

I was told by some *kokeshi kōjin* that those artisans who do not have lathe skills are unable to produce as many dolls as artisans in other areas. One male *kōjin* stated that he knew that it was very difficult for female *kōjin* if their husbands and teachers died early, leaving them to carry on the *kokeshi* business alone. It was the loss of husband and/or teacher that was linked to the low production levels for these households. Female *kōjin* also said that it was difficult to use the lathe as it required a certain amount of upper body strength. I suspect that these two theories are a misperception as the true cause for women not wanting to turn dolls on the lathe is that they just do not have the time to devote to it. All female *kōjin* with whom I spoke were mothers and grandmothers taking care of children, or who had full or part-time work in addition to *kokeshi* production. These women tended to paint *kokeshi* in the evenings when they had time. Several women had trained on the lathe, but stopped using it after a few years to devote their time elsewhere. Those who continued to turn and paint their own *kokeshi* surprised visitors coming to their workshops, so that the visitors would express their astonishment at seeing a woman using a lathe. Satō Ryoko, one such female *kōjin*, told me that her mother-in-law was

shocked to see her using the lathe, as it was thought that women just did not do it. In many respects, women often turn smaller *kokeshi*, which still require the same steps and time as larger ones, with more precision than their male counterparts. Collectors have suggested with slightly chauvinistic tones that women produce more delicate *kokeshi* in feature and form. *Kōjin* have also noticed a pleasing difference between dolls made by women and those by men.

Collectors of traditional *kokeshi* always told me that what mattered most was the balance expressed in painted facial features and body decorations, and not necessarily lathe skills. It is known that some artisans are not able to turn their own *kokeshi*, and must have someone else do this for them. At *kokeshi* competitions, though, dolls are judged on both the balance of the wood-turned body and the painting. There is still a strong undercurrent among *kōjin* that lathe skills are a significant part of traditional *kokeshi*-making as it is emphasized that the specialness of traditional *kokeshi* is that the artisans make the dolls from start to finish. Artisans agreed that making all of the parts of the *kokeshi* is very important for balance, and for the painting to be balanced the artisan must create a body to match.

#### **2.3.4 Paint Techniques and Body Decorations**

For the *Tōgatta*, *Yajirō*, and *Hijiori* strains, the head is painted separately from the body and then, after the two are put together, they are waxed on the lathe. In Narugo, they insert the head and body on the lathe and then finish painting lathe lines on the body. After taking the doll off of the lathe, they then finish painting the face and body of the doll. As in other strains, they then use wax (*rō*), either bee's wax, which gives a dull shine, or carnuba wax, that gives a shiny finish. When artisans paint the body, they generally use a thick brush (*fudoi fude*) and, for the

face, a very thin brush (*mensō fude*), but the use of brush width can vary from artisan to artisan. When asked, artisans said that brushes comprised the most expensive materials that they used, as some could be approximately \$30 to \$50 each, if not more. Artisans did not buy their brushes from one particular purveyor, but may purchase them from long-standing calligraphy brush stores in Nara, Tokyo and Sendai. Along with timber shortages, brush quality has suffered as many brushes now are no longer made by hand. Japan has long honored its brush-making tradition as artisans must learn the difficult task of how to combine various animal hairs to produce the desired ink absorption and line widths. Several *kokeshi* artisans said that they did not use factory-produced brushes from China because they could not paint a straight line with them as the hairs frayed too easily. For artisans who need to paint narrow facial features, brush selection is becoming more and more difficult as consistency in quality varies for Japanese paint brushes. A Tsuchiyu *kokeshi* artisan commented that out of ten brushes, he can use only about three, when before he could use all ten as they painted perfectly. Despite this high standard, I do know a woman who sells Chinese-manufactured paint brushes and ink at *kokeshi* events, and have witnessed on multiple occasions *kōjin* purchasing these brushes. The same Tsuchiyu artisan when asked about the future of *kokeshi* said that with changes in brush quality, the same type of *kokeshi* that his grandfather, father, and he produced would no longer be possible. Traditional *kokeshi* would still be produced in the future, but only artisans who had less strict and narrow facial designs would be able to continue to produce their family's *kokeshi*. Other artisans would have to adapt their designs to conform to changes in materials and produce something reminiscent, but not the same as their family's traditional designs.

All paint used for traditional *kokeshi* is water-based pigment or ink (*suiyosei*), or water-based powder pigments (*senriyo*). Sometimes, in order to avoid the bleeding of the color, gelatin or glue (*nikawa*) is added. These water-based pigments are distinguished from water colors that come in tubes (*genriyo*). The characteristic of this color medium is that it is liquid so it can penetrate freely into the wood, but also, once it has dried, the wood grain is still present. The paints used for other folk toys, such as poster paint or lacquer, cover up the wooden surface, so there would be no need to use wood for the *kokeshi* base. Also, these types of paint are sticky so it is hard to use a brush on the wooden surface and show the skilled brush strokes which are similar to calligraphy. For more creative *kokeshi* like Girl's Day dolls (*hina-ningyō*), water colors in tubes are often used, but artisans pointed out that it is difficult to use both inks and water color together on the same piece as they lend a different effect to the wood. (Figure 19)

The most regularly used pigment colors are black (*sumi*), red (Scarlet and Eoshin)<sup>30</sup>, green (blue) (Malachite green or Green bamboo), pink - *momoiro* (Rhodamin)<sup>31</sup>, purple (Natural Violet or *murasaki*)<sup>32</sup>, and yellow (Auramine).<sup>33</sup> Other colors have been used, but many plant-based pigments are difficult to handle, require the addition of minerals for stability, and can be too expensive. Colors other than red and black are not easily absorbed into the brush and, while initially very bright, easily fade in sun or florescent light. I was told by *kokeshi kōjin* that the first color to fade was purple (or any shade of blue), then yellow, green, and finally red. Dr. Paul Whitmore, Director of Carnegie Mellon University's Art Conservation Research Center, related to me in a personal conversation that the primary studies of colorant fading (Connors et al: 2003,

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<sup>30</sup> Eoshin, also called Bromeosin, is a water-soluble red dye used mostly in textile dying.

<sup>31</sup> Rhodamine, also called Rhodamine Red, is a bright pink water-based dye.

<sup>32</sup> The two main types of *murasaki* are *Edo-murasaki*, which is a blue purple, and *Kyo-murasaki*, which is more of a red purple.

<sup>33</sup> Auramine is also known as Basic Yellow 2.

MacIntyre and Buckley: 1930, Whitmore and Cass: 1988, and Whitmore, Pan, and Bailie: 1999) are on pre-20<sup>th</sup> century organic plant and mineral based pigments and dyes rather than on 20<sup>th</sup> century chemically manufactured colorants found on contemporarily made *kokeshi*. Organic colorants would exhibit very different rates of fading than chemical colorants which would illustrate why there is no direct correlation between fading rates found in these studies and color fading rates exhibited on *kokeshi*. Studies on ozone fading of traditional Japanese colorants found high sensitivity to color loss of most colors in the spectrum, especially indigo, bright yellow (cur cumin), and red (madder lake) (Whitmore and Cass 1988: 36-37). In *kokeshi*, however, red colorants fade at a slower rate than other colorants used. Dr. Whitmore explained that *sumi* (black ink), still an organically manufactured product, does not fade on *kokeshi* because the chemical compounds of carbon would not be affected by sun exposure. To fade, he said, the black ink would have to be burnt at such a temperature as to turn it into carbon dioxide, which is unlikely to occur in a typical environment. Fading rates of other colorants found on *kokeshi* would be difficult to ascertain as each individual color compound out of potential thousands would have to be identified, a near impossible task according to Dr. Whitmore as most artisans do not use identical colorants. The general category of red or purple cannot be compared as the chemical components differ significantly from one shade of color to the other, and it is the chemical composition of the color compounds that will dictate the rates at which it fades. In summation, it appears that the water based pigments used by artisans are extremely light sensitive, as I personally have noticed significant fading after just one year of sun exposure. Artisans also dilute pigments before application, adding to their instability, which would support the rapid fading of purple and blue decorations on *kokeshi*, as these colors, rather than either red or black, are most likely to be diluted with water prior to application.

It is not unusual to find *kokeshi* with faded fronts and vibrant back colors if they were stored up against a wall in a sunny room. Sun and florescent light exposure is a continued problem for *kokeshi* displayed in museums, and collectors will often comment on the dilemma between wanting to protect but still display *kokeshi*. Once the color has faded, the *kokeshi* becomes just a wooden log and loses much of its esthetic value. During an interview, I was shown an artisan's *kokeshi* collection. We walked out to the entryway closet and, next to the winter coats, he had his *kokeshi*. He said that while he could not see them on a daily basis, many of the dolls were from the Meiji Period and he did not want the color to fade, so it was best to protect them in the dark closet. Another collector keeps his *kokeshi* in display cases covered in curtains, and for older and rarer dolls, he places tube socks over them to further protect them from light and sun. Because of this problem, many artisans are considering using more acidic dyes as they are more colorfast. The continued fading of displayed *kokeshi* though points to a difference between more ephemeral materials such as newspapers or printed materials as these items, if collected, are stored in archival albums, or boxes, or are only taken out occasionally for viewing so that they have less chance of prolonged sun exposure. Itske Stern, *kokeshi* collector and scholar, comments that she was surprised when attending a *kokeshi* auction in Japan that several dolls, despite their deep brown color and severely faded facial features, commanded a high price. It was related to her that these dolls were produced by artisans whose popularity outweighed the impaired condition of their dolls (Stern 2003: 48).

In a later conversation, a *kokeshi* auction leader told me that for most *kokeshi*, condition is the first indicator of price, followed by the artisan's popularity among collectors. For certain artisans, though, limited production of dolls or a certain quality and style of *kokeshi* produced during a narrow time period during the artisan's life will drive up the popularity and price of even poor condition or damaged dolls.



**Figure 19. Various Girl's Day *Kokeshi* Produced by Traditional Artisans.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**



*Kokeshi* are also susceptible to water as any exposure will cause the ink to smudge. Several housewives told me that they did not realize this and had mistakenly sprayed their *kokeshi* with cleaner. Now, artisans and shops are careful to warn customers not to touch their *kokeshi* with wet hands, and to clean them with only a dry cloth. The use of wax on *kokeshi* protects somewhat from water-based issues. Japanese tree wax (*mokurō*) is taken mainly from the fruit (*hazenomi*) of the *Hazenoki*, a type of Sumac, commonly called the Japanese wax tree (*Rhus succedanea*) which can be used as a substitute for bee's wax. After WWII, because of the ease of obtaining it, paraffin wax (*shirorō*) is mainly used now, but as mentioned earlier many artisans use either caruba or bee's wax rather than this chemically-based wax. Collectors have voiced a dislike for the shiny waxed dolls and feel that the old style wax has a calm feeling (*chinsei*) and is representative of the traditional *kokeshi*'s "flavor". It has been pointed out by collectors, though, that originally *kokeshi* were not waxed at all, and some prefer un-waxed dolls to those that have even the non-shiny wax on them.

In applying the finished design of the *Tōgatta kokeshi*, first the lathe lines are drawn after the doll has been sanded. The basic design is two lathe lines about 6 mm wide at the bottom of the body and two lines on the shoulders. Sometimes a line is drawn in between these two lines on both the top and bottom of the doll. The doll is then taken off the lathe and the flower designs are painted, starting with red ink. The *kokeshi*'s body is divided equally according to how many flowers will be painted and the central location of each flower is decided as well. For the layered chrysanthemum design, the lowest flower is painted first, starting on the left side, and then the artisan will move up the doll, painting all the left sides of the flowers in turn. Then the doll is flipped so that its head is positioned closest to the artisan and then the right side of all the flowers are painted, again starting with the lowest flower. The leaves are painted in the same manner as

the flowers. On the back side of most larger sized *kokeshi*, the artist will also paint iris, peony, or cherry blossoms. The red flowers and green leaves will be painted at the same time as the flowers on the front side of the doll.

For the *Yajirō* strain, after smoothing the body, the doll is left on the lathe and lathe lines are painted on with a brush. Then, the head is attached to the body while it remains on the lathe, and a beret design is then painted on the top of the head in purple, green, red, and yellow as it is spins. The combination and order of these colors depends on the artisan. The head is then detached from the lathe and first the right eyebrow and then the left eyebrow is drawn. The upper right eyelid is painted from right to left and then the left upper eyebrow. The nose is painted first on the right side and then on the left. The upper lip and lower lip are painted next and then the right and left pupils. Some artisans complete the face by painting cheeks. The *kimono* collar is drawn in red ink, once more first on the right and then on the left side. Below the lathe lines they paint the *suso* (kimono opening), again first on the right and then on the left.

The *Sakunami* strain is first painted on the lathe from thick to thin and red to green lines on the bottom and upper part of the body. Some dolls have just colored lines (*iro senbiki*) or lathe decorations (*kanamizo moyō*). Usually over half of the body is covered in lathe lines, and flower designs are drawn only on the central portion. First the red flowers are painted, followed by the purple and green leaves.

In the *Hijiori* strain, the lathe lines are painted on the sanded body with a thick red or green belt or a combination of two-colored thin lines. Some artisans will omit the lathe lines and dye the body of the *kokeshi* yellow. The body then can showcase chrysanthemums painted with a freer and softer touch.

For the *Narugo* strain, the lathe lines are again painted on the body while it is still attached to the lathe. First thick red lines are painted for the bottom of the *kimono* and then thin red lines complete the lower portion of the garment. Next thick followed by thin lathe lines in red are painted on the shoulders. Green ink is next used in the same way, first painting thick followed by thin lines on the bottom of the doll and then the shoulders. Besides the red and green, some dolls have purple lathe lines, some show only red lines or no lathe lines at all, and others are decorated with tool marks (*kanamizo*), including wave-shaped designs which are created by using a special gouge called a *biri-kanna* on the shoulders and dome parts. To paint the flowers on the body, it is taken off the lathe and each flower is painted followed by the leaves and stems. The realistic chrysanthemum patterns painted on the body of the *kokeshi* are thought to have been influenced by gold inlay lacquer ware (*makie*).

As with the body, very precise techniques are followed for painting the heads of each of the strains of traditional *kokeshi*. The head of the *Tōgatta* strain is held in the left hand and the left eyebrow is drawn from the left side and then the right eyebrow is drawn from left to right. The top eyelid of the left and right eye and then the lower eye lid of the left and right eye are drawn. The eye is then filled in from left to right. The nose is painted first on the right and then the left. Next, both side locks of hair and the bangs are painted in two strokes with a special flat brush. On the top of the head the radiating design in red (*hōshajo no moyō*) is painted. Then the *tegara* is drawn from the back of the radiating center. Lastly, the mouth is painted in with red.

Artisans on average are able to make around thirty dolls from start to finish in a week. This number varies with age, popularity, and gender. One artisan said that during the second *kokeshi* boom he was making about thirty dolls every day, but now he makes about ten a week. When interviewing a family of *kōjin*, the father said that he makes about ten dolls a day while his

son who is in his late 30s can make up to 70 dolls in a day. Most female *kōjin*, depending on time devoted to part-time work, house work, or care of children and grandchildren, spread *kokeshi* production out over the week. One artisan stated that she will paint at night, completing around 50 small *ejiko kokeshi* in about three days. Another artisan said that she prefers to work at her own pace, supposedly without the stress of completing orders. Health, a continued concern among many artisans as their age creeps over the 80 year mark, are not able to spend as much time sitting at the lathe, or painting while bent over their work. I was told by the grandson of a now 91-year-old artisan that his grandfather does spend a couple of hours a day using the lathe, but this was greatly reduced from the average eight to ten plus spent at the lathe during his middle years. Failing eyesight is also a common complaint among older artisans as they are no longer able to paint the details on the faces of the dolls, or, because of a lack of depth perception, have difficulty painting balanced facial features.



**Figure 20. New Style *Kokeshi* from Left to Right: Back Row – 1) Sekiguchi Sansaku, 2) Oki Izumi, 3) Oki Yasunobu, 4) Fujikawa Syoei, 5) Kawase Yuji, and 6) Kawase Yuji. Front Row – 1) Takahashi Hajime, 2) Takahashi Hajime, 3) Takahashi Akinori, 4) Takahashi Akinori, and 5) Usaburo Okamoto.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**



**Figure 21. Creative *Kokeshi*: Sekiguchi Sansaku. Kokeshi Art Exhibition.  
Photo by Jennifer McDowell**



Figure 22. Creative *Kokeshi*: Oki Yasunobu. Kokeshi Art Exhibition.  
Photo by Jennifer McDowell



Figure 23. Creative *Kokeshi*: Oki Izumi. Kokeshi Art Exhibition.  
Photo by Jennifer McDowell

## 2.4 MODERN *KOKESHI*: NEW STYLE, SOUVENIR, AND CREATIVE

New style (*shingata*) (Figure 20), creative (*sōsaku*) (Figures 21, 22, and 23), and souvenir (*omiyage*) *kokeshi* (Figures 24 and 25), are made using the lathe, but, unlike traditional *kokeshi*, they do not necessarily adhere to specific forms or patterns passed down from generation to generation. New Style and Creative *kokeshi*, collectively known as modern (*kindai*) *kokeshi*, were first produced after WWII as a way to give wood turners much needed jobs and increase income in hot spring areas.<sup>34</sup> It was speculated by one traditional *kokeshi* artisan that these types of *kokeshi* also produced a “warm feeling” after the war and people may have wanted to copy the vibrancy of American dolls. Around 1950, modern *kokeshi* production peaked as they became popular souvenirs for both Japanese and the occupation army (Hirai 2000: 3). It was also around this time that the master and pupil relationship was no longer thought necessary to produce certain *kokeshi*, and *kokeshi* diverged into three types (Hirai 2000: 3). The convergence and popularity of several *kokeshi* types during this period has caused some to see the *kokeshi* as symbolizing the Shōwa period (1926 to 1989) as it was a standard souvenir at sightseeing locations throughout Japan until the economic collapse or bubble bursting in 1991.<sup>35</sup> In recognition of these three *kokeshi* forms the third All Japan *Kokeshi* Concourse (1961) in

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<sup>34</sup> It was related to me by several traditional *kokeshi* artisans that they or their fathers began to make *kokeshi* after WWII as they were unable to take up other more strenuous occupations due to injuries. Historically, lathe work and *kokeshi* production has enabled those individuals, who could not stand for long periods of time due to illness or physical disabilities, to make a living.

<sup>35</sup> The combination of exceptionally high land values and low interest rates in Japan during the 1980s, briefly led to a position in which credit was easily available and exceptionally low in cost. The Ministry of Finance recognized that this economic bubble was unstable and raised interest rates sharply in 1989, causing a massive stock market crash and a debt crisis primarily in the banking sector. The years 1991 to 2000 have been called the Lost Decade as many Japanese financially felt the after-effects of the bubble bursting. All collectors and *kokeshi* artisans cite this economic collapse as being the primary reason for the end of the *kokeshi* boom, and the continued disinterest in purchasing of folk arts in general, as many people are saving their money, or are unable to purchase what are considered non-essential if not luxury items.

Shiroishi listed traditional, new style, and creative *kokeshi* categories for judgment. The increase of modern *kokeshi* into the market also prompted the second traditional *kokeshi* collecting boom, as collectors feared that traditional *kokeshi* might be lost in the wake of modern styles. Traditional *kokeshi* production was displaced somewhat during the brief modern *kokeshi* boom from around 1950 to 1960, during which some traditional artisans made both traditional and modern *kokeshi* designs.

Modern *kokeshi* artisans continued to honor traditional forms and techniques while expanding on their own design repertoire up until the early 1970s. The continuance of traditional elements such as working with the paint brush, also allowed for traditional *kokeshi* artisans to change their dolls slightly to match with the then-popular modern styles as well. Later, as artistic expression in the form of “one of a kind” *kokeshi* became more prevalent, distinct classification of new style and creative distinguished these *kokeshi* further.<sup>36</sup> New style *kokeshi* can be reproduced year after year in the same form and design and are made either through the process of *bungyō* (division of labor or specialization) or *kōjyō seisan* (factory/workshop production) (Hirai 2000: 3). Creative *kokeshi* are one of a kind art pieces that are only made once. In Figure 20, the fourth doll on the left in the back row by Fujikawa Syoei was purchased about thirteen years ago, and the same design can be purchased in Japan and on the Internet today.

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<sup>36</sup> Traditional *kokeshi* artisans do not make the distinction between new style and creative *kokeshi*, referring to all *kokeshi* that may stray from traditional design and form as creative. These dolls are not one of a kind art pieces as they would be defined by modern *kokeshi* artisans. While the distinction between traditional and creative/modern is most important to traditional artisans, modern artisans feel there is a need to further distinguish between new style and creative *kokeshi* as the uniqueness of design and price warrant separation of categories.



New style *kokeshi* artisans also produce similar designs as their parents as seen in the four dolls on the left of the front row in Figure 20; the facial features of the dolls created by the father, Takahashi Hajime, and his son Takahashi Akinori are very similar in style. Most new style *kokeshi* artisans also make creative *kokeshi*, as seen in the dolls created by Oki Yasunobu, Oki Izumi, and Oki Izumi's father, Sekiguchi Sansaku, pictured in Figures 21, 22, and 23.



**Figure 24. Various Souvenir *Kokeshi*, Starting with Back Row from Left to Right: 1) Ainu Couple, 2) Traditional Snow Coat Couple, 3) Ski, 4) Nebuta Festival, 5) Sendai Tanabata Festival, 6) Traditional Bridge Post, 7) *Geta* with Jazz Hands Travelers, 8) Baby Sitter, 9) Hot Tub, 10) Nagoya Castle, and 11) Baseball. Front Row from Left to Right: 1) Three Drums with Kyoto Scenes, 2) Spring Landscape of Tokyo City, 3) View of Mt. Fuji from Tokyo, and 4) Haneda Airport.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**



**Figure 25. Various Souvenir *Kokeshi* from Left to Right: 1) Blowfish, 2) *Tanuki*, 3) Frog, 4) *Tanuki* Couple, 5) *Kappa* Couple, 6) United Airlines *Kappa* Couple, 7) Onions, 8) Chestnuts, 9) Tangerine Baby Sitter, 10) Eggplant with Shield. Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

Souvenir *kokeshi* were made primarily during the late-1940s to about the mid-1960s, and represent local area specialties or known products (*meibutsu*), landmarks, or popular cute figures. More specific categories designated by Nakano Midori (collector of souvenir *kokeshi*) are:

babysitting girls (*komori ona/ anko tsubaki*)

people of ethnic persuasions in a tropical setting (*kokujin mono*)

Yajisan and Kitasan, who traveled all over Japan making people laugh at their jokes (*yaji kita konbimono*)

to soak in a bath (*ofuro ni tsukatte ir mono*)

nuts (*kinomi*)

fruit (*kudamono*)

vegetables (*yasai*)

designed from nuts or seeds (*desain ka shita mono*)

design taken from either kappa or monkey (*kappa y saru o desain ka shita mono*)

body is a drum (*dogu tsuzumi ni nateiru mono*)

something arranged with a lucky gourd

ski *kokeshi*

(Nakano 2004: 116-117).

For even more detail in souvenir categories as collectors are inclined to do, Saitō Ayumi lists five souvenir *kokeshi* categories:

- 1) Plants: e.g. tangerine, watermelon, apple, grape, eggplant, *daikan* radish, gourd (*kanpyō*), nuts, field horsetail (*tsukushi*), edible wild plants (*sansai*), onions, and mushrooms
- 2) Animals: e.g. frogs, kappa (mythical water creature), tanuki, insects/snails, various animals such as penguins, sparrows, monkeys, owls, crabs, and blow fish
- 3) Things (*mono*): e.g. bottles, lamps, and towers
- 4) Personality Group: e.g. tropical, Gods (*kamisama*), bathing, and characters
- 5) Various People: e.g. stewardesses, pearl divers, modern, sports, good friends (*nakayoshi*), mini *kokeshi*, shell dolls, pearl dolls, and changing *kokeshi* (*kawari kokeshi*) like letter and kissing *kokeshi*

(Saitō 2005: 11-128).

Souvenir *kokeshi*, which are experiencing a nostalgic comeback with collectors in Japan, are no longer produced as many of the artisans from small household workshops have increased in age, and the market for new souvenir *kokeshi* is almost non-existent. During the modern *kokeshi* boom, there were not the same differences between new style and souvenir as there would be today. One collector of modern *kokeshi* told me that he thought many early new style *kokeshi* were souvenir *kokeshi* until he researched the artisans in his new style *kokeshi* books. Yamanaka (1969), one of the few authors to mention souvenir *kokeshi*, calls them *shōgyō kokeshi*. *Shōgyō* can be defined as commerce, business or trade, as Yamanaka states that these *kokeshi* have a strong connection to economic motivation, appearing in sightseeing locations, first in Gunma Prefecture and then spreading throughout Japan around 1947 (Yamanaka 1969: 75,139). Yamanaka's obvious slight, calling these *kokeshi* merely commercial, stems in part

from his focus on modern *kokeshi*, evident from his 1969 publication, and his three earlier publications that focused solely on the study and collection of modern *kokeshi*. I speculate that Yamanaka's disinterest and the dearth of information on souvenir *kokeshi* apart from the more recent "cute" item books with souvenir *kokeshi* sections, is due in part to artisans stopping the production of creative and traditional dolls to focus on this doll's production. As with scholars and collectors of traditional *kokeshi*, scholars and collectors of modern *kokeshi* have placed the modern *kokeshi*, now called creative *kokeshi*, above that of the souvenir and even new style *kokeshi*. Souvenir *kokeshi*, in effect, were perceived as not showcasing the artistic talents of *kokeshi* artisans, appeared to be made with little regard for the wood working tradition, and were made in a mass-produced fashion purely for the tourist market. Nakano, who admits to loving this form of *kokeshi*, speculates that traditional artisans might have had to make these *kokeshi* against their own will as these dolls were cheap and childish in contrast to the simple design and deeply-rooted tradition of traditional *kokeshi*. She compares this with traditional sweet makers who are forced by diminished popularity and difficult economic times to switch to making *dangashi* (cheap sweets) (Nakano 2004: 118). In reality, though, souvenir *kokeshi* were made in relatively small batches, painted in detail primarily by women, and allowed for continued creative expression by *kokeshi* artisans. Traditional *kokeshi* artisans following the souvenir *kokeshi* trend converted their job to make souvenir *kokeshi* using lacquer, paint, varnish, and color washes instead of just inks. At this time, many young women were employed to paint these *kokeshi* in small workshops, or female members of the household painted them during their free time. A traditional *kokeshi* artisan in Yonezawa (Yamagata Prefecture) stated during an interview that he made the wooden bodies for many souvenir *kokeshi* which in turn his wife painted. She was an accomplished artist, as evident from the complete and detailed *hina* doll

(Girl's Day) set in the living room. Because souvenir *kokeshi* come in shapes that are not human, some collectors do not categorize them as *kokeshi* and therefore do not include them in their research on the subject. This opinion is still prevalent today as two *kokeshi* sellers living in Tokyo told me that they did not like souvenir *kokeshi* as they were not *kokeshi*, but were forced to sell them as customers liked their animal and produce shapes.

Further division between *kokeshi* types persists among scholars. Shibata Chokichiro, author of many works on traditional *kokeshi*, while describing both traditional and creative *kokeshi* for The Japan Foundation's English pamphlet, illustrates a clear binary between the two forms. For creative *kokeshi*, he states that they represent one generation only, original art made by individual artisans, on the outskirts of large cities rather than in rural areas of Tōhoku as traditional *kokeshi* are (Shibata 1998: 11). In fact, there are both overlapping characteristics between *kokeshi* types, as many traditional *kokeshi* artisans created new style and souvenir *kokeshi* during its respective booms from around 1940 until the early 1950s, and some modern artisans started making traditional *kokeshi*. Traditional *kokeshi kōjin*, while maintaining the form and design of dolls passed from generation to generation, also create new forms and designs of varying degree. In turn, new style and creative *kokeshi* are made with the same pride and dedication as traditional *kokeshi* are, but with several modifications in technique. The accumulation of skills and the continued reproduction of patterns and forms in traditional *kokeshi* are seen as a basis for appreciation and skill level of an artisan; for modern *kokeshi* it is how well the artisan conveys a theme, feeling, and individual personality that indicates skill level (Shibata

1998: 11). Kogure, Mayor of Shibukawa (Gunma Prefecture), <sup>37</sup> in his appreciation for creative *kokeshi* featured in an annual exhibition there, stated in the exhibition booklet he looks forward to the accumulation of “eye-opening technical progress” as well as how each artist conveys their unique personalities through their *kokeshi* (2008: 3). As the exhibition was not a competition, artisans could utilize unique techniques and freely express their ideas. “This, in turn, makes it possible for the unrestrained hearts of the artists to speak freely to the viewers as they convey to us the essential warmth of the wood and fill the exhibition hall with the graciousness of their *kokeshi* dolls” (Kogure 1998: 3).

In modern *kokeshi*, design is most important, and this design is in a sense copy-written by an artisan or designer. After an artisan has created a design, the design can be re-created in that artisan’s name by another. For example, at this time Watanabe Masao’s wife and son have been reproducing his designs for collectors to enjoy despite it being several years since his death. Their productions include the first doll on the right in Figure 26, purchased new in 2008, entitled *chigozakura* (Child taking part in a festival procession - cherry tree), which was the doll that won the top Prime Minister’s prize in 1963, and is considered one of Watanabe’s masterpieces. According to Yamanaka (Scholar and collector of creative/new style *kokeshi*), this doll expresses the bark (*ki no hada*) of a young cherry tree as it is growing -- the effect created by polishing the body, made from Dogwood (*mizuki*), with hard *carnuba* wax and walnut dye. Yamanaka further interprets this *kokeshi* as showing Watanabe’s spirit as he was honored with the cherry star medal during the Shino Japan War, the medal perhaps intended to contain the energy or essence of a young cherry tree (*waka-zakura*). This energy is mirrored in the eyes of Watanabe’s *kokeshi*

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<sup>37</sup> Gunma Prefecture is currently home to 60 % of modern *kokeshi* artisans according to the Usaburo *kokeshi* museum homepage ([www.usaburo.com](http://www.usaburo.com)).

as youth and competitiveness (Yamanaka 1973: 92). Watanabe's success as a *kokeshi* artisan is attributed to his ability to express his personality in his works. Yamanaka concludes that Watanabe's dedication to learning how to use the lathe creates "twinkles" in his work, giving it a warm feeling, and his unpretentious personality shows through in how he creates simple unadorned dolls, both positive personality traits contributing to his *kokeshi*'s appreciation by dedicated collectors (Yamanaka 1973: 92).<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 26. Modern *Kokeshi*: Watanabe Masao. Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

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<sup>38</sup> The first doll on the left and first doll on the right in Figure 26 were purchased new in 2008, but were designed by Watanabe Masao in the 1960's. The two center dolls were purchased used on the Internet and also represent dolls designed in the 1960s, but which are currently produced by Watanabe's son.



Modern *kokeshi* artisans are sometimes recognized as *kokeshi* designers and do not necessarily make every part of their dolls, but send their work out to be made, or form workshops to recreate their *kokeshi*. Suzuki Akira (*Sakunami* strain) told me his father, a traditional *kokeshi* artisan in his own right, was also a *kokeshi* designer who employed several women to paint his non-traditional *kokeshi* designs, later selling them in his now closed souvenir shop in front of the Sendai Station. Other artisans do not do their own lathe work, instead asking a wood turner to interpret their designs in wood, later painting the wooden bodies themselves or hiring trained artisans to paint the dolls for them. As art work, or dolls that may be made by someone other than the designer, often dolls are not signed in black ink as traditional *kokeshi* are, but instead a name stamp (*hanko*) is used with red ink, as is traditional for Japanese art works.

Not making a new style *kokeshi* from start to finish is not necessarily considered a bad thing, as it might be for traditional *kokeshi*. As discussed previously, many traditional artisans state with pride that they make their *kokeshi* from start to finish, but some artisans, due to physical or time constraints, do not turn the wooden bases for their dolls. Satō Masahiro, a Tōgatta *kokeshi* *kōjin*, made the wooden bases for the modern *kokeshi* designed by Ishihara Hideo, a famous artisan who lived in Miyagi Prefecture. Satō said that he really enjoyed making the parts for modern *kokeshi*, stating, “Traditional *kokeshi* have strict measurements, but with creative you can relax while you are making them, literally making them at ‘my pace (*maipēsu-mai pēsu*)’.”

Satō, like other traditional *kokeshi* artisans, also expressed appreciation for creative artisans who were not necessarily met with the same appreciation by traditional *kokeshi* collectors. One such artisan had made Yajirō *kokeshi* in the past, but was asked by traditional *kokeshi* collectors to stop making them because they judged the quality as “not good”. Satō, though, felt that this artisan’s dolls were “top class”, giving the example of the cherry blossoms on the body.

## **2.5 DIVISION AND OVERLAP OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN**

### ***KOKESHI***

I did not meet many *kokeshi* collectors in Japan who collected several types of *kokeshi*, the collecting world being much divided. At a department store show featuring Miyage Prefectural artisans, both a traditional *kokeshi* artisan and a creative/new style artisan were selling their dolls. While these men had no trouble conversing with each other and admired each other’s works, when a *traditional kokeshi* collector showed up to give me some information, he walked between the modern artisan and me, completely oblivious to our conversation. Later, I apologized to the artisan, and learned that this was not unusual behavior as collectors become so focused that all else becomes irrelevant. On a separate occasion, there were a few grumbles from certain members of the local traditional *kokeshi* collectors association when I told them that I needed to miss a meeting to go to a modern *kokeshi* show in Gunma. The indignant members bluntly asked me why I would need to study these dolls. In their viewpoint, those dolls were not really *kokeshi*, but just wooden dolls. Traditional *kokeshi* artisans if in the know would always ask how the modern shows went when I returned to Sendai, and admired the photos of these dolls from

my own collection. Appreciation and interest heightened when I showed my photos to Mr. Tamura, who currently turns the wooden bodies for dolls at the Tōgatta Hot Springs. He paused over my photos, gently humming to himself and saying they were nostalgic (*natsukashi na*), slowly turning the pages of the album several times over. He had been one of the wood turners to make the wooden bases for these pioneer new style *kokeshi* during their boom around 1955 to about 1965 (Shōwa 30 to Shōwa 40) (Figure 27). At that time in the Tōgatta region, one group of artisans turned the bodies for dolls and the other group painted them.



**Figure 27. Pioneer Modern *Kokeshi*. Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

An interest in making creative *kokeshi* persists among traditional *kokeshi* artisans as most, while concentrating on traditional, also separately make creative *kokeshi* or variations on traditional. Traditional artisans are not slaves to design and form from the past, but make small artistic compromises, hoping that these slight changes will carry their dolls far into the future. During interviews with traditional *kokeshi kōjin*, distinctions had to be made between what I defined as traditional-traditional *kokeshi* (those dolls that retained all elements passed on from one generation to the next), creative-traditional (dolls that had slight changes made to them in either body shape or design motifs), and creative *kokeshi* (*kokeshi* made by traditional artisans that greatly strayed in both body shape and design motifs). During *kokeshi* competitions, creative-traditional and creative *kokeshi* by traditional artisans are judged in the new style *kokeshi* category. Interestingly, I have yet to meet a *kokeshi kōjin* who makes one of a kind creative *kokeshi* as usually their non-traditional designs are popular enough to warrant repeated production.

Abe Kunitoshi (*Tsuchiyu* strain) created a *kokeshi* character whose popularity has surpassed that of his traditional *kokeshi*. Satō Kazuo, an artisan in Tōgatta, who also in his teens was introduced to lathe work by making the wooden bodies for pioneer new style *kokeshi*, stated that he wants to inherit the traditional style in skill and spirit (*seshin*), seeking modernity in traditional *kokeshi*, but would like to make this modern form and design appear in his own *kokeshi* (Takahashi 2003: 68). His wife, Satō Ryōko, in a similar statement, said that she would like to show respect for the prestigious *Kichirobei* style <sup>39</sup> of *kokeshi*, seeking out what traditional *kokeshi* should be, but adding elements of modernity (Takahashi 2003: 69). I was told

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<sup>39</sup> Satō Kichirobei is the brother of Satō Kazuo's Grandfather. Satō Kazuo is the sixth generation of *Tōgatta kokeshi kōjin*; the family lineage began with Satō Enkichi, who was born in 1889.

by a collector specializing in *Tōgatta kokeshi*, that the Satōs were considered one of the better *kokeshi*-making couples in the area. This was in part due to their artistic skills in painting as well as turning. It was this innovation and respect for traditional elements that allows for the Satōs to continue to be recognized by the collecting community and to win top prizes in *kokeshi* competitions. In their shop brochure they list six traditional motifs: *mokome* (wood grain) *sakura kuzushi* (modified cherry) *kasane giku* (layered chrysanthemums) *asahi giku* (rising chrysanthemums) *kasane botan* (layered peonies) and *eda ume* (plum branch) and six creative motifs: *sagisō* (literally heron plant: Pink dianthus plant) *mokume naka botan* (wood grain with peony in the center) *ayume* (Iris), *katakuri no hana* (Dog toothed violet: Columbine) *Daruma-e* (daruma painting), and *tsubaki no hana* (camellia flower). The Satō's also make custom *kokeshi*, and on a rare occasion I ordered two *kokeshi* from Mr. Satō which, while having the traditional plum flower and branch motif, had two bush warblers in the center. Satō said that while the Japanese bush warbler (*uguisu*) and plum tree is a traditional motif found in paintings and decorations, this was the first time he had put two bush warblers on a doll.<sup>40</sup> This small change pushed this doll into the creative-traditional category. Inoue Harumi's family (*Yajirō* strain) started making new style and souvenir *kokeshi*, and later switched to traditional. Her mother, Inoue Yukiko, was making modern *kokeshi* at her grandfather's factory for about one year, starting in 1952 (Figure 28). She continued to make this type of doll along with her husband after they were married. It was only after she and her husband saw *kokeshi* by Sakurai Shoji (*Narugo* strain) at a department store in Ueno (Tokyo) that they decided to switch to making traditional *kokeshi* as they thought it would give them a greater income. At that time they started

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<sup>40</sup> The Japanese bush warbler symbolizes that Spring has come. When the plum tree blooms in early Spring before foliage has formed, this bird can be seen singing on the bare branches. Decoratively, the blooming plum and the warbler are often depicted together.

an apprenticeship with Satō Haruji. Their apprenticeship was a little different as Haruji was older at the time and had them practice painting and turning *kokeshi* at home. Later they would bring the finished dolls to show Haruji. Yukiko said that Haruji was very quick to discard any doll he thought was not done with acceptable skill.



**Figure 28. Modern *Kokeshi*: Inoue Yukio. Photo by Jennifer McDowell**

It is believed by some traditional *kokeshi* collectors that regions like Tōgatta which first produced new style *kokeshi*, suffered in their lathe and painting skills as most artisans only turned the bodies of *kokeshi*. The early traditional *kokeshi* produced by the same artisans are not readily collected as they are perceived not to embody a balance between these two skills. Traditional *kokeshi* need precise lathe skills and accomplished brush work which take no less than a year to master. Modern *kokeshi* artisans have adopted not necessarily a less comprehensive set of brush and lathe skills, but more loosely interpret those skills in relation to their dolls. After turning my first *kokeshi* bases on a lathe, Mr. Tamura said that maybe I could make creative *kokeshi*, as he had in the past, but did not voice that traditional could be possible because I had not produced the balanced straight traditional forms. Other traditional *kokeshi*-producing regions have not fallen under the same criticism as the artisans in these areas during the creative *kokeshi* boom continued to make traditional *kokeshi* and changed their *kokeshi* styles slightly to match with their traditional forms, or produced creative *kokeshi* separately from their traditional dolls.

These distinct divisions between modern and traditional were not always so strict. At the Shiroishi Concourse (the largest *kokeshi* competition which also judges all types of *kokeshi*), a city official whose responses indicated that he himself did not know the difference between creative and new style *kokeshi*, related that recognized *kokeshi* categories have become narrower as the *kokeshi* collecting and the *kokeshi* competition have progressed. The use of scrap wood left over from wooden bowl and utensil production and later used to make *kokeshi* resulted in great variation and a freer style. The official told me that a *kokeshi* artisan had given the example of the flat-headed *kokeshi* as seen in some dolls in the *Yamagata* and *Yajirō* strains, as the result of an artisan not wanting to waste a piece of wood. Instead of throwing away wood,

the artisan made a head that was not completely round. According to this artisan, before the 1970s few used the label “traditional” as it gives the image of high crafts, and as little as ten years ago there was less of a division between creative and new style *kokeshi*. Today, great care is used to measure out traditional *kokeshi* to size for competition, and the size is always listed with the name of the artisan, strain and location of production. This differs for modern *kokeshi* that only list name of the artisan, title of the work, and location. Certain collectors have voiced a concern that traditional *kokeshi* artisans have become too narrow in their brush strokes, and that the once free and loose brush strokes used on *kokeshi* in the past have been lost. As traditional *kokeshi* were first toys, and not collectibles, much of what attracted collectors to the dolls in the first place is being usurped by a more narrow interpretation of what is traditional.

The great resistance towards, and separation of traditional *kokeshi* from other forms, stems in part from the more mass-produced quality of modern dolls and perceived lack of personal involvement in production. While the makers of vintage new style *kokeshi* used the fude (Japanese paint brush), most modern *kokeshi* artisans started to use the hotwire, made from nichrome around 1961, to inscribe designs onto their dolls. A younger artisan told me he had only used the brush for practice, but now used the hotwire exclusively in his works as it is much easier. A second reason for the adoption of the hot wire is that dolls have progressively become more complex in color combinations and designs, the hotwire allowing these designs to show more easily on the wooden surface of the doll. As stated earlier in this chapter, the goal of the traditional *kokeshi* artisan is to showcase the wood of the doll, and not to cover it up with excessive design and color. Traditional artisans only stray from prescribed ink and color types when they are making creative dolls. For Girl’s Day Festival (*hina matsuri*) many traditional artisans will make *hina* dolls in pairs. For these dolls, many different paint types are used



including water color in tubes, gold and silver paint, and occasionally sparkles are added for further decorative affect. The Girl's Day dolls are classified as a creative endeavor by the artisans and collectors, allowing for a break from the strict traditional motifs and resulting in varied artistic expression each year. An artisan interested in starting to make *hina* doll pairs for the first time had borrowed water color paints from another artisan, as he had never worked with this type of paint before and wanted to practice.

The second design aspect of modern *kokeshi* that is off putting for traditional collectors is that many dolls, once designed exclusively for production on the lathe, are now automatically and mechanically made apart from the lathe, and there is more commercial motivation behind the dolls. The Usaburo factory, founded by Okamoto Usaburo in 1955, focused on making souvenir and new style *kokeshi* for 25 years and then switched to producing mainly new style *kokeshi* when the factory moved to its current location in Northern Gunma. On average, five to six buses arrive each day from Aiji, Shizuoka, Gifu, Tokyo, and Saitama Prefectures to take part in the *kokeshi* factory tour and to purchase *kokeshi* in the gift shop. On a tour of the current factory, I was surprised by the great number of souvenir *kokeshi* displayed in the museum, produced by the factory, and then shipped all over Japan. Previously, as many traditional and modern artisans had created souvenir *kokeshi* in their homes as part of their *kokeshi* repertoire, I thought *kokeshi* labeled with particular place names were made in that location. While some were, many came out of larger factories like the Usaburo factory, and then were shipped to the location. In particular, areas that did not emphasize wood turning like Nara and Kyoto, had souvenir *kokeshi* shipped to them.

While attending the 49<sup>th</sup> All Gunma Modern *Kokeshi* Concourse in 2009, a *kokeshi* artisan, recognizing the importance of a local *kokeshi* factory in the history of modern *kokeshi* that I have been researching, drove me to the factory and literally forced the rather embarrassed founder's son, Okamoto Yuji, to give me a tour. Currently there are sixteen designated modern *kokeshi* artisans working at the factory and about sixty additional employees to run the machines and decorate dolls. The full factory tour starts with the wood being stored and dried outside. The production process and material preparation is similar to that of traditional *kokeshi* production with the harvesting of Dogwood in the winter (listed as late Autumn for traditional *kokeshi* as Tōhoku becomes colder earlier than Gunma Prefecture), removal of some of the bark in strips, and drying for six to twelve months. Dogwood, in this case, though, is used for its white color, which provides for a suitable canvas to show off the details etched onto the dolls. If the wood is not white enough, it is bleached further. All of the wood used at the factory comes from the Gunma area and there is a separate grove of dogwood trees on site for harvest as well. The factory, as do traditional artisans, uses Cherry, Maple, Japanese pagoda, and Chestnut wood. It takes about six months for a 9 cm piece of wood to dry. Thicker wood takes about three times as long. An adjacent building to the wood storage area holds machines used for each step in the Usaburo *kokeshi*-making process. Okamoto Yuji told me that one worker could make 300 pieces a day using the specialized machinery, this number far exceeding what a traditional artisan could do. The logs are then cut on the circular saw into lengths suitable for *kokeshi* production. The process becomes automated as the factory produces a higher volume for tourists and companies within and outside of Japan. Logs are pressed into an oiled hydraulic cylinder where the center is compressed so that the outer bark is pushed off. This wooden cylinder is attached to a plane with two offset gouges that shape the cylinder and a third that rounds the top of the wood. Then

the piece is worked on an industrial-sized lathe by hand with the same gouges as traditional *kokeshi* artisans use to add the necessary detail to the doll body. The factory's English web page states there are not many workmen with the experience necessary to have a fine command of the lathe which would give their dolls a sense of balance and shape, as these skills are essential to making good *kokeshi* ([www.usaburo.com](http://www.usaburo.com)). Pieces are sanded as they are attached upside down to a drill and then are moved using hydraulic power to a second sanding pad with finer grain sandpaper. Final sanding is usually by hand. For specific doll designs, different machines are used throughout the vast workshop floor. A separate hair piece indicative of Usaburo *kokeshi* similar to the one seen on the first doll on the right in Figure 20, is shaped on a machine exclusively used for this task. There was a sign on the machine, stating in English, "The woodworker places the pieces of wood precisely into the machine and it automatically cuts it into the proper shape". The webpage describes the shaping of the hair as a fourteen-step process, including: the cutting of the wood, pressing the wood, turning the outside of the hair by machine, hollowing out the hair, turning the top of the head, sanding by machine, sanding by hand, dying the hair, putting on an undercoat of lacquer, polishing by hand, finish coat of lacquer, cutting of the face frame, painting face frame, and finally attaching the hair to the top of the doll's head. When Okamoto Usaburo first started to make these hair-topped *kokeshi* around 1975, people did not think that these were *kokeshi* at all, but merely wooden dolls as they did not resemble any of the *kokeshi* previously made. Now, these are widely accepted as a prominent modern *kokeshi* form. To make little egg-shaped *kokeshi* (Front row, first doll on the right, Figure 20), a special machine automatically turns the oval shape. At the factory there are separate areas for each task in *kokeshi* production including a lacquer room and a dedicated painting display area in the gift shop where visitors can watch artisans at work. Several *kokeshi*

with the same design in different graduated sizes can be purchased. Okamoto Yuji stated in the pre-production process that he often thinks of the price he wants to charge for a doll and then makes a sketch of it. I have noticed among other modern *kokeshi* artisans that if multiple sizes are created for a single doll design, the larger sizes have slightly more detail in their designs than medium or small dolls, the differences allowing for greater price. As an example, Oki Izumi's new style *kokeshi* titled *Ugetsu* can be purchased online for around \$117 for the large size (25 cm) and only \$48 for the small size (15 cm).

Similarly, modern *kokeshi* artisans utilize the same dialogues as traditional artisans for *kokeshi* production. In two far corners of the vast Usaburo workshop are traditional lathes and lathe tools, the set-up in great contrast to all the automated machinery. These areas look more like museum pieces than actual work stations. Okamoto Yuji said, though, that only about 60% of the *kokeshi* can be made using the machines and the other 40% must be hand turned on the lathe. These lathe stations are used by artisans to make their creative *kokeshi* designs and to demonstrate the importance and difficulty of lathe skills to visitors.

At the Modern *Kokeshi* Concourse, on the wall behind the dolls on display, a film was playing in a continuous loop featuring the steps for how *kokeshi* are made. The film storyline was the same as other films on *kokeshi* production I had seen at traditional *kokeshi* museums, featuring harvesting of timber in winter and the turning of each part of the *kokeshi* on the lathe. The only differences with the film were the introduction of the hot wire used to decorate and *kokeshi* having the wooden hair pieces glued onto the top of their flat heads. A woman sat on the floor with a vast sea of flat-topped *kokeshi* in front of her waiting for her to brush glue on top and then stick the hair piece on. While there are no bald traditional *kokeshi* waiting for artisans, the production process is equally methodical for traditional *kokeshi* strains. When visiting shops,

there were usually about fifty *kokeshi* heads drying on sticks or in a box waiting to be attached to their bodies. The film and narrative of modern *kokeshi* artisans does not seem to be one of elevating their *kokeshi* to the same status as traditional *kokeshi*, but one that links the two and celebrates the end creative process.

The differences between traditional *kokeshi* and other types of *kokeshi* being evident, the current traditional *kokeshi* designs did have a starting point. As one collector explained, if a design was added to a *kokeshi* by the grandfather, then it is now traditional. Itō Shōichi (Narugo *kokeshi kōjin*) stated that Itō Matsusaburō (Narugo *kokeshi kōjin*) created the maple leaf on top and chrysanthemum on the bottom design for his *kokeshi* because he liked a particular gambling card game (*hana fuda*) in which these two designs together equaled a good score. I had assumed the *komori* (baby sitter) design I had purchased from Inoue Harumi (Yajirō *kokeshi kōjin*) at a festival was something she herself had designed, but during a visit to her home she showed me the same design her parent's instructor, Satō Haruji, had made 80 to 90 years earlier. Also, the *ejiko* made by another artisan's grandfather were seen by collectors as being creative, but as it has now been reproduced by several generations, it is accepted as traditional by collectors. In 2008, NTT *DoCoMo* (Japanese cell phone company) launched a new ad campaign in which the famous actress Aoi Miyazaki painted her own *kokeshi* in Narugo. Summing up the feelings of many traditional *kokeshi kōjin*, Sakurai Shōji (Narugo *kokeshi kōjin*) said to the actress, "Narugo is the production place of *kokeshi* from a long time ago. The important thing is to protect the feeling of tradition and express your individuality."

### 3.0 COLLECTORS, TOURISTS, AND ARTISANS: MOTIVATIONS

The consumption of folk art is primarily by tourists and collectors, and authors have focused on how these populations differ in their motivations. In his study of Samburu souvenirs, Kasfir relates that the collection of objects outside of the tourist realm, like stamps and butterflies, is motivated by a passion for completeness, while the collection of souvenirs is motivated by nostalgia, longing, memory, and proof of an authentic experience (1999: 71-72). Stewart further breaks down the difference between collections and souvenirs stating, “While the point of the souvenir may be remembering, or at least the invention of memory, the point of the collection is forgetting — starting again in such a way that a finite number of elements create, by virtue of their combination, an infinite reverie” (1993: 152). In her definition of a collection, she, too, is talking about the collection of objects like stones and butterflies (1993: 156) collected and displayed without regard to a specific timeframe. When confronted with a large collection of *kokeshi*, say several hundred to several thousand, the uniqueness of the object dissipates as does any distinguishing features or providence of the dolls, replaced by a sense of infinite reverie, as Stewart states. I would argue, though, that in the case of folk art consumption, the folk art is at once defined as souvenir and collectable, resulting in at least similar preliminary motivations by collectors and tourists. Under the pretext of nostalgia for a traditional hometown experience, or a relived childhood memory, both collectors and tourists seek out folk art in Japan to recapture

these feelings. *Kokeshi* feature prominently in childhood memories of adult Japanese who first encountered them during family trips to hot springs. Part of the collector and tourist process after an object is found is the memory it induces. Many collectors told me that the primary motivation for their collection was that when they looked at a *kokeshi* they were reminded of those times they spent at hot springs with their parents when they were young, or merely that *kokeshi* reminded them of their childhood.

Coupled with a preference for dolls produced before WWII, or newly produced *kokeshi* that maintain the flavor of these earlier dolls, current collectors, most of whom started to collect during the last *kokeshi* boom, are trying to retain the same atmosphere experienced or perceived to have been experienced during those times of *kokeshi* abundance and collector camaraderie. This is not unusual behavior for collectors, as most want to capture the “Good Old Days”, and maintain the opinion that certain objects produced in the past were superior in design and artistic insight than their modern equivalents.

This chapter will focus primarily on collectors, but it is impossible to make a clear break from literature on folk art and tourists as it represents the bulk of publications, especially as in early accounts of tourism and its impact on indigenous products a hybrid tourist-collector or collector-tourist emerges. I may be making a distinction here, but I am very aware that the collectors with whom I spoke partake in tourist-like behaviors. They are very much involved in the same transformative practices on *kokeshi* forms as tourists are, and artisans must negotiate their aesthetic proclivities.

Aesthetics and “discovery” play a key role in the attractiveness of a particular object to a consumer as well. *Kokeshi* acquired a large collector following and continue to be collected because of the great variety of sizes and patterns. According to Yamada (1955), the simplicity of shape and of coloring appeals to the Japanese esthetic, as does the uniformity in shape, and slightly different head, shoulder, and body lines all appeal to collectors (1955: 77). There is an undercurrent of primitivism in the dialogues of *kokeshi* collectors. The disdain for overly decorated *kokeshi* (See Chapter Two) and the praise of more simply decorated *kokeshi*, imagined as being closer to their original purpose, a toy, is evocative of similar criteria of other artisans’ folk arts as classified by tourists and collectors. Graburn (1976) points out that, “In the eyes of the Eskimos, their sculptures are more sophisticated, whereas the majority of those from the west of the Hudson Bay are more ‘primitive,’ and hence enjoy a greater favor with the more ‘sophisticated’ collectors” (1976: 47). The use of more simplified patterns, enlarging or widening designs, and color changes are all techniques that artisans utilize to meet consumer demand as evidenced in weavings by Toba Batak (Niessen 1999: 168); Native Art in Alaska (Lee 1999: 269-277); Kuna crafts (Tice 1995: 86); and Weavers of Teotitlan (Stephen 1991: 383) to name just a few of the anthropological studies that have looked at the agency of artisans and the influences of tourists and collectors on folk art.

In what Ellis and Haywood call the “ritual of collecting”, collectors in Japan still revel in the “difficulty of acquisition”, often traveling great distances to an artisan’s home to see and purchase dolls. “Collections are assemblages of goods that project the taste, discernment, and knowledge of their owners, and intrinsic to the act of collecting and the performance of this ‘knowledge’ objects should be geographically scattered and retrieved from spaces of ‘unknowingness’. . .” (Ellis and Haywood 2006: 45). Historic collecting culture, such as



traveling to remote and distant artisan homes, often multiple times, or to distant locations where a *kokeshi* artisan might continue to live, is still a relevant part of the authentic collecting experience. Among *kokeshi* collectors in Japan, I often heard the narrative of accomplishment and a deep sense of pride at tracking down, or finally being able to purchase a rare or desired *kokeshi*. This narrative overlaps with Steiner's observation that the context in which an object is discovered weighs heavily on the buyer's assessment of quality, value, and authenticity (Steiner 1995: 152). The quest for authentic *kokeshi* did not surface in conversations with collectors, but the tenacity of collectors to search out a particular *kokeshi* in an artisan's shop or even in a used *kokeshi* shop, fulfills this sense of discovery.

Unfortunately, the economic downturn of 1989, and the ever-increasing age of both collectors and *kokeshi kōjin* has inhibited recapturing the former heights of the collecting booms. Despite the decrease in collecting, and its effects on *kokeshi* production, collectors in Japan are still the primary sources of income for *kokeshi* artisans. *Kokeshi* artisans, in keeping with collector requests, have to walk a fine line by using understood traditional techniques and designs, but still innovate within the ascribed parameters of tradition. Artisans who have the talent to reproduce past family or teacher designs, and who have a plethora of designs from which to choose, stand a better chance of attracting collectors than artisans who are only able to reproduce the few dolls their teacher or family members originally designed. An added attraction for an artisan is being the apprentice of a *kōjin* who produced very few *kokeshi* during their life time, as collectors want those designs to complete their collections. Several artisans' *kokeshi* are so sought after by collectors that they stand out because of the collector behavior lavished upon the artisan. Muensterberger, while discussing the psychological causes of frenzied collecting behavior, thankfully does not agree with certain psychoanalytic propositions that a

collecting mania is the result of a childhood attitude toward feces later transplanted into attitudes towards individual personal achievements (1994: 21; 229), but rather or more likely links a longing for possessions with an early trauma or disillusionment which then shifted to a narcissistic need for objects (Muensterberger 1994: 229). Though I hesitate to say that any or all collectors are attempting to make up for some past trauma, collectors clearly are driven by individual quests to procure complete collections, and derive great personal pleasure and achievement in the act of seeking out dolls for that collection.

While collectors have many different collecting goals, two main foci stand out among *kokeshi* collectors I met in Japan. The first collector-type seeks out active artisans to reproduce *kokeshi* designs from past *kōjin* family members. The second group of collectors feels that any newly-produced traditional *kokeshi* cannot capture the feeling of older dolls, so they only purchase *kokeshi*, or buy *kokeshi* at antique or used *kokeshi* stores, or, rarely, from online auctions. How these collectors refrain from purchasing available *kokeshi* at festivals and museums mirrors what Steiner (1999: 97) describes as the opinions of serious collectors who argue that tourist art pales in comparison to the original. These collectors are convinced that *kokeshi* available at events and museums can only be souvenirs available for general purchase, and, therefore, are the mundane and ordinary. It is only by seeking out dolls that are representative of what are accepted as old enough, or asking for reproductions of original dolls, that collectors are able to capture the extraordinary. *Kokeshi* coveted by collectors often reflect their attachment to a distant time in the past, as Wallendorf and Arnould would say, these favorite objects serve as beacons to personalize and orient the individual in time and space (1988: 538). The irony of the collector's quest for dolls that no longer are made is that some artisans no longer have these designs within their own family's collections. *Kokeshi* collectors

either purchased all dolls during previous collecting booms, or a family member did not produce many dolls and regrettably sold all that were made. The original families who produced these *kokeshi* must seek out a sympathetic collector and borrow dolls if they want to practice making a particular style, or ultimately reproduce it themselves. Changes in materials, such as inks and brushes, painting styles, and the esthetic tastes of collectors have caused current artisans to produce different *kokeshi* than their relatives. While for some collectors this is not a bad thing, others prefer how things used to be, longing for the “feel” of past *kokeshi*.

### 3.1 THE CURIOUS CASE OF *TSUGARU KOKESHI*

While attending the *Miroku-ten*,<sup>41</sup> I watched as a group of usually previously energetic collectors sat in subdued silence. These gentlemen had come to the exhibition early, but did not appear to have purchased many dolls from the artisans featured at the event. When the *takyubin* (delivery service) arrived, all four men jumped up and rushed the unopened box, and it became clear why they had come to the event early, and for what they had been waiting. When the package was opened, without even looking at the *kokeshi*, they grabbed what they could and paid for them. Afterwards, these collectors gathered together and carefully drew back the tissue paper to see what designs they had procured. These *kokeshi* had been made by Mori Mitsuo, the grandson of Mori Hidetarō (1895-1986), who is credited with creating the foundation for the *Tsugaru* strain. Moreover, this was not the first time that I had witnessed this frenetic buying behavior towards

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<sup>41</sup>*Miroku-ten* (笑轆展) is a traditional *kokeshi* sale held each June in Tsuchiyu, Fukushima by the *Miroku-kai*, literally the Beautiful Lathe [Work] Association. This exhibition started in 1993, and there are currently thirty *kokeshi kōjin* members from all over the Tōhoku region.

Mori Mitsuo's *kokeshi*. While waiting in line to enter the special judging section at the All Japan *Kokeshi* Concourse in Shiroishi, customers stormed the platform area where Mr. Mitsuo was sitting along with other guest *kokeshi* artisans.<sup>42</sup> It took only a hurried eight minutes to sell all of the dolls that he had brought (approximately twenty). As the crowd was thick around the platform, I doubt if anyone could have seen all of the *kokeshi* on display, or even necessarily the doll that they had just purchased, as a fellow artisan helped to wrap each *kokeshi* sold as quickly as possible. When I was finally able to approach Mr. Mitsuo, the *kokeshi kōjin* sitting next to him joked that they were still wrapping up dolls long after customers had receded.

Initially, I was a bit taken aback by this buying behavior, as I had assumed that most collectors were more reserved when purchasing *kokeshi* from the individual artisans. This had been a rare occasion, though, as, due to limited numbers of dolls on the market or entered into competitions, numerous collectors did not have any Mori Mitsuo *kokeshi* in their collections. Mr. Mitsuo usually entered only two or three dolls out of a possible ten allowed for entry for judging in the competitions, and occasionally did not enter competitions at all. Unlike other artisans, he did not even sell his dolls in the special area for non-visiting artisans. This appearance at the Shiroishi Concourse was an exceptional opportunity for collectors to have a chance at purchasing a doll. One might also argue that the opportunity to procure a *kokeshi*

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<sup>42</sup>At the All Japan *Kokeshi* Concourse there are five main areas: 1) Local produce, wares, lathe exhibition, and traditional and modern *kokeshi* being sold by artisans and family members; 2) Tatami platform area where guest artisans sit making and selling dolls; 3) special judging area where those dolls that have not won a prize are available for sale (entrance during the first few hours on the first day of the concourse is by number only); 4) *Kokeshi* for sale by artisans who entered their dolls for judging, but were not invited guests (entrance during the first few hours on the first day is by number only); and 5) Display of *kokeshi* that have won a prize. In the special judging section, items are divided in five categories: 1) Traditional *kokeshi* (*dentō kokeshi*); 2) New style *kokeshi* (*shingata kokeshi*); 3) Creative *kokeshi* (*sōsaku kokeshi*); 4) Wooden folk toys (*kiji gangu*); and 5) Applied/Industrial wooden goods (*ōyō mokuzaihin*). These five categories for judging are separated further into A and B sections. Section “A” contains Traditional *kokeshi* and Wooden folk toys while section “B” contains New-style *kokeshi*, Creative *kokeshi*, and Applied/Industrial wooden goods.

directly from this artisan would be held in higher esteem by collectors than just purchasing dolls in his absence at events, and therefore contributed to the excitement, but this does not appear to be the case. It was a sad observation that after buying their *kokeshi*, collectors in general did not interact with Mr. Mitsuo. At the next year's concourse, Mori Mitsuo was not a visiting *kokeshi* artisan, and those collectors who desired his dolls had to come to the concourse extra early to secure top numbers to get into the judging section. I asked a collector friend of mine what he had bought on the first day of the festival as he had boasted his number had been in the upper forties out of an estimated 300. He lamented that even though he had bought a rare example of a doll made by an artisan in Fukushima, he had not been able to get the artisan's *kokeshi* he really wanted. He led me over to the most popular traditional *kokeshi* section (*Tsugaru* strain) and stealthily lifted up the dolls to show me that those individuals with number one and number two had bought up Mori Mitsuo's *kokeshi* before anyone else could. He chuckled to himself and told me that he had visited Mr. Mitsuo in Neruyu Hot Springs (Aomori prefecture) while the snow was still deep in March, and bought dolls then, but he was still disappointed that he had missed purchasing a doll at this festival. This collector's sense of achievement was in his determination to get a particular doll, going all the way to Aomori Prefecture in the deep snow, but still his interest was in the doll itself and not necessarily to meet with Mr. Mitsuo personally.

A little background is necessary to ferret out the reason behind this obsessive collecting behavior towards certain *kōjin's kokeshi* like Mori Mitsuo's. The Mori family's *kokeshi* have always been popular with collectors, and one of the reasons for the willingness of collectors to go to great lengths to procure a Mori family *kokeshi* is that they are relatively rare in relation to other *kokeshi*. Mori Hidetarō was born in 1895, to a family of wood turners in Neruyu Hot Springs. At sixteen, he started to turn wooden household items like bowls. It was not until 1914,

at age 19, that he first made *kokeshi*. Other wood turners in the area also started to make *kokeshi* around this time, a late start in comparison to all other strain localities as *kokeshi* had already become a nationally-known folk toy. It is said that the *Tsugaru kokeshi* came about through free creativity without being chained to tradition as other prefectures whose *kokeshi* were created in apprentice systems where tradition was strictly protected (Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Association 1994: 3). Ironically, this “new sense” garnered the recognition of collectors as something special and unique within the traditional *kokeshi* world. Mori Hidetarō in particular was pushed into the limelight, and his work was praised and promoted by Munakata Shikō, the famous wood block printer who was born in Aomori City. Munakata’s promotion of Mori Hidetarō’s work was prompted by his friendship with Yanagi Sōetsu (Father of the Japan folk art moment). For Munakata and collectors, Mori Hidetarō’s *kokeshi* epitomized folk art as it was constructed on the lathe, portrayed design motifs from Ainu culture and traditional clothing of the area, and because of the *daruma* designs painted on the center of the *kokeshi*’s body, representative of the Tsugaru clan family crest.<sup>43</sup>

The second factor that led to the rarity of the Mori family’s *kokeshi* was that despite early success and voluminous orders, Mori Hidetarō was very strict about his *kokeshi*, and if he was not satisfied even after just finishing a doll, he would toss it into the fire (Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Association 1994: 3). Because of his perfectionism, he was not very prolific during his life time,

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<sup>43</sup> Tsugaru Tamenobu (1550-1608), was first family head of the Hirosaki main branch of the Tsugaru clan which rose to power during the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573-1603) in what is now Aomori Prefecture, after the battle of Sekigahara, the decisive battle which brought Tokugawa Ieyasu to power (First shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate that ruled in Japan from 1600 until the Meiji Restoration in 1868). (See Ravina 1999, for a full history of the Tsugaru clan) Tsugaru Tamenobu is credited with inviting *kijishi* to present Aomori prefecture. It is said that one group of *kijishi* immigrated to an area near Kuroishi and a second group immigrated to Owani. Both Southern Aomori Prefecture locations continue to be production centers for *kokeshi* today (Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Association 1994: 7).

resulting in a collector-following even early on in his career. He was often overwhelmed with orders already containing money in them, as customers were willing to pay before the dolls were completed. Mori Hidetarō confirmed, “It was nice that money was coming in, but I was bogged down with terror and couldn’t move or do anything else [was not able to do anything else but make *kokeshi*]” (Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Association 1994: 3).

Just as Mori Hidetarō was critical of his own efforts, he was also a strict teacher and practiced the old style apprentice system in which those in training lived with their teachers without pay. Okuse Tetsunori (1940-1990) and Satō Zenji (1925-1985), his first apprentices, in part trained by borrowing their master’s work without permission to fully learn the details and designs, as Mori Hidetarō was typical of many teachers in Japan and gave little verbal instruction (Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Association 1994: 3). At a later date, Mori Hidetarō’s grandson Mori Mitsuo also became his apprentice. This was an important moment for Mori Hidetarō and collectors as Okuse Tetsunori, who continued to produce *kokeshi* closest to the Mori Hidetarō style and who was considered to be the successor of the Mori Hidetarō *kokeshi* style, passed away at a young age. Mori Mitsuo revealed that he was under pressure to become the successor of his grandfather’s *kokeshi* style after Okuse Tetsunori passed away, and he felt obligated to protect his grandfather’s style for the next generation (Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Association 1994: 17). Mori Mitsuo’s popularity has not wavered since he started to produce *kokeshi*, his dolls on average cost 14,300 to 19,100 yen, depending on size and year made, while his grandfather’s dolls, again depending on the size and year made, command around 59,800 to 239,500 yen.<sup>44</sup> Moeran relates

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<sup>44</sup> Prices were estimated in yen amounts listed in the Hiyane auction guide for years 2009 and 2007. From price lists in 2001, it appears that values for these dolls have remained steady for these three *kōjin*. Dolls 30cm and taller tend to be more expensive because of the amount of material used to produce them. Earlier dolls by some artisans are also sought after as these artisans did not produce many *kokeshi* during this time frame, or the designs of earlier

the high prices of certain folk art potter's ceramics as being linked to "honorific consumption" in which people place value quantitatively on handwork because of the few numbers of pieces being produced. The fewer the pieces produced the more expensive the price, and the more people are willing to pay for these few pieces (Moeran 1997: 214-215). A second reason for the high prices of Mori and Okuse family's dolls is that they do not produce *kokeshi* for the average consumer or tourist. Chibnik (2000) divides Oaxacan folk art carvings into three main price divisions with carvings created for collectors fetching the highest prices in comparison for those intended for tourists, intermediaries, and wholesalers. All carvings intended for collectors are custom made, take longer to produce, and therefore are priced higher than others. The Mori and Okuse family's reluctance or inability to produce dolls outside of the collector market is one contributing factor to their high prices. I would speculate, though, that as Mori Hidetarō's *kokeshi* were popular throughout his lifetime, even if the price were lower today, or if the Mori and Okuse family had produced more *kokeshi* in the past, they would still have a large collector following because of the aesthetic quality of their work. Mori Hidetarō continues to be glorified as the quintessential *kōjin*, the museum pamphlets stating that, "With the work of Mori Hidetarō who lived his whole life as a craftsperson in a little workshop in the quiet hotspring town of Tsugaru, we can see the noble mind/spirit (*sūkō na seishin*) and sublimation (*shōka*)" (Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Museum 1994: 3).

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dolls differ from those produced later in life. As current exchange rates are highly unstable, to estimate an approximate US dollar amount, eliminate the last two digits: 14,300 to 19,100 yen would be \$143 to \$191 respectively.



I have listened to artisans wondering amongst themselves why certain *kōjin* have such high prices for their dolls, and have witnessed those same high-priced artisans sell nothing during gallery shows. Although the reason for such high prices for most artisans was kept private, the popularity of certain artisan's *kokeshi* over another is contingent upon whether or not collectors have already bought the breadth of an artisan, the esthetic quality of their work, and ultimately the artisan's personal story. If an artisan is known to struggle financially, as certain artisans mentioned in chapter two, or has a "noble mind/spirit" then they are more apt to have their *kokeshi* collected.

After witnessing a dedicated Mori Mitsuo following, and high prices on Japan Yahoo Auction and in antique stores for both *kokeshi* made by Mori Hidetarō and Mori Mitsuo, I began to ask collectors why they liked the Mitsuo family's *kokeshi* so much. My questions were deflected as collectors would tease me for my assumed infatuation with Mori Mitsuo. They would also deny their behavior, and say that they didn't just like Mitsuo's dolls. In the Tokyō *Kokeshi* Friend's Association monthly booklet, Yoshida Hiroto describes a trip several members took to Takahashi Goro's home to see his *kokeshi* collection.<sup>45</sup> Yoshida vividly recounts being dazzled by so many amazing, rare, and old dolls. Members were taking photos left and right, and Yoshida was so overwhelmed at seeing such precious *kokeshi*, that he did not know which dolls to take photos of first. Despite his appreciative and memorable experience at seeing Takahashi's *kokeshi*, and recounting that there were so many rare dolls to see, the only two

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<sup>45</sup> Takahashi Goro's *kokeshi* collection is comprised primarily of the surviving *kokeshi* from the late Amae Tomiya's collection. The museum is located within his home, and members from various *kokeshi* collector associations throughout Japan are invited to view and often touch these rare dolls. Members are willing to make the pilgrimage to Takahashi's home as Amae Tomiya is considered the first true *kokeshi* scholar and collector. Most of Amae's collection was destroyed in two fires. The second fire occurred immediately prior to the publication of the revised edition of his book and destroyed all but the *kokeshi* pulled for photos by Takahashi, who was serving as consultant and editor.

photos to appear commemorating this trip are a black and white group photo posed in front of Takahashi's home followed by a color photo of five *kokeshi* produced by Mori Hidetarō, originally part of Amae's collection (Yoshida 2009: 6-7). It is obvious from the inclusion of just this one photo of *kokeshi*, and the exclusion of photos of other rare specimens, the almost cultish following that Mori Hidetarō's dolls possess. The appearance of the photo also stresses the popular recognition of this particular artisan over others who may have produced equally rare and sought after dolls.

The status of an artisan can also be measured by how he or she is viewed by those who do not collect or have specific knowledge of *kokeshi*. While travelling to an interview by bus early in my field work, I spied a rather large *kokeshi* in the window of an antique gallery. When I stopped by the shop later, I was informed that the approximate 90,000 yen price tag, despite a large water stain on the front of the doll, was because it was made by a "famous artisan" who, as it turned out, was Mori Hidetarō. If a non-collector knew of the status of this doll, and what a collector might pay for such a large albeit damaged specimen, then what might the actual collecting public be saying about this artisan, and how did this family's *kokeshi* in particular become such a fixture on the *kokeshi* collecting landscape? Maki Yasushimine (牧保峯), a *kokeshi* collector, recounts his frustration at trying to procure a prized doll from Mori Hidetarō, and discusses a possible cause for the selective collecting behavior that I had witnessed. At one time Maki thought about quitting *kokeshi* collecting, but because he was finally able to procure the one *kōjin*'s *kokeshi* (Mori Hidetarō) he had been searching for, he had decided to continue. His frustration as a collector stemmed from what he saw was a collector's need to acquire a "complete collection". "When I started to collect *kokeshi*, I was running around to the Tōhoku production areas in search of one piece by one *kōjin*. The reason I was thinking of stopping

collecting *kokeshi* was Neruyu *onsen*'s (Neruyu hot spring) empty trip" (Maki 2004: 67). During this trip, Maki was not able to purchase a doll from Mori Hidetarō as it was the peak of his popularity. All was not lost, however, as he was able to obtain his sought after *kokeshi* at the Hiyane used book and traditional *kokeshi* shop in Tokyō, evidenced in the photos of the Hiyane catalogue where Maki's essay appears. The fact that Maki was not able to obtain these *kokeshi* directly from Mori Hidetarō does not appear to be a problem, as his main goal was to acquire the *kokeshi* necessary to complete his collection.

Peter Hyland, a foreigner who was exposed to the world of collecting traditional *kokeshi* while living in the Tōhoku area during the late 1970s, bemoans the fact that he might never own a *kokeshi* by Mori Hidetarō as by that time they were very expensive and rare. His reason for wanting a doll by Mori Hidetarō was that it is a special doll in which a *daruma* is incorporated in the painting on the body (Hyland 1986: 52-53). Hyland is not the only collector to be seduced by the unusual *daruma* found on the body of Mori Hidetarō's *kokeshi* as it is an infrequent design element in other strains of *kokeshi*. Satō Zenji's *kokeshi* style appears to have diverged from his teacher, and having many apprentices reproducing his style has not garnered him the same level of popularity as Mori Mitsuo or Okuse Tetsunori. The uniqueness of the Mori Family's (and I would include Okuse's *kokeshi* here as well) design of a *daruma* in the center, narrow eye-lashed eyes, and local fabric designs painted on the upper and lower portions of the body make this doll stand out among the other *Tsugaru kokeshi* designs. Coupled with its relative rarity, the late production start, early deaths of its top artisans, and lack of heirs make this type of *kokeshi* highly desirable among collectors.

Collectors with whom I spoke may also have misinterpreted my interest in Mori Mitsuo because, in their minds, they had their own collecting style, and were motivated not necessarily towards the Mori family's *kokeshi*, but were looking to complete their collections, which may have necessitated purchasing as many of the varying designs produced by the Mori Family as possible. Maki points out that each collector has a unique collecting personality. Most collectors I met in Japan had a particular collecting style, focusing on only older works, one specific *kōjin's* dolls, one particular prefecture's *kokeshi*, only new *kokeshi*, specific sized *kokeshi*, a particular collection of *kokeshi* now available for sale, or those who did not care about a particular strain, but wanted many variations of all *kokeshi*. Within their personal collecting goals, the collectors search for a complete collection signifying their collection style or genera (Maki 2004: 97). Frustration sets in for collectors when they are short of funds or cannot find a particular piece for their collection. When the opportunity arises, and there is money to procure needed *kokeshi*, this frenzied buying behavior sets in, as collectors trying to complete their collections scramble for all possible *kokeshi* needed to attain that goal. In the case of Mori Mitsuo, the chance to complete a collection of the breadth of his dolls is fleeting so collectors must act fast.

Okuse Tetsunori's *kokeshi*, as he retained the style of his teacher, are also sought after by collectors. Tragically, Okuse Tetsunori died at the young age of 51, and was not able to produce many *kokeshi* in his lifetime. His dolls sell in used *kokeshi* shops and in auctions depending on size and year made for around 15,000 to 20,000 yen, but I was witness to a large sized doll of around 40 cm being sold for 85,000 yen. His wife, Okuse Yōko, and son, Okuse Keisuke, now carry on the *kokeshi* making tradition in his family. Okuse Yōko, who trained under her husband, did not start to turn wood until 1994, and made her first *kokeshi* only two years later.

Collectors often now come to her home and request specific doll designs from photos in Volume Two of the Mori Hidetarō Family Kokeshi Dictionary (Nishiyama 2003, sold at the Tsugaru Kokeshi Museum), covering the dolls produced by Okuse Tetsunori, Okuse Yōko, and Okuse Keisuke. Okuse Yōko said in an interview that she was able to reproduce her late husband's body and face designs, but feels she adds a feminine touch of her own to the dolls she makes. Her artistic abilities have garnered her great respect among collectors, making her currently one of the most popular *kokeshi kōjin*. Though she did not formally state why she started to make *kokeshi* after her husband's death, I suspect that the repeated requests from collectors as well as financial need prompted her to do so. Okuse Yōko said that customers often want either small changes to her husband's early designs, or reproductions of or slight changes to her *kokeshi* as pictured in the Mori Hidetarō Family Kokeshi Dictionary. From the photo choices available in the dictionary, collectors are then able to add to their collection either a design from an artisan who was not able to make many *kokeshi* in his lifetime, or a slightly different version of either Okuse Tetsunori or Okuse Yōko's *kokeshi*, making their collections unique. Okuse Yōko worried, though, that her son who has suffered from health problems would not be known by collectors as she was in the spotlight. Her son had only been producing *kokeshi* since 2003, and was still perfecting the family's *kokeshi* style. I noted that in volume two of the Mori Hidetarō Family Kokeshi Dictionary, Okuse Tetsunori's *kokeshi* were often compared directly with Mori Mitsuo's *kokeshi* and Okuse Yōko's *kokeshi* were compared directly with her husband's works. In the dictionary, certain *kokeshi* are positioned on the same page for comparison between artisans. Collectors who used this volume to order *kokeshi* from Okuse Yōko could see the resemblance between her husband's *kokeshi* and her own, assuring that they could purchase something with the same feel as her husband's *kokeshi*.

Under less predictable circumstances, collectors must take the luck of the draw so to speak as they compete with each other for top numbers or lottery tickets to procure desired *kokeshi*. Each October at the Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Museum (Aomori Prefecture), a festival is held for relatively young *kokeshi* artisans from all over the Tōhoku area. On the first morning of the festival and before anyone is allowed into the museum where artisans have *kokeshi* for sale, a box of numbered slips of paper is passed around two or three times, depending on how many guests are waiting. Those who draw one of the lucky numbers are allowed into the museum early for an exclusive opportunity to purchase an honored *kōjin*'s limited number of *kokeshi*.

The second year I attended, both Mori Mitsuo and Okuse Yōko were honored artisans, Mori Mitsuo bringing eight dolls and Okuse Yōko only six. I was never lucky enough to draw a number, but might not have been able to purchase a *kokeshi* if I had, as they were usually around 10,000 yen for just one small doll. Other collectors, if they were fortunate enough to procure a number, rushed inside one at a time and picked the doll they wanted from those left, and went straight to the cashier and wrapping station. They did not share with each other what they had purchased, nor did collectors take photos of the *kokeshi* to have a record of what they might be able to procure in the future.

The secretive buying behavior I witnessed at the Tsugaru festival and among *kokeshi* collectors in general about what dolls they had in their collections is not unique in the collecting world. Secretiveness in not so overt forms dominates the interactions between artisans and consumers as Moeran attests that dealers and collectors of ceramics will show up to a kiln opening earlier than the ascribed time in order to be the first to pluck items from the kiln before others have a chance to see.

The thrill of the hunt that drives collector behavior is also a form of secretiveness. In their search to procure *kokeshi* that perceivably differ from those offered under normal sale periods collectors are in affect creating collections of objects other collectors may not have encountered in their own quests.

An odd mixture of paranoia and respect for privacy surfaced among *kokeshi* collectors who tend to be private and retentive about their collections. I had asked the chair of the local *kokeshi* collector association if he had seen other members' collections, and it surprised me that he had not. He went on to say that he had only visited the home of one member, and during that visit had only stood in the entry way. There was some speculation among collectors as to what other collectors had in their collections, as one told me that another collector had really big dolls. When I visited that collector's home, I found out that he had more than just big dolls, including some very rare smaller specimens hiding under tube socks in an upstairs room. This collector balked when I asked him how many *kokeshi* he had in his collection, although later he stated that all approximately 4,000 dolls were in a database telling him the artisan, cost of doll, and where he had bought it. At another friend's home, I noticed a miniature *kokeshi* by an artisan no longer active. My friend told me that the doll had been given to her mother, who was told that no one should know that the doll was in her home as someone might want to steal it. This was a rare case, but I had to promise never to show the photos I took of the doll, or mention it to other collectors I might encounter.

The limited access to collections also helps to maintain an aura of mystery and contributes to its specialness exemplified in Lee's exploration of the history of collecting Alaskan arts and my earlier example of Takahashi Goro's museum room within his home. These collections are for viewing only at the invitation of the collector, and few seem to want the specialness of their collections to dissipate or even be destroyed as they are revealed to others.

There is general knowledge among collectors that certain older collections might yield rare finds. Around 1985, a famous collector from Osaka passed away. His children did not want his collection, so it was bought by a used *kokeshi* seller. I was told that while around 300 to 400 *kokeshi* have been sold from this extensive collection, collectors have said that they do not want to see all the dolls at once. The general feeling was to see them "slowly" to make the feeling of excitement last. All of the *kokeshi* in this collection had the collector's nameplate on them, and this has become a big selling point as it authenticates these dolls as being something rare and important. The high price of these marked *kokeshi* does not deter collectors, as some only collect *kokeshi* from this collection. There are several *kokeshi* collections that are comprised completely from one collection or from previously collected *kokeshi*. I was surprised to know that one prominent collection featured at a local museum was made up of around 90 percent of previously collected *kokeshi*. Many *kokeshi*, or previously-made designs, are no longer available new, and collectors either ask a *kōjin*'s family member to reproduce a particular *kokeshi* style, or they purchase used *kokeshi* in shops or on Yahoo Auction Japan. Those collectors who only purchase new dolls, or who lack the resources to travel or purchase older dolls, risk creating un-unique collections.



This factor may inhibit collectors from sharing their collections for fear that they may not possess anything special. As an example, while I was in the field, one collector published a book on his complete collection. When the announcement was made about the publication at a *kokeshi* association meeting, it was said that many may not find the dolls in the book unique, but it was something to add to their libraries.

Some collectors also feel that newly-made traditional *kokeshi* do not have the feeling of the area where they were made, or distinguishing features that would link them to the Tōhoku region. They are not *michinoku teki kokeshi* (*kokeshi* of *Michinoku*). Other collectors expressed the opinion that older dolls were made with a freer approach and less rigid brush strokes. One collector explained that older *kokeshi* have a “primitive” feeling and a “brush” feeling. As artisans began to cater more to collectors and less to children, their approach to their *kokeshi* became stricter and more about aesthetics.

While there are still artisans who capture the flavor of older *kokeshi*, often the only way to find these old traditional *kokeshi* that have the flavor of *Michinoku* is to purchase them used. Ironically, the *kokeshi* from the Tōhoku area are no longer there as they have been bought up by collectors who live in the Kantō region (encompasses seven prefectures: Gunma, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Saitama, Tokyo, Chiba, and Kanagawa) and many of the stores that sell used *kokeshi* are in this region as well.

### 3.2 KOKESHI KŌJIN AND THE NEED FOR AN HEIR

Originally, being more concerned with the economic side of *kokeshi*, I asked artisans how many apprentices they had trained, an indication I thought of their economic well-being and popularity. As discussed previously (see Chapter Two), while an artisan training outside of their family is not unheard of, many *kōjin*, following the rules of traditional professions, do not train people from outside the family. Japanese tradition, *dentō*, “. . . implies those things and customs that have been transmitted through a line, or passed down through the generations, which will be passed on in the future” (Oedewald 2009: 108). On the two occasions when I saw apprentices working in the windows of workshops, these were people employed from outside the family to do lathe work, but who did not paint *kokeshi*. The potential lack of an heir is the main theme explored in the illustrated children’s book The Master of Kokeshi Dolls<sup>46</sup> where a Kijiyama *kokeshi* artisan struggles with the idea that his family’s *kokeshi* will not continue. The story begins with a simple account of family pedigree, “The craftsman loves his work. He has inherited his passion from his father and grandfather, makers of kokeshi dolls. Every morning he sits at the Buddhist altar in the house and prays to his ancestors for a good day’s work” (Miyakawa 2001: 2). The family tree, evidence of the historical longevity of *kokeshi* and continuance through time, is always a large part of *kokeshi* books, artisan guides, and individual artisan pamphlets. The story continues that even though the artisan’s dolls are famous and he has gained international recognition for them, he fears that he might be the last *kokeshi* maker in

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<sup>46</sup> This title also was published in Spanish with the title: *El Maestro De Las Muñecas Kokeshi*. According to the book jacket biography, Miyakawa was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil [hence his interest in a Spanish language publication], and collected this story while traveling in Japan. While it is not stated in the text, from the *kokeshi* depicted, the artisan is Ogura Kyūtarō (1906-1998) (Figure 14 second doll from the left).

his family as his son's hand was injured in an accident and his grandson seems more interested in baseball (Miyakawa 2001: 5). "The old man has given up hope that anyone will succeed him – his only wish now is to finish his working life as an expert *kokeshi* doll maker" (Miyakawa 2001:6). The story ends on a high note as his grandson secretly has been painting *kokeshi* while his grandfather sleeps. The final message, "So now the medal will not be added to the craftsman's collection of awards – instead, the old man has received something much more dear and precious to his heart" (Miyakawa 2001:14). When asked, some artisans bluntly said that they did not think that the future of traditional *kokeshi* was bright as the younger generation did not have an interest in making *kokeshi*. Also, as the average age of artisans across all strains of *kokeshi* is 60-70 years, certain *kokeshi* strains may not have any successors to continue them in the future. The number one issue facing *kokeshi* artisans is lack of future artisans, and in places like Akita (*Kijiyama* strain) whose *kokeshi kōjin* age averages 72 years old with more than half of the population 70 years and above in age, there is fear that the *Kijiyama kokeshi* will cease to exist. Further, a 2006 survey completed by the Japan Tradition Craft Association for Tōgatta, Yajirō, and Narugo found that in all three *kokeshi*-producing areas listed, the *kokeshi* craft was difficult to maintain due to "social and environmental traditions" and, as there is a talent shortage, it is difficult to secure a successor.

The keeping of *kokeshi*-making within families is taken a step further as some *kokeshi kōjin* ascribe to the attitude that even if a *kokeshi* is skillfully reproduced by an outsider, the doll produced is not a *kokeshi*. This unusual "*kokeshi* branding", while rare, exists among families who want to protect their styles from perceived copying, so that they may maintain sole access to collectors. Giddens (1994: 20) in Oedewald argues that threats to the integrity of traditions are often experienced as a threat to the self (2009: 109).

Therefore, the copying of traditional *kokeshi* or the inclusion of outsiders in their production may be perceived as a threat to the uniqueness of a family's profession and the individual talents therein.

On a visit to a *kokeshi* museum with a collector, I was confused by a conversation he had with the museum director, also a *kokeshi* artisan. The museum director said that several *kokeshi*-making families wanted the displays in the museum, especially those donated by a local collector, to be taken down because they did not want the general public or collectors to see the breadth of what they produced. It was then that I remembered an earlier encounter with one of the more popular *kokeshi* artisans in the same area. I had told him that I really enjoyed the museum because it featured so many dolls made by each artisan, promoting what I thought was a family atmosphere and support for their fellow *kokeshi* *kōjin*. The artisan disagreed, stating that he did not like the museum's displays, vaguely stating that there were too many dolls. It turned out that there was general fear by certain *kokeshi*-producing families over copying their dolls by outsiders, or potential badgering by collectors requesting styles they did not want to continue to make. Their request to pull the dolls from the museum seemed odd in that any collector would have known a copy from a doll produced by the family, and wouldn't artisans want more earned income from *kokeshi* sales? The reason for the artisan's displeasure over the display of their dolls may stem from a third more unspoken reason. The most popular *kokeshi* artisans, while appreciating collectors who purchase their dolls, may suffer from family or health issues that inhibit their abilities to keep up with collector demands. A vicious cycle of low production levels creates a perceived scarcity of goods driving up collector demand and prices of dolls, but again straining the abilities of the artisan to produce more dolls. The collecting public is already aware of the low numbers of dolls produced by these artisans each year, as many will not take

orders, or if they do, it can take up to a year to produce one ordered doll. Still, during an interview with one of the artisans who wished the dolls pulled from the museum, they voiced what they thought were legitimate concerns about fake *kokeshi* in the image of their family's designs making it on to the market, resulting in a loss of household income. The area in which they lived already was suffering economically, as it was not a popular tourist destination. They did not want their own financial troubles to be exacerbated by imposters filling collectors' needs for their family's dolls. While this artisan was assured by the collector who was with me that they would never have to worry about this, the artisan may not have been voicing a real fear that, despite immense popularity, they still were not making enough to live on. Even if the artisan was able to fill 500 orders at 10,000 yen apiece, their earned income would be well below poverty level. These phantom impersonator *kokeshi* only added to their fears. The two main families who had asked that the dolls be removed from the museum also asked a fellow *kokeshi* artisan known for making *kokeshi* in many different styles to refrain from creating any more *kokeshi* that resembled their families' *kokeshi* lest they be further impersonated by someone copying the copy or denied profit from the sales.

### **3.3 KOKESHI COLLECTING, TRAVEL, AND TŌHOKU**

The Mori and Okuse Family's dolls are not the only *kokeshi* to garner a following as at subsequent events I saw certain other artisans engulfed in a sea of collectors. Collectors are willing to go to great lengths to procure certain rare *kokeshi*, or *kokeshi* from those artisans who do not attend events with regularity. It is easy to spot one of these sought-after artisans at

*kokeshi* festivals as they sell all of their dolls quickly, usually on the first day if not within the first fifteen minutes. At Yamagata's *Michinoku Kokeshi* Festival, the first year I attended, most guest artisans still had many dolls left unsold by the third and final day of the festival.<sup>47</sup> The second year I attended, Takahashi Tooru and his wife Jyunko (*Tsuchiyu* strain) were mobbed by collectors, and it was only later in the morning that I was able to talk with them. This couple had sold all the dolls they had brought in about fifteen minutes, and were now only taking orders. The couple related to me that two contributing factors they thought had led to the rapid sale of all of their *kokeshi*. It had been their first time at any *kokeshi* event, preferring collectors to come to their house. Takahashi Tooru's popularity also stems from the fact that his first instructor, his father, Takahashi Chūzō, who died in 1981, and his second instructor, his uncle, Takahashi Yoshitaka, died early at age 68 in 1995. As his sister was no longer producing *kokeshi* for her own reasons, Takahashi Tooru had become quite popular, being the last to continue making his father's *kokeshi*. It was also difficult to purchase the Takahashi's dolls entered into competitions, as individuals with top numbers often bought them up. Later, during an interview at the Takahashi's home, they told me that part of the *kokeshi* collecting culture was the traveling to an artisan's home, and they preferred this to going to an event. The festivals were too commercial, they said, while *kokeshi* themselves were traditional.

During the first *kokeshi* boom, *kokeshi* became symbolic of collecting, travel, and the Tōhoku region. Visiting the shops or homes of active artisans is an important element for most

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<sup>47</sup> The isolated areas of what is now Tōhoku before the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century (601-700) were called Michinoku, which literally means land far removed from the road. During the Edo period, five major routes (Tōkaidō, Nakasendō, Kōshū Kaidō, Oshū Kaidō, and Nikkō Kaidō) were established for trade and travel connecting the then capital Edo (now Tokyo) and regions slightly to the north of it with central and southern Honshū. "Today the term 'Michinoku' is still used by residents of Northeastern Japan to evoke a sense of nostalgia for the rich heritage of cultural sophistication and originality associated with the Tōhoku region" (Traphagan and Thompson 2006: 20).

collectors. One artisan stated that collectors may go to stores that sell *kokeshi* to see the dolls displayed, and then come to the artisan's shop to request that certain designs of dolls previously seen elsewhere be made. *Kokeshi* festivals and events also act as repositories of information for collectors as they are able to see the complete range of production or design of an artisan there, and then order a special selection of *kokeshi* that will be personally made for that collector, and later picked up at their homes.

*Kokeshi kōjin* tend to live in isolated areas, and, before festivals and competitions, collectors had to travel great distances to reach production regions or coveted artisans. Amae Tomiya recounts an embarrassing tale of putting the members of a tour group in jeopardy when hunting for *kokeshi* artisans in Akita Prefecture. In 1925, on a trip to Kijiyama, he traveled with a tourist party after hearing a rumor that there was a *kokeshi* artisan living in a nearby remote area. The party found Ogura Kyūshirō (1878-1933) still making *kokeshi* with the old style hand lathe. Amae stated that he had never seen *kokeshi* like those made by Mr. Ogura, and considers the dolls he bought from the artisan be the best in his collection (Amae 1928: 36). On the way back to the hot springs where the group was staying, they decided to take a short cut, but lost their way in the deep snow. Hungry and tired, one of the members of the group fell down and was picked up and put on the shoulders of a fellow traveler. Amae joked that on his own shoulders was a bag with so many large “Kinjyama” *kokeshi* (Amae 1928: 37). Although Amae felt guilty and ashamed for not abandoning his *kokeshi* for his fellow traveler, fellow collectors commended him for his passion and dedication to *kokeshi* research. Most collectors today do not try to get themselves killed in a snow storm, or hopefully do not abandon their companions for the sake of *kokeshi*, but *kokeshi* research and collection is still challenging (and sometimes

dangerous) as some *kokeshi* artisans live in areas with little or no public transportation, and heavy winter snow falls inhibit visiting for most of the year.

In the introduction to his book on his *kokeshi* research and travels, Takahashi Goro goes out of his way to thank the couple who lent him their car, stating, “So I did not spend much time walking and visiting in vain, I could move easily about by car. As a result my research progressed very well and I would like to express my gratitude for their help” (Takahashi 1983: 9). Ultimately, traveling to these distant and isolated areas where *kokeshi* artisans reside has become very much the makeup of the *kokeshi* culture. Collectors would prefer to visit artisan homes and order dolls there, telling me that they want to go and see and touch the *kokeshi* as each doll is different and they would be deprived of the much anticipated visceral experience if they were just to receive a doll at home in the post, or had looked for dolls in online auctions. Takahashi, in his discussion of the joys of *kokeshi* collecting, sums up the connectedness collectors feel with *kokeshi* and the landscapes in which they are reproduced. “To visit the makers in production places is not only to travel, but it is also to develop a deep understanding of *kokeshi*. To visit is to feel the climate of the place in your skin, and we increase our friendship with *kokeshi* by coming in contact with the personality of the artist. Please breathe the air in the field your enjoyment will increase deeply two fold” (Takahashi 2003: 20). Hyland also writes about how he grew to know the country through *kokeshi* collecting. “Their main contribution to my enjoyment of Japan was that they took me into odd corners of the Tohoku region. Real *kokeshi* are associated with hot-spring resorts, and I visited many of these as well as other remote villages during my excursions to buy *kokeshi* from the actual craftsmen who made them” (Hyland 1986: 50). Like Japanese collectors of *kokeshi*, he, too, marveled at the unique *kokeshi* he could procure by traveling to see the artisans. In his explanation of Kunio Sugai’s *kokeshi*



(*Narugo* strain), he describes the color of the wood, smooth surface, and delicately painted features of the doll. “It is a great pleasure to handle, in its polished perfection, and very attractive to look at. It is also quite unlike any other *Narugo kokeshi* that I possess, and has value to me for that reason — it is an individual reminder of a part of Japan” (Hyland 1986: 52).

As a collector of *kokeshi* myself, I, too, was looking for a particular artisan’s doll. I was lucky enough to find that Nīyama Yoshinori and his wife Nīyama Mayumi (*Yajirō* strain) still produced the design I was looking for originally made by Satō Kiichi (1894-1976). It became clear, though, that the original *kokeshi* designed by Satō Kiichi were very rare in numbers and high in price.<sup>48</sup> Ono Takeshi recounts his quest to purchase a *kokeshi* from Satō Kiichi in a subsection of his book aptly titled, “The *kokeshi kōjin* whose work is hard to get”. He states with prejudice that, “The personality of the *kōjin* and the *kokeshi* they make are similar, but in the case of Satō Kiichi it was the complete opposite. When I visited him he was always wearing *dōtera* (work shirt) and had a stubble beard. I could not imagine this unkempt person creating such a sensitive and beautiful *kokeshi*. There is no sense of business and he was not a genuine *kijiyā* I think” (Ono 1992:129). Ono continued to visit Satō Kiichi, but there were never any *kokeshi* for sale. Satō Kiichi’s wife would also not give up the two 30 cm *kokeshi* her husband had made for her, nor would a shop owner part with the small *kokeshi* in his display. Ono had especially wanted to own a small *kokeshi* as this was the style Satō Kiichi had made before WWII, so he requested one via the mail and visited him, but it was not until three years later, in

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<sup>48</sup> A survey of ten years of Hiyané auction catalogues reveals that prices for Satō Kiichi’s *kokeshi* range in price from 20,000 to 120,000 yen. All *kokeshi* were being sold in special collections and were not part of the general *kokeshi* being sold in the auction catalogue. Price of each doll is based on age, condition and size. Three *kokeshi* listed in seasonal auction catalogues show the range: a 24.1 cm *kokeshi* made in 1945 at 20,000 yen, 30.9 cm doll at 50,000 yen, and a 30.8 cm doll at 120,000 yen. In one 2009 auction guide a 31.5cm doll made in 1940 is listed for 30,000 yen while another 31.5 cm doll sold in 2007 was priced at 100,000 yen.

1961, that he received one (Ono 1992: 129). The willingness and determination to find one of Satō Kiichi's *kokeshi* is evident in Ono's description of the Satō family's *kokeshi*. While Satō Kiichi's father, Satō Eiji (1865-1928), was more skilled and had a soft touch of the brush, his facial expressions were also rustic or countrified (*hinabiteiru*). The designs on the body of Satō Kiichi's *kokeshi* were both sensitive and beautiful. "In either case these dolls have a womanly elegance and the big red shoulders have a unique beauty. The *kōjin* that can create this kind of beautiful *kokeshi* is homespun" (Ono 1992: 129). The adjectives like sensitive, beautiful, rustic, and homespun signify a *kokeshi* that truly comes from Tōhoku, and therefore worth the arduous task of procuring it.

### 3.4 KOKESHI POPULARITY AND COMPETITIONS

There are four main *kokeshi* competitions in Japan. The largest is the All Japan *Kokeshi* Concourse in Shiroishi, Miyagi Prefecture (Start date 1959) followed in size by the All Country *Kokeshi* Festival in Narugo, Miyagi Prefecture (1954), *Michinoku Kokeshi* Festival in Yamagata, Yamagata Prefecture (1981), and the Akita Prefecture *Kokeshi* Exhibition (1977). There are also several *kokeshi* events during the year at which invited and local artisans sell their *kokeshi*: *Rokuro* Festival in Tōgatta, Miyagi Prefecture (1989), All Japan Traditional *Kokeshi* Young *Kōjin* Festival in Tsugaru, Aomori Prefecture (1988), *Miroku-ten* in Tsuchiyu, Fukushima Prefecture (1993), Tsuchiyu Hot Springs *Kokeshi* Festival in Tsuchiyu, Fukushima (1975), and the Hijiori Hot Springs *Nameko* Mushroom and *Kokeshi* Festival in Hijiori, Yamagata Prefecture (1965). The All Japan *Kokeshi* Concourse is the only competition and *kokeshi* festival that

honors both traditional and modern *kokeshi*. The annual catalogue for this competition states that the purpose of the event is to introduce a wide variety of *kokeshi* and to recognize the skill and beauty of crafts. The All Gunma Modern *Kokeshi* Concourse (1961) in Maebashi (Gunma Prefecture) is the only surviving modern *kokeshi* competition. There are, however, several modern *kokeshi* non-competition events during the year as well. Two of the main events are the All Japan Creative *Kokeshi* Art Exhibition (1994) in Shibukawa (Gunma Prefecture) and the All Japan Modern *Kokeshi* Exhibition at the Tokyo Ozu Gallery.

It was very challenging to obtain information about how *kokeshi* are judged at competitions, and what attributes judges were looking for in a *kokeshi*. An estimated 70 percent of judges are *kokeshi* collectors, so I attempted to ask collectors what attributes made a *kokeshi* good or bad. Collectors had a very difficult time telling me what it was about *kokeshi* they liked, and even those collectors who had been judges at competitions said that it was a “feeling” they had about the dolls when they saw them. *Kokeshi* artisans themselves said that they did not know how judges made their decisions as the judging process was closed door. Most felt that the judges made fair decisions on who won a prize and who did not. I had asked *kokeshi* artisans how they felt about *kokeshi* competitions and if they felt there were artisans who should have been recognized but who had not won any competitions. One artisan in particular was deeply hurt that his *kokeshi* were not only unpopular among collectors, but he had never won at any of the *kokeshi* competitions. His brother, ten years his senior, also was seemingly slighted by the judges at competitions as he only received a prize at the end of his life. As a result, this artisan gave one of his *kokeshi* to a local museum as a last effort to earn respect in the collecting world. This artisan had been told by fellow *kokeshi* *kōjin* that his dolls would never win a prize unless he changed his painting style. He explained to me that, at the time, more rounded eye shape had

become popular and his eye shape was narrow. Whether or not this was a true deciding factor in this artisan's popularity, it does illustrate that the collecting public and judges at competitions dictated the acceptance and continuance of many forms of particular *kokeshi* strains. Other artisans, while producing very traditional dolls, also have never received a prize at a competition and have given up on entering their dolls all together. I was told that if an artisan chooses to enter into competition a doll that features a new design, the design is either accepted or outright rejected by judges and collectors. Most artisans choose a design with only a slight change, or create *kokeshi* that are classified as new style such as a *Narugo kokeshi* with atypical bright blue chrysanthemums.<sup>49</sup>

The instructions for the All Japan *Kokeshi* Concourse do not list what merits the *kokeshi* entered into the competition will be judged on, nor does it give any point breakdown for positive *kokeshi* attributes. I had the rare opportunity of talking with two judges of *kokeshi* competitions. One judge spoke extensively about the judging process of a certain *kokeshi* competition. He said that in judging the number one thing is facial feature balance. The second judge said that, for him, the number one thing he looks for is facial feature balance and then head and body balance. His emphasis on balance was not always exact, and revealed an important third category. He stated that as there are many *kokeshi* entered into the competition, they have to be inspired and not just cute. If the doll is only cute and has good balance he will not pick it, but if the doll has poor balance and is inspired then he will pick it. As most judges have been collectors for twenty to thirty years, they are also aware of artisans who have remained skilled in their techniques or who have clearly improved. The other thirty percent of the judges are local governmental

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<sup>49</sup> Dark blue is occasionally found on *kokeshi* produced by Satō Minao in Yajirō (Figure 8, second and third dolls from the left). The color is not found on any other traditional *kokeshi* because of dye restraints in the Edo period and perceptions that blue is a cold color while red is a warm color with a pleasant feel and look to it.

officials who have an interest in *kokeshi*, but are not necessarily collectors. Both judges said that it was difficult to suppress their emotions when looking at *kokeshi*, and not think about the artisan's attitude or personality. The professional collector judges know the history of each *kōjin* intimately as many have been judging for twenty or more years, so it only takes about thirty to forty minutes to select all *kokeshi* for prizes. The first twenty *kokeshi* picked by judges are very similar in choice, and the top five or ten *kokeshi* picked for prizes are always the same for all professional judges, according to both judges interviewed. If there is a deadlock over a doll, then there is a vote on the doll as to whether or not it is included in the winner's circle. Sometimes judges will personally include an extra doll in case another doll they selected is dropped. Judges will confirm comments for selection for top five dolls and will re-vote if there are too many *kokeshi* for one category. One judge said that he was sometimes disappointed if one of his dolls was not picked for a prize, but that every year the results were acceptable. The logic of the selections, and why a *kokeshi* was thought to be good and worthy of a prize was only discussed afterwards among the judges themselves. The selection process never was revealed to the general public or the artisans. Some *kokeshi* artisans have challenged the judging decisions, but it is not clear how often artisans challenge a judgment or the success level of their challenge. All artisans except for two with whom I spoke said that they were content with the outcome of the judging process, but this may have just been a formal response as some also hinted at wondering why some dolls had been picked over others.

Not all *kokeshi kōjin* enjoy the same success as they once did as they are no longer popular with collectors. A used *kokeshi* seller said that the value of a doll is not about how old the doll is necessarily, but if the condition of the doll is good and the artisan is popular. If the artisan is no longer popular, then neither the condition, nor the age of the doll matters. One

*kokeshi* artisan said that he had bought up all of his father's *kokeshi* at a used *kokeshi* shop because he felt sad that no one wanted them and their prices were so low. While collectors are not always able to articulate why they like one *kokeshi* artisan over another, there are some trends in collecting behavior. As stated previously, the number of *kokeshi* an artisan produces during their lifetime and how skillfully they reproduce their family's *kokeshi* are two important factors. Collectors also like to be dazzled by the variety an artisan can offer them. For example, Okuse Yōko has approximately 105 different *kokeshi* designs, while Mori Mitsuo has potentially 64 different designs that can be made for collectors that fit within the range of what is considered traditional.<sup>50</sup> Evans and Wolf, two American *kokeshi* collectors, theorize “. . . it is the nuances and seemingly infinite ways that one object can be interpreted which stimulates and feeds our desire and need to possess [sic] an object displaying the artist's skills and talent” (Evans and Wolf 2005: 21-22). Other artisans are successful because they rarely interact with the collecting public at events. When these artisans did venture out into the public forum, they usually brought a large selection of shapes and designs to sell. I was able to enter the judging area at the Narugo All Country *Kokeshi* Festival before the general public as I had procured a ticket the day before the actual festival (Yet another exclusive way for collectors to procure wanted dolls). Unaware that I was only allowed to purchase dolls in the judging area, I approached an artisan I had not met previously at any *kokeshi* event. He had brought many different-shaped dolls with abundant floral patterns on them, and kindly put the dolls I had chosen to one side for me to buy later when the festival actually got under way. When I returned to the festival, this artisan's booth was mobbed by potential customers in stark contrast to the surrounding booths that were not

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<sup>50</sup> Numbers of *kokeshi* were estimated using photos of *kokeshi* available in both volumes of the Mori Hidetarō family *kokeshi* dictionary (Nishiyama 2003).

busy at all. By the end of the day, not only had the artisan sold all the dolls he had brought, he said that the display dolls he had not intended on selling also sold as customers wanted them. For the next two days of the festival he could only take orders for *kokeshi* chosen from a large photo album of dolls he makes.

Many *kōjin* bring photo albums to festivals and competitions to allow customers to choose and order designs. At several festivals, collectors who had traveled from Tokyo or even farther did not buy any *kokeshi*, but said they had ordered the dolls they wanted from artisans. These events are opportunities to see many *kokeshi* artisans at one time, and then to order a particular *kokeshi*. Later, most collectors would travel to the artisan's home to pick up their ordered dolls. Artisans who do not have as many design options gradually lose their customer base as collectors have already bought all of the artisan's different dolls. At the All Japan *Kokeshi* Concourse, I spoke with Shiroishi's assistant chief in charge of the Sightseeing and Tourism Division, and he lamented that although artisans who have good designs, even if they are a little more expensive, sell every year, that those with poor designs never sell even if the price is low. He told me that these artisans always made *urenai kokeshi* (non-selling *kokeshi*), and he thought it was very sad to have to give back dolls to a maker when they did not sell.

### **3.5 THE ECONOMICS OF KOKESHI**

Income from *kokeshi* sales is primarily from special orders by individual collectors or collector associations. Active popular artisans reported an average total income each year to be around 2,000,000 to 3,500,000 yen (approximately \$20,000 to \$35,000). Most artisans, though, had to

supplement income earned from *kokeshi* sales with a side occupation, or benefited from being in a dual income household. Sale of *kokeshi* at museums and *kokeshi* events made up for only a small percentage of overall income. Yajirō artisans receive about 80% from sales at the museum (the museum retains a commission of 20% of the sale price of each *kokeshi*), but must pay taxes and do upkeep on the *kokeshi* village and *kokeshi* shrine. Artisans said that if they do sell their dolls at shops and local museums, they receive orders two or three times a year for around twenty to thirty *kokeshi*. A generous estimate based up orders of thirty dolls at a time at 3,000 yen per doll, selling at three venues with an 80% portion of the sale price, would give artisans at the most 648,000 yen (\$6,480). Most artisans only receive orders for around twenty dolls from two venues, and would earn closer to 432,000 yen (\$4,320) for orders of thirty dolls, or, based on orders of twenty dolls, a total earning of 288,000 yen (\$2,880).

The owner of a major folk art store revealed to me that he was having increasing difficulty getting artisans to send in *kokeshi*. One popular artisan had turned him down six times when he called her on the phone, only relenting on the seventh try. Increasing age of artisans may inhibit them from fulfilling orders. Also, depending on the location of the shop, the market for certain *kokeshi* may have dried up, and those shops either have cut their orders to only ten dolls or less a year, or have stopped ordering altogether. In a remote shop in Tokyō, I was delighted to find *kokeshi* I had never seen made by artisans I knew. While these *kokeshi* were special and new to me, the owner of the shop said that collectors were not interested in these dolls and he could not sell them to anyone except me. This was not the first of such encounters with shop owners, as at a popular used *kokeshi* shop in Fukushima, I was told by the owner that I was the number one buyer of *kokeshi*, a fact I felt surprised by as I had only been to the shop twice. My participation in the *kokeshi* market revealed the larger problem of a lack of a young or



new collecting public. Most collectors and artisans share the same age cohort, and one of the few younger *kōjin* complained to me that you see the same faces at *kokeshi* events, and these same faces do not buy *kokeshi* anymore.

Actual *kokeshi* sales from the all Japan *Kokeshi* Festival (Narugo) in the years from 2000 to 2005, reveal out of 110 total artisans, the average number of participants, who enter dolls for judging at the event, each individual artisan only takes home an estimated 32,000 yen (\$320.00) (Estimated from totals given by Hirai 2006). This amount, though, does not reflect the disparity between individual artisans who sell all of their dolls and those who sell only a few or none at all. Totals from the 2008 All Japan *Kokeshi* Concourse reveal that the total sales for traditional *kokeshi* sold in the special judging area was 180,700 yen (\$1,807) for 116 artisans averaging only 1600 yen (\$16.00) earned per artisan (Estimated from personal calculations at event). Again, some artisans may not earn any income from *kokeshi* sales at festivals as 116 dolls out of 524 did not sell, and the number of dolls entered varies by artisan. In the wooden folk toy category, which traditional artisans also enter, total sales for all 29 artisans was 301,215 yen (\$3,012) for 75 out of 134 toys sold. Each artisan earned an estimated 10,387 yen (\$103.00) (Estimated from personal calculations at event).

*Kokeshi* artisans also make special *kokeshi* for graduations, weddings, retirement presents, and the birth of children. These orders are infrequent, and many artisans said that, in the last ten years or so, orders for these types of *kokeshi* had stopped completely because people no longer wanted these types of decorations in their homes. The one special *kokeshi* that still continues to be made with frequency appears to be the birth *kokeshi*. Artisans will make a *kokeshi* of the same length and weight of the baby. For an extra charge, the *kokeshi* can have a hollowed out space in the bottom to hold a message to the child. The first *kōjin* to reportedly

make this type of *kokeshi* was Izu Mamoru (*Narugo* strain: Yamagata Prefecture), who created the *kokeshi* for his grandchild. After the birth *kokeshi* was introduced by an acquaintance newspaper reporter, there were many customer requests by phone for a similar *kokeshi* to be made for grandchildren. At first, Izu Mamoru replied that he only made it for his grandchild and was not thinking about selling them. Customers were persistent, though, and eventually Izu Mamoru relented. Other artisans in *kokeshi*-producing regions now make birth *kokeshi* as well. These *kokeshi* usually sell for around 10,000 to 15,000 yen (\$100 to \$150).

### 3.6 THE SHADOW SIDE OF *KOKESHI*

At a prominent folk art store I asked the owner which *kokeshi* he liked the best. He led me over to two miniature *kokeshi* made by a Yajirō artisan, and said that he liked this type of *kokeshi*. When asked to elaborate, he explained that they were not just pretty or cute, but that it had to have taken great skill to produce something that was as unique (his exact words “not-pretty”) as these two *kokeshi*. Competition judges also said that it was frustrating to see only pretty or cute *kokeshi* as they did not have any character. As *kokeshi* moved from children’s toy to display doll, many artisans had begun to make only pretty designs, a move in the minds of some collectors as losing the original character of the dolls. I was told that copying was an important process for *kokeshi* artisans along with the skillful representation of a “shadow side” on the *kokeshi*. Pretty and cute refer only to surface attributes while beautiful is the total feeling.

*Kokeshi* are not just *kawaii* or *minkoi* (cute) or *kire* (pretty), but are *minkui* (beautiful).<sup>51</sup> Beautiful is an attribute that reflects both surface and inner characteristics, a total impression of an object or a person. Collectors stated that a *kokeshi* that is cute just for the sake of being cute is not an interesting *kokeshi*. Moeran argues that while there is actually a history of an aesthetic attitude which praises irregularities and imperfections in Japanese art, and I would add the “dark side” that pre-dates the Meiji Restoration, the notion that beauty is derived from this imperfection and irregularity may be strengthened by modern industrial society’s reaction to the perfection and regularity of machine-made things (Moeran 1997: 215). While collectors do honor a well-balanced *kokeshi* in form and design, they appreciate the unique qualities of each piece.

Following Moeran’s assertions about hand-made verses machine made art, the second event that led to more cute or pretty *kokeshi* was the change in lathe technology. The roughness of the dolls produced by the hand-pulled lathe or the leg-powered lathe disappeared, as the motor lathes produced *kokeshi* that were more uniform in shape and smoothness. Collectors also complain about the use of wax on dolls, and often prefer dolls that are still produced without it. At a *kokeshi* festival, I made the acquaintance of a collector who had not purchased any *kokeshi* at the event, preferring to order *kokeshi* from the artisans. When I asked him what he thought was a good *kokeshi*, he silently stood up, walked away out of the room, and disappeared for about five minutes. When he returned he was carrying a wrapped *kokeshi*. He un-wrapped the *kokeshi* for me, and then held it up, declaring, “This is a good *kokeshi*!”. He went on to explain, using his finger to draw an imaginary line across the face of the doll, that the facial features were

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<sup>51</sup> *Minkoi* (cute) and *minkui* (beautiful) are Tōhoku dialogue words. Standard Japanese equivalents would be *kawaii* (cute) and *utsukushi* (beautiful).

well balanced, as was the body and head, and the doll was not waxed. He then re-wrapped the doll and gave it to me as a gift (Figure 29). I noted that the new addition to my collection was also very traditional, in keeping with only three ink colors red, green, and black with a minimal stacked chrysanthemum pattern on the front. This was not a cute or pretty *kokeshi*, but had captured the darker strange “shadow side” of *kokeshi* design that most traditional *kokeshi* collectors are seeking.



**Figure 29. A "Good" *Kokeshi*: Satō Yasuhiro**  
**Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

A general criticism of modern *kokeshi* by traditional *kokeshi* collectors is that they do not possess the “shadow side” of *kokeshi* design. Modern *kokeshi*, including souvenir *kokeshi*, were produced primarily for the tourist trade, these dolls were always given pretty or cute designs that were appealing to non-collectors. Most non-collectors in Japan with whom I talked expressed a deep aversion to certain *kokeshi*, preferring those with cute faces or pretty floral patterns. It is not surprising that pioneer modern *kokeshi* all had very round shapes and round eyes, the ultimate expression of cuteness in Japan. In a brief experiment I showed non-collectors photos of *kokeshi* to see their reactions to them, and asked what they liked or disliked about a particular doll. Respondents, after viewing just a few photos, would only respond if they felt a doll was cute, or if they hated it. As I continued, respondents became downright silly, openly making fun of certain *kokeshi* that did not fit into their perceived notions of cuteness. When asked, artisans said that they did not know what attributes a good *kokeshi* had. Again, this response seemed to originate from a sense of modesty rather than lack of opinion. One artisan stated that it was the customer’s face that told him if his *kokeshi* was good or not. Personally, he thought it was how he painted the face, and if it stood out then it was good. Another artisan expressed that he did not think if his *kokeshi* was good or not, but if in his heart he felt it was good, it was okay. If he was not sure about the doll then he would put it into the case for his personal collection. Other artisans expressed similar sentiments as those of collectors and judges, and said that when you look at the *kokeshi* if you get a warm feeling then it is a good *kokeshi*. If the face of the *kokeshi* is just pretty, then it is bad.

### 3.7 COLLECTORS AND TOURISTS

*Kokeshi* artisans were asked the difference between collectors and tourists who were not collectors. One artisan stated that collectors really like Japanese things (*nihon no mono rashi*) because they wanted their own unique collections, and asked him to make older dolls that his father or grandfather made. Most artisans said that collectors only ask for older dolls, and usually do not choose new styles because they are also *kokeshi* researchers. Being interested in *kokeshi* history, collectors want older doll designs first created by artisans who are no longer living. *Kokeshi kōjin* told me that they averaged thirty orders each year from collectors for older dolls. Collectors send in a photo of these older *kokeshi* styles, or might send in the actual doll to the artisan to reproduce. Some collectors will also supply older wood, perhaps thinking that an older style *kokeshi* will be rendered more authentic if it is made with older wood. The new style or creative traditional *kokeshi* that are produced by traditional *kokeshi* artisans are often bought by non-collectors or certain anthropologists who are attracted to the colorful floral and design motifs of these dolls in contrast to the more traditional dolls that can look the same to the unacquainted eye. Tourists, or as one artisan said, “people who do not know *kokeshi*”, like cute dolls and define all *kokeshi* as souvenirs. At one *kokeshi* artisan’s home where tour buses stopped several times a day, the artisans told me that tourists do not know the individual artisan’s dolls, but just look at decorations. Some customers buy *kokeshi* for homestay students or foreign guests, and are looking for dolls with a “Japanese feel” such as dolls with *kanji* on them or bark showing. Tourists also tend not to interact with artisans or ask questions.

At the *kokeshi* village up the highway from the Tōgatta Hot Springs, all of the artisans’ homes are lined up on either side of a now well-paved road with a stream running down a stone-

lined ditch on one side. While the village appears to be the anthropological ideal for study as each house is well marked with the artisan's name on a brown sign and white writing, few artisans actually interact with each other. Only three of the artisans living in the village were still producing *kokeshi* with any regularity, and except for the household mentioned above, none of the other households could accommodate nor did they welcome the tourist buses. Most artisans in the area sold their *kokeshi* at the Tōgatta Hot Springs museum, and felt that tourists would purchase their *kokeshi* there. It was later that I found out that during the *Rokuro* Festival (Lathe Festival), one prominent *kōjin* couple turned their sitting room into a gallery for collectors to come and see their dolls. While eating cake and drinking tea or coffee, collectors could look at dolls displayed on shelves covered in bright red fabric, catch up with the artisans, and then purchase dolls. As the *kokeshi* village is about a twelve minute walk up hill from the museum (I say walk, but I was the only person walking as most came to the village by car) many non-collectors went to the museum, but never made it to the village. This sitting room gallery event was reserved for collectors. The artisan's home was located on the opposite side of the village where the tour buses stopped, but in the rare instance when some adventurous traveller came up the other end of the road, the artisans did go to work on the lathe to show them how *kokeshi* was made, but did not invite them into the sitting room, nor did they encourage the tourists to stay.

On a rare occasion when a tour bus accidentally came through the back entrance of the *Kokeshi* Village and stopped at this shop, the pleasant demeanor of the two artisans changed dramatically. Both artisans entertained the tour group by working on the lathe, but no further interaction was initiated or encouraged. The *kokeshi* produced by these artisans were well out of the price range of most tourists and casual visitors to the area. These two artisans knew that only dedicated collectors would pay the high prices they sought for their dolls and clearly did not anticipate any interest in purchase from the tourists.

### 3.8 *KOKESHI KŌJIN* AND PERSONAL CHOICES

It was not until late in the second year of research that I was introduced to a collector who had formed the only *kokeshi* artisan fan club in Japan, the Kon Akira Fan Club. I soon realized why I had not seen any of the honored artisan's dolls in the shops and collections of traditional *kokeshi* because many collectors did not recognize this artisan's dolls as *kokeshi*, but as *kiji ningyō* (wooden dolls) or classified them as modern *kokeshi*. A collector of Kon Akira's *kokeshi* said that if the person was narrow-minded (*atama ga katai*), then Kon Akira did not make traditional *kokeshi*, but if they have a flexible mind (*atama ga yawarakai*), then he is traditional. Mr. Saitō, the founder of the Kon Akira fan club, told me that the members of the club were from all over Japan, not necessarily collectors of *kokeshi*, but appreciators of art. The collectors for Kon Akira also tend to be private, unlike those of Mori Mitsuo who had a public collector following. The difference between Kon Akira's *kokeshi* and his fellow *Tsugaru kōjin* is that he does not keep to one particular family of *Tsugaru kokeshi*, but makes *kokeshi* with design features of many of the



*Tsugaru kokeshi* as well as *Narugo* and *Kijiyama* strains. Kon Akira had trained in these areas as a wood turner and *kokeshi* artisan. He was born in Ōdate (Akita prefecture) and after graduation from high school went to work at the Ōyu Hot Springs in Akita turning the wooden bodies for souvenir *kokeshi*. Wanting to improve upon his *kokeshi*-making skills, he trained in Narugo, and also upon returning to Aomori Prefecture he asked Hasegawa Tatsuo (Tsugaru artisan) to be his instructor. On the way to his brother's home in Aomori, Mr. Saitō told me that traditional *kokeshi* collectors do not tend to collect Kon Akira's dolls. If they do collect them, they go for the earlier dolls, especially those he made in Narugo which are very rare as it is estimated he only made ten. When Kon Akira returned to the Aomori Prefecture, he settled in Hirosaki and made few dolls at this time as well. According to Saitō, at first there were around six to seven Kon Akira collectors who bought up all of his dolls when he was in Hirosaki. Now, for collectors like Saitō, the *kokeshi* Kon Akira made in Hirosaki are rare and highly sought after. While visiting in Aomori, Saitō spotted one of these rare Hirosaki *kokeshi* in the back storage room of a shop. As I was holding it, Saitō saw it and without hesitation said, "*hoshii desu!*" (I want that!). Saitō said that this was one of Kon Akira's number one sought after dolls, but the owner of the doll refused to sell it to him, possibly because she knew of the value of the piece.

Kon Akira continues to make *kokeshi* sporadically and in small numbers for collectors. He states that he tries not to make many *kokeshi* as he gets tired of making the same thing. The skillful and practiced repetition of traditional *kokeshi* artisans does not appeal to him, and instead he prefers to paint skillfully many different *kokeshi* in traditional styles. He also has a personal style to painting that is very free form in brush strokes. Kon Akira thinks that this technique is more difficult than if he were to paint in the rigid traditional style. Mr. Saitō told me that Kon Akira wants to paint like a child. Saitō attributed this to Kon Akira's living environment, as

lives in the mountains in an older home and does not make much money, so the simple life is sufficient. Despite Kon's tremendous artistic ability, when I talked with him he emphasized wood turning. I had brought a *kokeshi* catalogue, and, as we flipped through the pages, he only talked about the balance of the *kokeshi* expressed by the skills of the *kōjin*, or *kokeshi* he attributed as having *futsu na kanji* (an ordinary feeling) as these dolls all looked alike to him.

When Saitō orders from Kon Akira, he calls him up and tells him the image or type of *kokeshi* he wants from a catalogue of Kon Akira's work. Kon Akira then interprets this order. Often Saitō will receive two different styles of *kokeshi* in one set order. When questioned, Kon Akira was not able to answer why he had sent two different styles of dolls. An interesting fact, though, was that one set was very much done in Kon's personal style and the other set was a copy of the style of the dolls from one of his teachers. The difference in style perhaps alludes to his refusal to abide by the arbitrary rules set by traditional *kokeshi* collectors (Figure 30).



**Figure 30. Kon Akira *Kokeshi*: Top Box: Kon Akira Style. Bottom Box: Hasegawa Style by Kon Akira. Saitō Collection. Photo by Jennifer McDowell**

Although collectors do in many ways dictate which artisans are popular, or what *kokeshi* an artisan makes, artisans do not always adhere to the whims of the collectors. If a request falls out of the realm of what an artisan is willing to make, or does not represent their own family's repertoire, then they will often refuse a request. One artisan said that the local *kokeshi* association had asked him to make small cheap dolls for their end of the year party, but he told them he could not do it. He seemed to understand that most of the collectors had already bought many of his dolls and most were not economically well off, but on the other hand he did not feel he should be making cheaper and smaller dolls when he enjoyed and wanted to make more elaborate and larger dolls. While visiting the same artisan's shop, a family came in to peruse the

*kokeshi*. The grandfather really wanted a small *ejiko* made with darker maple wood, and kept gravitating towards the smaller *ejiko* in the shop, asking if there were ones in the darker maple. The artisan explained that they could not make small things out of the darker maple, only large sized *ejiko*. It was the price of the large maple wood *ejiko*, around 3,000 to 3,500 yen, that might have been the motivation for wanting something smaller. After the daughter bought another doll, the artisan gave the grandfather a large-size *ejiko* in dark wood as a gift. Though the artisan had given the *ejiko* as a customer appreciation gift, she was unwilling to compromise her design esthetic and recognized that customers are often not aware of the limitations of certain materials.

During an interview with another *kokeshi kōjin*, I heard some commotion out in the *genkan* (entryway). The *kōjin* quickly got up, picked up and looked at the rather large wooden *daruma* he had made, took it over to a sliding closet in the adjoining room, and then replaced it with a smaller *daruma*. Soon a man entered the room. This man was a principal at a local middle school and had an interest in *daruma*. When I asked the man if he had an interest in *kokeshi*, he enthusiastically but unwisely said he did not. The artisan sat with a pleasant smile on his face and said nothing. When the conversation died down between the principal and me, he inquired about the *daruma*. Apparently he had called ahead to arrange to purchase one, and the artisan got up and went over to get the smaller *daruma* from the alcove. The man was visibly disappointed by it and asked if there wasn't a larger one he could buy. The artisan said no, and that he did not make them anymore. When the man left, I asked the artisan about the *daruma* and he suddenly grinned at me and said, "He wanted it, didn't he?!" The large *daruma* came out of the cabinet in the other room and was placed in the alcove once more. Later, the artisan explained that the expense of materials and difficulty in making larger items at his age had persuaded him to keep the larger *daruma* example for himself.

Artisans, while compliant with most collector requests, nevertheless may refuse more enthusiastic collectors, as I was witness several times. At a festival, one such collector wanted me to ask a *kōjin* to decorate a wooden battledore as a souvenir to give to the members of the *kokeshi* association. The maker refused, saying he was too busy at the moment. I never did get the battledore painted, and it was a great embarrassment during the next *kokeshi* association meeting when the collector said that he had all but one artisan in attendance at the festival paint special battledores for the members. Requests for older family member's doll designs are sometimes refused as well when the artisan just cannot duplicate the *kokeshi* wanted. Collectors occasionally make requests for an artisan to make a *kokeshi* within their strain, but not by a past *kōjin* family member. At another festival, a couple requested that an artisan paint an all-black ink *kokeshi* with a *daruma* on it. The artisan refused, explaining that this doll had been made by a different artisan. The couple complained that the artisan could have painted it anyway, unaware that this artisan's dolls were nothing like the one they had requested, and the artisan's refusal was out of respect for his fellow *kōjin*'s family *kokeshi*.

Collectors of *kokeshi* behave similarly to collectors of other types of folk art in that they are excited by discovery, enjoy the process of visiting artisan's shops, and assign the label of traditional to certain objects. They are dissimilar in that they do not talk about authenticity as an element of tradition. Unlike Steiner's African art, a *kokeshi* does not have to be uncovered in its presumed natural setting, but may be ordered beforehand from the artisan by the collector, or, in the case of an artisan who is no longer producing or who will not accept an order, can be purchased in a used *kokeshi* shop or online. With this in mind, though, the purchasing of *kokeshi* online is still a relatively rare activity among collectors. During preliminary research, no collectors admitted to purchasing *kokeshi* online, and, by the end of the research period, only two

collectors said that they purchased *kokeshi* online. Most collectors did not have computers and preferred to either purchase older dolls from used *kokeshi* shops, or, if the artisan was still living, from them directly. The popularity of a particular artisan is not contingent on if they are perceived to be unknown and long departed, but if they are known and produced a certain style of *kokeshi* in their lifetimes. Faded dolls are sold, but those dolls that have retained color and design are considered worth more than a faded specimen by the same artisan. In his discussion of *kokeshi* collecting, Tsuchihashi (1961) talks about how one should keep *kokeshi* around you.<sup>52</sup> “In order to avoid the stagnation of feeling you should organize your collection and constantly seek to buy them new or old. By purchasing them you will have a serious gain (*shōbu*) and develop your judgment/connoisseurship. By gazing at one *kokeshi*, and savoring the volume (weight in the hand), the flavor (*ajiwai*), spirit (*kihaku*), drive sense and such by doing this you will have read the *kokeshi* actively. In order to appreciate instinctively you need to have the eyes of a connoisseur (*mekiki*), and you sometimes have to waste money” (Tsuchihashi 1961: 146). The *kokeshi* is a reflection of a *kōjin*’s *seikatsu kōjyō* (everyday life feeling) at the point of making them, and in order to enjoy them, one must know the *seikatsu shi* (everyday life history) of certain *kōjin* (Tsuchihashi 1961: 146). *Kokeshi* collectors continue to seek out artisans in their homes and purchase *kokeshi* even during difficult economic times to reach their personal goals of a complete collection.

Ethnographic studies of folk art (sometimes called craft, exotic art, or tourist arts) tend to center around interactions with artisans in touristic spaces. The impact of these interactions are the altering of folk art to meet consumer needs while maintaining original patterns either for

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<sup>52</sup> This work in particular was highly criticized by the poet and scholar Matsunaga Goichi. For criticism and discussion, please see Chapter Four.

private use within communities, or incorporation into more simplified designs geared towards the tastes of the consumer. Although *kokeshi* were never objects incorporated into a larger cosmology of religious or cultural use aside from plaything and souvenir, some collectors have similarly fought to maintain a perceived quality of folk art by emphasizing through their collection practices which artisan's dolls uphold this quality and those who do not. Secondly, the reluctance of indigenous communities to produce certain forms of folk art or poorly made products because they will become perceived cultural signifiers has been taken up by some collectors as a means to discredit more elaborately decorated and waxed dolls that may appeal to the non-collecting populace. A 1970s survey of Scottish craft objects stated that good craft was produced locally, made by hand, and could sell at a higher price than mass-produced souvenir goods (Peach 2007: 249). Peach continues her discussion of good and bad craft with the example of Scottish craft fairs where cheap mass-produced souvenirs were masquerading as authentic hand-crafted objects, in the eyes of some debasing the reputation of true Scottish craft (2007: 250). How the image of *kokeshi* is constructed creatively by collectors and artisans as an image of Tōhoku and lost feelings of Japaneseness and home towns will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, but the consumers' tendency to see souvenirs as an all-encompassing definition of a particular culture highlights the reluctance of certain communities to fully adopt consumer interests. Schildkrout (1999), in her discussion of African art, states that, "The perceptions and misperceptions of taste and the stereotyping of African life by both Africans and Europeans led to the commoditization of tradition. Westerners admired and collected certain types of objects that they labeled 'typically Mangbetu'" (Schildkrout 1999: 203). While *kokeshi* have always circulated as souvenirs, their cultural classification is determined by who does the purchasing. *Kokeshi* collectors are much more invested in artisans and, albeit with some prejudice, make an

attempt at leaning about the artisan's commitment to their craft. Collecting practices vary, but they are involved in the grading of cultural worth of a doll based on how well it maintains perceived traditional values. This is not to say that today's improper *kokeshi*, or an artisan's newer works won't become tomorrow's "good" *kokeshi*.



#### 4.0 KOKESHI: SHIFTING SIGNIFIERS AND WOODEN TRADITION

This chapter will first explore the various theories surrounding the meaning of *kokeshi*, the perceived connection that *kokeshi* has with child death, and the more recent practice of *mizuko kuyō* (memorial services for miscarried or aborted children), followed by commentary on these various theories. The supposed meanings that *kokeshi* have are partially due to the ability of this doll to act as a personal canvas for recounting tales of life traumas, limited perceptions of the Tōhoku region as being a land of loss and hardship, and the assumption that the doll can act as a memorial for the dead. Secondly, this chapter will concentrate on how *kokeshi kōjin* themselves talk about and classify *kokeshi*, particularly the ways in which their dialogues focus on the material of which the *kokeshi* is made (wood), the history of lathe work in the Tōhoku region, and the skill and use of the lathe to separate this folk art form from other Japanese dolls. The *kokeshi* is ultimately an expression of regional pride, each individual strain of *kokeshi* acting as a metaphor for the positives of the Tōhoku area, as well as its industrial achievements.

In 1940, a group of Japanese scholars and collectors unified the many regional dialectic words (*hōgen*) for a wooden doll, calling it *kokeshi* (Hirai 2009 & Takahashi 2003). The first *kokeshi*-collecting boom peaked at this time, and an early interest in *kokeshi* classification, production, and regionalism in the form of scholarly publications starting in earnest in 1932, with Tachibana Bunsaku's research on *kigata ko*-wood bodied doll (Hirai 2000: 3), pushed this doll

into the Japanese spotlight. At this time, there was an influx of *kokeshi*-like dolls on the market, and all wooden dolls were being classified as the same. Collectors wanting to preserve and maintain the studied and categorized tradition narrowed the *kokeshi* category to dolls that were made by specific families in the Tōhoku region which also adhered to specific designs and construction techniques. Tomiya Amae, who had published the first dedicated work on traditional *kokeshi* in 1928, moved from Sendai to Tokyo after his marriage in 1930, opening a wholesale liquor shop near Akihabara. After he began to display his *kokeshi* in a local wine bar three years later, the bar became a gathering place for the Tokyo *Kokeshi* Club (Amae 1977: 11). It was decided that the Club would publish a regular report, in the first volume of which Amae proposed *kokeshi dō* (*The way of kokeshi*), discussed in the previous chapter, where he argued that the word *kigata ko*, used at that time to describe all wooden Japanese dolls, was insufficient in describing *kokeshi* (Amae 1977: 12). In 1940, a large traditional *kokeshi* exhibition was sponsored by the *Kokeshi* Club. The event's cultural importance and prestige were illustrated by the invitation and attendance of the Crown Prince (Amae 1977: 13). Though it is not stated by Amae in his revised 1977 edition, it appears that his push for the separation of *kokeshi* from other wooden dolls as well as the forthcoming 1940 *kokeshi* exhibition prompted the decision by club members to finalize the name “*kokeshi*”.<sup>53</sup> It was further explained through the etymology of the word *kokeshi* that local dialect words were combined to create a word that signified *ko* (tree),<sup>54</sup> *ke* as an abbreviation for *kezuri* (to sharpen like a pencil) or *kezuru* (to shave or plane down

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<sup>53</sup> After rationing began during WWII, Amae returned to Sendai with his *kokeshi* to avoid the bombing. Also, around 1942, because of the War *kokeshi* scholarship also lessened. In 1948, Amae resumed the exhibition of his *kokeshi* after the prefectural office request during the visit of the Emperor to Miyagi Prefecture.

<sup>54</sup> The Japanese reading (*kunyomi* - 訓読み) of *ko* comes from *moku* in *mokuyobi* (木曜日 - Thursday): 木 read as *ki* or *ko*. The sound reading (*onyomi* - 音読み) is either *boku* or *moku* ) (Related to me in conversation with Sugawara, a *kokeshi* *kōjin* ).

wood) and *shi* (used as a conjunctive particle), thereby linking the name to how the doll is made, and not to the subsequently more sensational meaning of “child death”.<sup>55</sup> The connection of *kokeshi* with the concept of infanticide or filicide, based on the false etymology of the *hiragana* *ko* as the *kanji* 子 (child) and *keshi* as the *kanji* 消し (used in this context, to describe the extinguishing or erasing of a life), increasingly has been challenged by *kokeshi* artisans and the collecting population in Japan, who acknowledge past region-specific combination of words that either mean wood, wooden, or to shave down wood like *ko*, *kogesu*, *koge*, and *ki* with words that mean doll like *hohōko*, *hōko*, *boko* and *ningyō* used instead of *kokeshi*, the vast array of early dialectical name variations not utilizing the combination of *ko* and *kesu*, and the creation of the term “*kokeshi*” during a time when *kesu* was not connected with the action of killing.

#### 4.1 PERCEIVED MEANINGS OF THE WORD *KOKESHI*

Interpretations of the word “*kokeshi*” have often literally translated the *hiragana* (Japanese syllabary for native words) こけし- *kokeshi* as (*ko*) child and (*keshi*) as erasing or removal of children through the practice of infanticide (Jolivet 2000; Baten 2000, 1992, & 1986; Booth 1995; & Takeuchi & Stephens 1982). The meaning of *kokeshi* similarly has been linked to memorials, or as substitutions for children who were killed during times of famine or hardship

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<sup>55</sup> The translation of *ko* (tree) and *kezuru* (to plane down wood) was related to me in personal conversations with Shogo Kamei (Senior Advisor of the Kamei Corporation), *kokeshi* collector and researcher) and several *kokeshi* makers during field work in Tōhoku during 2007 to 2009. This appears to be a variation on Mihara Yokichi’s theory using *ke* as an abbreviation of *kezuri* (In Shikama and Nakaya 1971: 190).

Note: This chapter is a revised and corrected version of a 2010 publication for the Tōhoku University’s Anthropology Department.

(Coulbrooke 2002; LaFleur 1992; Law 1997; Saint-Gilles 1998; & Takeuchi & Stephens 1982). Speculation over the meaning of *kokeshi* has been fueled further by misinterpretations of the doll's simple shape and minimal decoration as being akin to the undeveloped facial features and body of a fetus or dead infant (Law 1997: 37). Baten likewise draws a connection between the unpainted body and bobbing head of the *nanbu kokeshi* (Iwate Prefecture) with the drooping head of a dead infant (2000: 55 & 1992: 29). The *kokeshi*'s lack of visible limbs has been interpreted as being the ghost of a dead child, or with a midwife's practice of wrapping an unwanted infant tightly in rags to hasten death (Booth 1995: 130). Some authors have straddled the fence on the meaning of *kokeshi*, perhaps in an attempt to impart a positive spin on its origins, as Miyakawa does by saying that while it is not conclusive, the origin of the *kokeshi* doll could be a charm to ensure the good health of newborn babies, or, conversely, one for dead infants (particularly those who died of famine) to pray for the comfort of their souls (Miyakawa 2001: Introduction).

These perceived meanings of *kokeshi* have influenced artists living outside of Japan to express their feelings of child loss through the use of *kokeshi*, either incorporated into their works or as narratives of loss. Coulbrooke (2002), in her interpretation of a work titled "The Goddess of Hysterectomy", describes the "symbols of motherhood" contained within the piece, one of which is a *kokeshi*. While the artist, who is half Japanese, did not articulate a connection between the *kokeshi* and child death, the piece presumes this connection as the artist tells the story of her oldest son's death, the piece a memorial to him (2002: 160).

The following excerpt of the first two stanzas from a poem written by McCune (2006), aptly titled “Kokeshi”, also uses the *kokeshi* as a visual device, building a connection between *kokeshi* and children who perished during the tragic atomic bomb blast in Nagasaki:

My mother bought me rare *kokeshi*,  
fragile dolls, made only for display.  
They were delicately painted,  
lathed from wood  
and had no hands, no feet, no mouths.  
They were memoria, some said,  
made in bitter years of famine  
to appease the spirits of the dead,  
for their name means  
poppy-seed child or child erasing.

Burned they look something like the girls  
of Nagasaki, captured in photographs,  
half-naked, lying in the ruins . . .  
their skin black and swollen,  
as if they’d been boiled from the inside,  
Some were charred. Others flashed  
The patterns of their skirts  
Against the ground, small flowers  
Etched into their skin, leaf-prints.

McCune plays on our imaginations as she links information about a *kokeshi* festival doll burning, the decorations on the *kokeshi*, and child suffering. A small introductory paragraph before the poem explains that at the *kokeshi* festival, defective or “unborn” dolls are burned on the second day. The word unborn positioned within quote marks further emphasizes the connection with child death and *kokeshi*.

## 4.2 EVIDENCE FOR THE FALSE ETYMOLOGY OF *KOKESHI*

Recent growing concern among *kokeshi* *kōjin* and collectors over the continued popular assumptions that *kokeshi* historically were used in remembrance of dead children has prompted a resurgence in the discussion about the origins of the word *kokeshi*. It is not surprising, though, that the first publication dedicated to the discussion of *kokeshi*, authored by Tomiya Amae, also dwelled on this question. Amae concluded, as did subsequent scholars, that the word “*kokeshi*” was created through the process of *ateji* (当て字), using *kanji* (Chinese characters used in Japanese writing) as a phonetic symbol rather than for its meaning. Attempting to decipher what *kokeshi* means using *kanji*, scholars translated *keshi* as either the *kanji* 芥子 (poppy seed or small) or 消し (to delete or erase). The use of these two *kanji* for the word *keshi* ignores the many *hōgen* (regional words) for this doll; the term *kokeshi* was established by collectors and researchers from areas outside of Tōhoku, interpreting the many *hōgen* to reflect the more established Tokyo dialect (Hirai 2008 & 2009). In both his original and revised publication, Amae listed the *hōgen* for fourteen *kokeshi*-producing regions within Miyagi, Fukushima, Yamagata, and Iwate Prefectures (1928: 14). Research from just one local production area, Shinchi (Tōgatta), revealed that *koge* of *kogeshi* (a local name for the doll) means *kezuru* (locally *sagu*) to cut down or shave, referring to the process of cutting down, or planing down wood to make the doll (Amae 1928: 15). Later, *kokeshi* guide books continued to list the many *hōgen* within each prefecture, illustrating the great variety of local names. For Miyagi Prefecture: Narugo - *kogesu* (こげす) and *kokeshi* (こけし), Sendai - *kinboko* (きんぼこ), *kibokko* (きぼっこ), and *kogesunboko* (こげすんぼこ), Aone - *kiboko* (きぼこ) and *kogesu* (こげす), Tōgatta -

*kioboko* (きおぼこ), *kogesu* (こげす), *kokesu* (こけす), and *kogeshi* (こげし), and Kamasaki/Yajirō - *kiboko* (きぼこ) and *oboko* (おぼこ)<sup>56</sup> (Tsuchihashi 1973: 234). Further, regional variations are categorized into five distinctive types or models (*gata* - 型): *kogesu gata* (こげす型), *boko gata* (ぼこ型), *kogesuboko gata* (こげすぼこ型), *deko gata* (でこ型), and *kina-kina gata* (きなきな型) (Hirai 2009: 58-60; Matsukawa 2002: 4; Nishida 1961: 26-28 & Tsuchihashi & Nishida 1968: 34).<sup>57</sup> Within each *gata* there can be 6 to 19 variations. The *kogesu gata* consists of the following name variations: *kogesu* (こげす) *kokeshi* (こけし), *kogesukko* (こげすっこ), *kokesukko* (こけすっこ), *kogeshi* (こげし), and *hogeshi* (ほげし) (Hirai 2009: 58). Specific terms also reflected actual sizes of dolls. For example, for *kokeshi* made in the Tōgatta region, dolls that were 13.2 cm or smaller were called *kogesu* and dolls larger than 13.2 cm were called either *ningyō* or *kiboko* (Shikama and Nakaya 1971: 190). In Narugo, small dolls were called *takko* and the large dolls were called *bōzu* (Shikama and Nakaya 1971: 190).

Speculation, based on visual evidence alone, has also come up short in recognizing the many strains of *kokeshi* and variations within those strains. The *ateji* of (*keshi*) 芥子 (poppy seed) reflects the possibility that the doll's name refers to its poppy-like appearance, the head and stick-like body of the doll mimicking the shape of a dried poppy seed head and stem. Amae

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<sup>56</sup> Hirai's (2009) publication lists the term *ningyō* in addition to terms mentioned for Kamasaki,

<sup>57</sup> Takahashi (2003) lists five regional names for *kokeshi*: *kogesu* (こげす), *kogesunboko* (こげすんぼこ), *kiboko* (きぼこ), *deko* (でこ), and *deku* (でく). Matsukawa (2002) breaks down the regional names for *kokeshi* into four systems or family lines, *kei* (系): *kogesu kei* (こげす系), *boko kei* (ぼこ系), *deko kei* (でこ系), and *kinakina kei* (きなきな系). This publication places the regional name, *kokeshi bokko* (こけしぼっこ) under the *boko kei* (ぼこ系) instead of *kogesuboko gata* (こげすぼこ型) as Hirai & Tsuchihashi and Nishida do. Hirai states that the distinct type of *kogesuboko* (こげすぼこ) acknowledges the simultaneous use of both *kogesu* (こげす) and *boko* (ぼこ) to describe dolls in certain regions (2009: 59).

Note: For full list of local dialect words for *kokeshi* see Appendix B.

points out, though, that 芥子 (*keshi*) in this case means small, a reference to the tiny black seeds contained within the poppy's head, and, as *kokeshi* are not all small nor do they all look like a dried poppy head, this interpretation is highly improbable (Amae 1928: 13).

In 1940, when deciding on the encompassing term “*kokeshi*” to describe the lathe-turned wooden dolls of Tōhoku, local name variations for the doll were sacrificed for a more organized classification system favored by collectors, but connections with how the doll was made were retained. It was not until after World War II that the word *keshi* started to be associated with killing, first proposed as slang for killing and murder in detective novels (Takahashi 2003: 6) and in Fukazawa's (1980) fictional work, *Michinoku no Ningyōtachi* (*The Dolls of Michinoku*).<sup>58</sup> The general dolls (*ningyō*) Fukazawa describes in relation to the practice of killing of unwanted children are widely interpreted as being *kokeshi* because of the location of the story, *Michinoku*, an historical name for Northeastern Honshū, approximately corresponding to the area now covered by Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate and Aomori Prefectures (Hare 2001: 2). As *kokeshi* are one of the most visible and popular folk arts of the region, many have assumed that this is what was referenced. Hare points out, in her analysis of Fukazawa's work, that while his character, Danna-sama, uses the phrase *ko wo kesu* (子を消す- “do away with a child”) to describe the sins of his ancestors, it is highly unlikely that the word *keshi* (colloquially in Tokyo dialect to mean kill) would have been used by this man, living deep in the mountains of the Tōhoku region, who spoke in a broad Tōhoku dialect (Hirai 2000: 251 in Hare 2001: 45).

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<sup>58</sup> *Michinoku no Ningyōtachi* is credited by *kokeshi* researchers and collectors in Japan as being one of the primary sources that links *kokeshi* with infanticide. While Fukazawa received great literary acclaim for this fictional work, his interpretations of what are supposedly *kokeshi* has been cited as a purely creative construction, more of a tantalizing literary device than actual fact (Related to me in 2007, by Dr. Fumio Ano, avid *kokeshi* collector and scholar).



A second source for the connection between infanticide and *kokeshi* comes from the NHK (*Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai* - Japan Broadcasting Corporation) series “*Shin nihon kikō futatabi*”, subtitled “*kokeshi no uta*” (*kokeshi* song), filmed in Narugo in 1971, and revisited in 2006, some thirty-five years later. In the original 1971 program, the narrator states there are many theories about the origins of *kokeshi*, but one is that there is talk that the word *kokeshi* is written in a way that means to erase a child. He goes on to say that about 140 years ago when they had the big Famine of Tenpo, the *kijishi* in Narugo, especially the Onikobe area, almost everyone died. It is said that those *kijishi* who supposedly killed their own children because they could not feed them, carved wooden dolls and that was the beginning of *kokeshi*. At the end of this explanation of the meaning of *kokeshi*, a song begins to be sung by an older woman (a grandmother) in very heavy local dialect.

<i>orai no nen ko ya</i>	[My] non sleeping baby
<i>nero de baya</i>	go to sleep/ I am telling you to go to sleep
<i>minko no kachyan</i>	Your mother
<i>doko sa itta</i>	where did she go?
<i>hayagu keette koi</i>	come home soon
<i>nero de ba ya</i>	Go to sleep
<i>nero de ba--</i>	Go to sleep-- go to sleep
<i>nero de ba</i>	
<i>hayaku nero</i>	Go to sleep soon/quickly
<i>neredo ba-chyan</i>	If you don't go to sleep [your] grandmother will . . .

While the lyrics of this song do not seem to be related to the previous dialogue about infanticide, the incredibly “creepy” way it is sung creates an audible connection to infanticide while *kokeshi* faces are shown simultaneously, further visually linking *kokeshi* to the child and implying that children were literally put to sleep forever. The song also slowly fades, ending on a dubious proclamation by the grandmother that something might happen to the child if he or she does not go to sleep.

In both the 1971 and 2006 versions of this NHK program, Itō Matsusaburō (famous Narugo *kokeshi kōjin*) is shown painting two *kokeshi*. When the dolls are finished, the narrator says, “The faces that Matsusaburō paints may be related to the images of his two dead daughters. That is something that we don’t know for sure, though” (*Matsusaburō san ei ga kaku kokeshi no kao wa nakunata futari no musume san no omo kagei ni kao kangai aru kamoshirimasen*). Several *kōjin* related to me that the origin of the *kokeshi* infanticide connection was from these two NHK specials, but that an actual *kōjin* had said in the film that the dolls were used in a memorial for dead children. As it turns out, it does not appear that any *kōjin* was consulted, and that the narration was used as a method of drawing the audience into the story of *kokeshi* as only one theory of the meaning of *kokeshi* was emphasized. The 1971 program occurs during winter and features a deep snowy landscape with ominous music playing in the background to heighten the effect of this dark story. The 2006 version, while dropping the beginning narration about the theory of *kokeshi*, does revisit the story of Itō Matsusaburō, using the original film clips and narration. While the use of clips from the 1971 program are used to create a connection between past *kokeshi* production with Itō Matsusaburō, Itō Shōichi (*kokeshi kōjin* who trained under Itō Matsusaburō), and the continuance of interest in *kokeshi* production with the youth of Narugo, the insinuated connection with *kokeshi* as child memorials remains with the inclusion of previous

program clips. The film also states that the wood-working profession has existed for 600 hundred years. While this is not necessarily false for the wood-turning profession, it has given the impression that *kokeshi* are also this old, adding to their potential to having been used in some ancient child memorial rituals. In reality, *kokeshi* production started from 1804-1818 (Hirai 2000: 3), as suggested by the Iwamatsu Naosuke Document (1811), a detailed document from instructor to apprentices indicating the proper production techniques and measurements for *kokeshi* and wood turned items, making *kokeshi* to be only around 192 to 206 years old.

When asked, *kōjin* and collectors expressed surprise and horror that the connection between *kokeshi* and filicide/infanticide<sup>59</sup> was made in a program, as there is much evidence that pointed to the contrary. The head of the Narugo *Kokeshi Kōjin* Association told me that they had recently asked the owner of a coffee shop near the Narugo Station to paint over the shop's shutters as they depicted *kokeshi* rising from lotus flowers. Lotus flowers are associated with death, and *kōjin* did not want tourists to make this connection in their minds. When I returned to the station, I found that the shutters in question, which the owner had refused to repaint, depicted a rather cute Indian-themed scene of elephants, *kokeshi*, and lotus flowers. While it may have been a bit of an overreaction on the part of artisans in the area to ask the owner to paint over such a naïve scene, embarrassment that one of the main causes for misconceptions about *kokeshi* was filmed in Narugo, and a continuance of these misconceptions has prompted this over-sensitivity.

A second link with Narugo and infanticide can be found in the *enka* song (Japanese folk song) *Kokeshi Monogatari* (*Kokeshi* Story) written in 1989, with a version in 2008 by Tamagawa Seiji. When visiting a *kokeshi* artisan in Narugo, I was told about this particular *enka* song and

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<sup>59</sup> In the body of this text I primarily use the word infanticide to describe any act that takes the life of a young child or infant. Others authors, most notably Hirai prefer to use the more exact term of filicide, the killing of a child or infant by the parents of that child or infant.

thought it was the same one as featured in the NHK broadcasts, but while that *enka* song does not directly mention Narugo, *kokeshi*, or lost children, this particular *enka* song is very specific about these three topics. The song's problematic subject matter came to the attention of *kōjin* living in Narugo in 2008, when a man emailed the local *kokeshi* museum with an angry letter about a radio broadcast in which he had heard an *enka* singer describing her song with great conviction, and its link with *kokeshi* and infanticide. The singer said that while *kokeshi* from Narugo were cute, they came from the sad history of *kogoroshi* (child killing). She went on to describe the history of this practice stating, “[A] long time ago there was a famine in the Tōhoku area and there were many occasions that the parents who could not earn a living abandoned children in the mountains unwillingly. Later, those parents who killed their children regretted this, and made dolls that resembled their children. I heard this was the beginning of *kokeshi*. This *Kokeshi Monogatari* is the song that describes this sad incident”. The MC of the program was so overwhelmed by this introduction that he literally wailed. The author of the email feared that the MC's emotional reaction to what he described as an “outright lie” would perpetuate through media the “awful” image of the Tōhoku people as being dark and guilty of killing their children. The email author ends his letter by saying that for the sole purpose of selling one *enka* song, the Tōhoku people are now perceived as “dirty” people who will use *kogoroshi* without concern. “I cannot bear that the image of this quotation will be spread” (email sent to the Narugo *Kokeshi* Museum, dated June 2, 2008).

The *kokeshi* artisan from whom I heard this story later sent me a packet of material that included both the email and two versions of the *enka* song.

*sono toshi Tōhoku no kanson wa hidoi kikin deshita.*

That year the poor villages in Tōhoku suffered a terrible famine.

*hitobito wa kusa no ne wo zōsui ni shi (shite) ue wo shinoide imashita.*

People made rice porridge with grass roots and tried to survive (stave off hunger)

*“a, toshi ha moikanai omae wo oyama ni suteru*

“Oh how dare did I abandon you who is oh so very young/of tender years in the mountain

*nante, warui okachan wo yurushite okure”*

please forgive [your] horrible mother.”

*- kurai akaride mi wo kezuru omoide kizamu kokeshi wa*

**Under the dim light - the *kokeshi* I carve with pain**

*ima wa kaera nu kawaii waga ko no omokage wo yadoshite ita.*

**Has the image of my pretty child who will never come back anymore.** (Found in the 2008 version)

*shiroi ki hada ni hohosuri yoserya*

When I rub the white wood surface against [my] cheek

*narugo kokeshi wa kyunto naku*

[The] *Narugo* kokeshi cries out “*kyun*” (pathetic sound like one made by a puppy)

*shide no tabi to mo*<sup>60</sup>

With the journey to the other world [Not knowing it is going to die]

*shide no tabi to mo wakarazuni*

With the journey to the other world -- without understanding it [Without understanding it will journey to the other world/Not knowing it will die]

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<sup>60</sup> The phrase *shide no tabi to mo* literally means “to journey to the other world”, but also may be interpreted “to die”.

*akai bebe kite itta ko no*

Wearing red children's clothes -- the child who left [The child who left, wearing the red clothes]

*kawaii me mo to ni iki utsushi*

[it] is the mirror image of the child's cute eyes

*“okachan, Oshōgatsu mitai ne,*

“Mother, it looks like New Year's

*konna kirei na kimono kite” . . .*

Wearing such a pretty kimono” . . .

*nanimo shirazuni hashida ano ko no koe ga*

Without knowing anything [and] having fun-- that/my child's voice

*ima mo mimi kara hanaremasen*

Even now [that /my child's voice] won't leave my ears.

*kazoe mitsu no chiisa na se na ni*

[The] child who is going to turn three this year

*se ou enishi no awaresayo*

[is] carrying the fate on [its] back

*semete wakare ni*

At least at the farewell

*semete wakare ni – ten temari*

At least at the farewell - - bouncing the *temari* (ball made from wound colored string or yarn)

*tsuiteyarukara – hanabuchi no*

I will bounce it for you

*yama he ii ko de, itto kure*

So be a good child and go to Hanabuchi Mountain<sup>61</sup>

*dare ga tsuketa noka, ano ko wo suteta Hanabuchi no*

I wonder who named it, the valley in Hanabuchi where I abandoned that child

*tani wo kokeshi tani to mōshimasu.*

Is called *kokeshi* valley

*ima mo kokeshi wo horu tabini*

Even now every time I carve *kokeshi*

*ano ko no koto ga . . .*

About that child . . .

*fuyu ga nagakute kokeshi no sato wa*

Winter is long [and] the *kokeshi* village

*kyō mo roku shaku yuki no naka*

Again today covered in six *shaku* (about six feet) of snow

*naite ichi nen*

Crying a year [has] passed

*naite ichi nen—mata ni nen*

Crying a year [has] passed and two years

*yubi wa shibarete kogoetemo*

Even my fingers get cold and frozen [Even if fingers are frozen, still carving the doll]

*waga ko tomurau nomino oto*

Mourning my child - sound of the chisel [The sound of the chisel reminds me of my child]

*Kokeshi Monogatari (Kokeshi Story) (My translation)*

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<sup>61</sup> Mountain overlooking Narugo Dam.

In this song, the links between Narugo, infanticide, and *kokeshi*, are obvious as the dead child's face is reflected in that of the Narugo *kokeshi*'s face. The sound of the lathe tool on the wood as the *kokeshi* is being turned is also a particular reminder of the child, and the mother's grief over killing her child. One might ask why Narugo specifically has been connected with the practice of infanticide more so than other areas of *kokeshi* production. One supposition is that the Narugo *kokeshi* holds more weight for the average Japanese viewer as it is the most recognizable strain, and Narugo in particular is made more realistic as the high Hanabuchi Mountain overlooking the Narugo Valley provides the perfect visual locale for abandoning children during periods of hardship. It is also tempting to point out the Narugo *kokeshi*'s unique ability to make a crying or high pitched keening sound as the head is turned which could be interpreted as a child's pitiful cry. The lyrics, though, also reinforce for the listener the already perceived notion that the Tōhoku region is the origin and sole location for carrying out the practice of infanticide during times of hardship. The lines added to the 2008 song heighten the feeling of emotional guilt and loss supposedly felt by all Tōhoku people for killing off their children. The line *Kurai akaride mi wo kezuru omoide kizamu kokeshi wa* (Under the dim light - the *kokeshi* I carve with pain) expresses more than just pain but a whole host of emotions like trouble, worry, and suffering. The song's purposeful use of *shaku* (a unit of measurement for wood workers in Japan) to describe how much snow had fallen instead of the standard centimeters or meters, further connects *kokeshi* (the large dolls measured in *shaku*) with the practice of infanticide as presumably only local *kijishi* would have used such a unit of measurement.



### 4.3 CRITIQUES OF THE VISUAL INTERPRETATIONS OF *KOKESHI*

The interpretation that *kokeshi* represent the ghosts of dead children, or, alternatively, fetuses because of their lack of limbs, further ignores local interpretations, as well as other doll forms throughout Japan.<sup>62</sup> While a perceived limbless doll is unusual by non-Japanese standards, the *kokeshi*'s shape is not unusual within Japan. One of the earliest doll forms, the *hitogata* (ひとがた), used to absorb illness or evil by rubbing it on the body, was constructed of wood, paper or metal and resembled a flat cutout of just a head and limbless body. The *papier maché hakota ningyō* (はこた人形)<sup>63</sup>, first created in the 1780s and still produced in Tottori Prefecture (Southwest Honshū), and, more specifically, the *kurayoshi hakota* (倉吉はこた), has been compared to the *kokeshi* because of its similar shape, with just a *kimono* to suggest the presence of arms and legs (Nishimura & Hatano 2004: 196-197; also Tawara & Saitō 1986: 135). The *kokeshi* is made to resemble a person wearing a *kimono* where often the hands and feet of the wearer are hidden beneath the long folds of the sleeves and robes.

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<sup>62</sup> Takei Takeo in Amae (1928), as part of his miscellaneous thoughts about *kokeshi* (*kokeshi zakkan*), addresses the odd appearance of the doll for someone who had never seen *kokeshi* before and how they might, “. . . feel the ghost of the long neck and have a bad feeling from this deformity [lacking arms and legs] and will be afraid of it.” He asserts that the powerful connection that people have with *kokeshi* [the connection that came to him after he grew to appreciate this art form] and the doll's “good impression” will not make it feel like a ghost, but give a “pretty” impression (Takei 1928: 46-47).

<sup>63</sup> *Hakota ningyō* are part of the wider *oboko* (おぼこ) family of *papier maché* dolls.

The *kokeshi*'s limbs are implied, and several artisans have added hands holding either an umbrella or fan and little feet on the underside of the *kokeshi*.<sup>64</sup> Also, as there are limitations to the shapes that can be created using a lathe, the simple body and head format is a reasonable adaptation and expression of those skills needed to produce wood-turned items. *Kokeshi kōjin* do produce other wooden toys which are not classified as *kokeshi* that include movable wooden arms to emphasize motion as the toys are being pulled.



**Figure 31. Various *Kina-Kina Kokeshi*, Center *Kina-Kina* with Nut for Head.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

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<sup>64</sup> Ogura Ishizō (1883-1962) painted small hands holding fans or umbrellas on the sides of his *kijiyama kokeshi* (Akita), and later taught his student Miharu Fumio (1954), who continues the practice today. The late Satō Yoshiki (1949-2007) is also known for painting little feet on the bottoms of his *Tsugaru kokeshi* (Aomori).

The inclusion of arms and legs was not emphasized in the *kokeshi*'s construction, as it was first created from scrap wood, often for teething children or toddlers. The *nanbu kokeshi*, mentioned by Baten as being akin to a dead infant, is actually a *kokeshi* originally created as a pacifier/rattle (*oshaberi*) for babies and toddlers. This specific type of *kokeshi* is called *kina-kina kokeshi*, the head can be shaken back and forth, and the body remains unpainted so that the child can put it in their mouth without risk (Figure 31). It is not unusual to find *kina-kina* with nuts used as heads on which a baby supposedly may gnaw or suck during teething. One theory for the origin of *kokeshi* proposed most emphatically by Saitō (1989) is that wood turners “must have” made wooden pacifiers on the lathe for their own children to have strong teeth. The part that was put in the mouth became the head of the *kokeshi*, and the part held in the hand became the body (Saitō 1989: 8). *Kokeshi kōjin*, in addition to *kokeshi*, have continued to make wooden rattles, whistles, and horns for children to play with as part of their wooden toy repertoire.

*Kokeshi*, though only appearing in the late Edo period, and more specifically in the Genroku era (September 1688 to 1704), have been erroneously linked to pre-Heian period (794 to 1185) doll forms. Before the widespread use of *ningyō* to describe dolls, *hitogata* (human form), possibly another name for *hitogata*; *katashiro* [divine shape], *hihina* [person doll],<sup>65</sup> *dogū-jin* [*dogū* person/figurine], *jinzō* [人像 - human image], and *kugutsu* [傀儡 - a puppet] were

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<sup>65</sup> “*Hihina* is a word which later became associated with the types of dolls used in the Girl’s Day Festival, but it originally denoted a ‘miniature’ or ‘copy’. Thus, what was referred to as *hihina* during this period does not necessarily refer to a *hina* doll. In the Tale of the Genji (completion date in the year 1021) we find descriptions of young princesses playing with *hihina* dolls, which seems to suggest that dolls were used by children as everyday playthings” (Kawakami 1995: 11). “*Hihina asobi* among nobles had begun in the Heian era and originally meant ‘princess playing with small, sweet articles’. But the word *hihina* became applied to *hina* dolls, those linked to one of five seasonal festivals (called *Jōshi no Sekku* on March 3<sup>rd</sup>) and developed into the *hina* festival we know today” (Ikeda M. 2009: 92).

used with *hitogata* being the main term (Ikeda M. 2009: 91-92). Many of these doll forms were used to absorb illness, pollution, or evil from the body. In the Heian period, *amagatsu* (literally heaven's child) were the first examples of clothed human forms, and having the power to protect their owners from illness as well as serving as effigies to protect children as their ritual substitutes (Gribbin and Gribbin 1984: 12 and Law 1997: 35). While Law states that *amagatsu* were sometimes called *hōko* (*bōko*) or generically *o-san ningyō* (birthing dolls) (1997: 35), most authors separate these two forms of *migawari ningyō* (substitute dolls). The *hōko* (crawling/creeping baby), as its form represents the crawling posture of an infant, was traditionally made on the same day as the birth of a child, and served as a baby's talismanic substitute. Illnesses would be attracted to either the *amagatsu* or the *hōko* instead of affecting the child. These two doll forms are credited with becoming the present day *hina-ningyō* (Girl's Day dolls) around the Edo period. The *amagatsu*, because of its outstretched arms, became the male doll, and the *hōko* became the female doll (Gribbin and Gribbin 1984: 12 and Kawakami 1995: 11). Both of these doll forms later became *kigan ningyō* (prayer dolls) which were displayed on Girl's Day (March 3<sup>rd</sup>) and Boy's Day (May 5<sup>th</sup>), for appreciation and prayer that children grow up in good health.

Law treats *kokeshi* as a pre-Heian period doll form, stating, "Prior to this [Heian period], all cases considered below that can be considered examples of *ningyō* had specific names in their own contexts: *haniwa*, *hitogata*, *kokeshi*, *kugutsu*, etc." (1997: 32). She then lists seven specific uses for doll forms throughout Japanese history. Within the construct of Law's list of doll functions, the *kokeshi* seems to fit in with the fifth doll category, that they can be substitutes for unborn children and small infants, either protecting them from illness and epidemics or appeasing their spirits if they should reach an untimely end (Law 1997: 32). The last use of

appeasing the spirits of young children if they reach an untimely end appears incongruous with her first assertion that *kokeshi* is a pre-Heian doll form, as no pre-Heian doll forms appear to have functioned in this capacity. Later, Law states that *kokeshi* are effigies linked with practices of infanticide and served as ritual substitutes for dead children (1997: 37). The final paragraph in the *kokeshi* section states that they might have been a fertility symbol as they resemble phalluses. It appears that Law's claims are based on various personal interpretations of the physical appearance of the *kokeshi*, and assume an incorrect time frame for when the doll was first produced in Japan.

Both Japanese and non-Japanese interpretations have reasonably linked the possible origins of *kokeshi* as being later forms of similarly shaped dolls within the Tōhoku region. Three doll forms, the *Sansuke-sama* from the Tsugaru district of Aomori, *Oshira-sama* from the Tōhoku region, and the *Kosodate jizō* (child-rearing *Jizō*) have been tentatively linked as possible early versions of *kokeshi* (Tsuchihashi & Nishida 1968, and Saitō 1989). *Sansuke-sama*, a doll made from carved wood, was offered to the mountain god to reduce the number of people the god does not like. *Oshira-sama* is a stick doll in which a person's face is painted in ink, or the eyes and nose of a person are carved on the end of the stick and worshipped as the god of fields (rice or vegetable) or silk worms.<sup>66</sup> Several theories link the well-being of children to

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<sup>66</sup> The legend of *Oshira-sama*, on which the current festival is based, probably originated in China. Two stories have been recounted explaining the use of two mulberry stick dolls in the shape of a woman and a horse. The first states that once there was a poor farmer who had a beautiful daughter and one horse. The daughter grew to love the horse and married him. When the father found out, he killed the horse by hanging it from a mulberry tree. The daughter was so shocked, she clung to the horse. The father then cut off the horse's head. The daughter, still clinging to the horse's head, flew off to the heavens (Jeremy and Robinson 1989: 80). The second story states that a beautiful chestnut horse called Sendan-kurige was sick with love for the beautiful girl who took care of him. The owner of the horse killed and skinned the horse after he learned it was love sick. The girl went to say a prayer over the skin and suddenly wrapped herself up in it and was carried into the sky. Soon after, a shower of black and white insects fell from the sky and alighted on the mulberry trees and began to eat the leaves. These insects were thought to be the first silk worms (Blacker 1975: 150). Blacker also states that in the Tōhoku region, female mediums

the making of wooden dolls in the Tōhoku region. It is said that people made dolls for children so that they would become a good playmate for the child, often offering protection to the child as well (Akiyama & Saitō 1976: 5). The *Kosodate jizō* is used in the southern regions of Tōhoku where there is a custom of creating a wooden figure in the shape of a person or animal from wood borrowed from a *Jizō* statue, wishing for children to grow up healthy. Once the wish was granted, the person would return this wooden figure to the *Jizō* statue from which it was borrowed (Saitō 1989: 8). In a general description of the origins of wooden dolls it was said that, if wooden material is available, it will be carved into the shape of a person or animal (*mokugū*) and will contain blessings or hopes (*inori*). Also, two *komori jizō* (babysitting *Jizō*) can be made. One is kept and the other is offered to the shrine [for protection of the child] (Akiyama & Saitō 1976: 5).<sup>67</sup>

Despite these wooden doll forms, it is thought that the *kokeshi* is more likely to be indirectly linked through locally-made clay and *papier maché* dolls with the *gosho-ningyō* (御所人形)<sup>68</sup>, a specialty of Kyoto. The widespread popularity of *gosho-ningyō* in Edo-period culture is seen in the frequency of *gosho*-like features in other doll forms, such as the clay versions from numerous kilns across Japan that provided inexpensive versions of *gosho-ningyō* for those who

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received special tools to summon *kami* (spirits) and ghosts. One of these instruments was a pair of puppets known as *Oshira-sama*, used for summoning *kami* (Blacker 1975: 148). Jeremy and Robinson describe *Oshira-sama* as the guardian deity of sericulture. Up until 1945, sericulture and horse-breeding led to the development of the distinctive *magariya* farmhouses in north eastern Japan. Presently, on the eve of the New Year, a new layer of clothing is added to the *Oshira-sama* dolls, one representing a horse and the other representing a girl (Jeremy and Robinson 1989: 80). It is unlikely from these two similar legends that the *kokeshi* became this whittled mulberry stick doll as it does not have any relation to sericulture or horses.

<sup>67</sup> Munsterberg links *kokeshi* to being possible offerings presented at shrines to insure the prosperity of a family's descendants (1958: 92-95). Another more general interpretation is that, as they resemble phalluses, they were perhaps used as fertility symbols to invoke the deities responsible for a good harvest (Law 1997: 37).

<sup>68</sup> The name *gosho-ningyō* (palace doll) was popularized in the early twentieth century by Nishizawa Senko, a member of the *Ōdomo-kai* (Big Babies Club) (Pate 2008:108). Senko proposed unifying all of the regional variations of the doll's name, settling on *gosho-ningyō* which pays tribute to Kyoto where the dolls were exchanged as gifts within the imperial culture of Kyoto in the eighteenth century (Pate 2008: 108-110).

could not afford an original (Pate 2008: 114). Takahashi believes that the *kokeshi* evolved as an expression of one such clay version of the *gosho-ningyō* along with several other doll forms produced in Miyagi Prefecture. The *tsutsumi-ningyō* (堤人形)<sup>69</sup>, made from the clay found in the Tsutsumi ward in Sendai, and the *Sendai hariko no oboko* (仙台張り子のおぼこ), also named neck-doll (*kubi-ningyō*), consisting of a *papier maché* doll's head on a stick, were both produced earlier in Miyagi Prefecture than the *kokeshi* which first appeared in the late Edo period (1811), but all influenced the doll's decorative markings. The patterns drawn on the *tsutsumi-ningyō* are similar to those on the *kokeshi*, and the *gosho-ningyō* always has a *mizuhiki-te* (水引手) head decoration. Pate, a Japanese doll scholar, states that the late eighteenth century, special *gosho-ningyō* called *mizuhiki-de gosho* were created and presented as formal or celebratory gifts (*iwaimono*). These dolls had ribbons called *mizuhiki* painted on their heads, which he translates as “water mark” (Pate 2005: 32). This design is based on the practice of tying red or black, and white paper cords around gifts for formal occasions, and they symbolize a purifying element, or that the gifts have been blessed before their presentation (Pate 2005: 32).<sup>70</sup> This design element is also featured on the *tsutsumi-ningyō* and later on the *kokeshi*. Takahashi theorizes that the prosperous connotations of this mark, and the fact that *gosho-ningyō* usually represent boys, indicate that scholars have falsely defined *kokeshi* as little girls and memorials for dead children (2003: 6-7).

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<sup>69</sup> The Sendai City Museum states that the *tsutsumi-ningyō* first appeared in Sendai during the middle Edo period, later than the most famous clay dolls in Japan, the *fushimi-ningyō* (伏見人形), produced and sold in the Fushimi district of Kyoto during the early Edo period (1989: 4-5). Yamada relates that the incredible popularity of the *fushimi-ningyō* prompted other doll makers to use it as a model. He notes that most of these dolls were produced as a side business and lacked the originality of the basic *fushimi-ningyō* forms, but among noted areas that expressed originality in products were Tsutsumi and Yonezawa in northeastern Japan (Yamada 1955: 66).

<sup>70</sup> *Gosho-ningyō* were traditionally exchanged as gifts to convey auspicious wishes and offer protective blessings within the Kyoto Imperial court, as the dolls are often holding auspicious objects. They were also given as official commemorative gifts from the emperor to visiting *daimyō* (Pate 2008: 110).

Further, the *tsutsumi-ningyō*, the smaller versions called *keshi* (けし),<sup>71</sup> and Sendai *hariko oboko*, contain in their names *keshi* and *oboko*, both common names used in the general descriptions of many Japanese doll forms, and later used when describing the *kokeshi* (Takahashi 2003: 8). During the Edo period, there were a profusion of hairstyles; it was estimated that there were as many as 280 hair styles just for women (Chaiklin 2009: 42). The hair decorations painted on *kokeshi* have been linked to Edo period hair styles (Shikama 1966: 124), and, while *keshi* usually refers to something small, it also can mean the hair styles of babies or toddlers during this period as well. *Keshi* can be found along with *mizuhiki* on the tops of *kokeshi*, further linking this doll form to earlier dolls made during the same period, such as *tsutsumi-ningyō* and *gosho-ningyō* that also sport these decorations (Shibata & Minowa 1981: 20, Shikama 1966: 24, and Takahashi 2003: 7).

Takahashi's theories emphasize that the *kokeshi*'s origins stem from more refined forms of dolls in Japan, instead of similarly-shaped doll forms found in Northern Japan. Walthall concludes that in 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan, those defined as peasant classes, and I would add artisans in Northern regions, were exposed to the refinements of urban culture, but interpreted them in favor of their own indigenous tastes (1984: 386). The use of local products in the production of *kokeshi* and earlier doll forms like the *tsutsumi-ningyō* in Tōhoku is indicative of this regional pride and taste.

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<sup>71</sup> The term *keshi* is used to describe miniature dolls in general. While Amae critiqued the use of the *ateji* of *keshi* (芥子), Takahashi differs in his approach, emphasizing locality, a possible connection between local names for products and *kokeshi* name variations in the Miyagi, Sendai area as well as connections to infant hair styles.



Shigeru, in his discussion of *hanamaki-ningyō* (Iwate Prefecture), one of three clay dolls produced in the Tōhoku region during the late Edo period (late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century), gives examples of *hanamaki-ningyō* depicting mothers caring for children either by dressing their hair or nursing a baby in an *ejiko* (basket).<sup>72</sup> There is also an example of *dairi-bina* emperor and empress couple made in the Edo period, for the appreciation of and the prayer for the good health of little girls (Shigeru 2009: 40-41 and 77). A reference in *Yamato Kōdaku e-sho* (illustrated almanac published during the Genroku era) attests to the widespread and popular practice of displaying dolls in Japan, stating that displays of *dairi-bina* could be found even in the furthest Mutsu province (Northeastern Honshū) (Kawakami 1995: 12). It is obvious from these examples of clay dolls produced in the Tōhoku area that decorative dolls depicting scenes from everyday life and the care of children were prevalent in the late Edo period. Their simultaneous production, and corresponding production location with *kokeshi*, further casts doubt on the origins of *kokeshi* being linked with spiritual dolls, or the more dubious use as infanticide memorials. The insinuations that Northern prefectures could not have been capable of producing decorative toys and dolls is indeed indicative of the racist sentiments that cloud the perceptions of the early artistic achievements of the Tōhoku region as a whole.

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<sup>72</sup> Along with the *hanamaki-ningyō* produced in Hanamaki City, Iwate Prefecture, two other clay dolls were first produced during the late Edo period in the Tōhoku region: the first, the *sagaru-ningyō* in Yonezawa City, Yamagata Prefecture, and the second, the *tsutsumi-ningyō* in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture (Ikeda 2009: 101).

#### 4.4 *KOKESHI*, CHILD DEATH, AND *MIZUKO KUYŌ* AS A BUDDIST PRACTICE



Figure 32. *Mizuko Kuyō* Display in Yamadera. Photo by Jennifer McDowell

The practice of *mizuko kuyō*, modeled on memorial services for ancestral spirits (*senzo kuyō*), has been described by scholars (Harrison 1999, Harrison & Midori 1995, and Underwood 1999) as a means for women to confront their roles as mothers in Japanese society and as a method for coping with child loss. Critics of the practice say that it is yet another means for temples to earn money, ultimately taking advantage of women and their families during times of grief. This paper is not intended to critique either position, but *mizuko kuyō*'s connection to child death has

linked it to the use of *kokeshi* as early memorials for children who had been aborted or deliberately killed through the practice of *mabiki* (literally meaning the thinning out/culling or pulling of seedlings) (Iijima 1987: S41). In her research on *hanayome-ningyō* (Bride dolls), Schattschneider states that her informants insisted that any *ningyō* is a potential vessel for a *tamashii* (spirit). “Any ‘human-shaped’ artifact is well suited to ritual acts of healing the living or memorializing the dead because it represents (or doubles) the human form, establishing beneficial links and distinctions between itself, its human donor and its ultimate (usually divine or sacralized) recipient” (Schattschneider 2004: 146). It is indeed this association that *ningyō* has as a vessel for disquieted spirits that has encouraged the more recent practice of some grieving parents to use the *kokeshi* as such a vessel to memorialize their aborted and miscarried children.

It is a common perception because of the name “*kokeshi*” that the Tōhoku region widely practiced *mabiki* more so than other regions in Japan. To the contrary, during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Japan, the practice of *mabiki* was accepted across all social classes, not just among poor peasants in desperate times (Harrison 1999: 779). It was thought that a child did not become a real person until sometime after birth, the newborn distinguished from other people by certain rituals like not giving it a name or not putting its arms through the sleeves of a *kimono* until a certain number of days after birth (Harrison 1999: 779). Iijima states that until the age of seven a child was not human, but belonged among the gods and therefore did not possess a full social personality until that time (Iijima 1987: S42). The child’s considered status of *kami* (gods or spirits) until the age of seven further indicates an unsettled existence within this world (Harrison 1999: 779). Children who died before age seven were not given a customary burial and might be buried under the floor, threshold, verandah, or hearth of the home (Iijima 1987: S42). The spirits

of these young children who died were not seen as malevolent, but many, like the *Zashikiwarashi* (room child), became gods of the household, bringing good fortune and protection (Iijima 1987: S43). In Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima Prefectures in Tōhoku, *Kamadogami* (tutelary deity of the hearth, cooking range, and, by extension, the kitchen) is widely worshiped by affixing a wooden or clay mask of the child's features to the beams of the house. It is said that *Kamadogami* was an ugly child from the Dragon Palace (Undersea Palace of Ryūjin, the Dragon God of the Sea) who was killed and then worshipped at household hearths (Iijima 1987: S43).

As opposition to the assumed widespread practice of infanticide/filicide, first surfacing in the 19th century, the formalized practice of *mizuko kuyō* emerged as a religious acknowledgement of children who were never born (Harrison 1999: 770). In the early 1970s, *mizuko* became linked with both a religious and social concern for aborted children with the first *Mizuko Kuyō Jizō* dedicated, and, by the 1980s, the word *mizuko* had become synonymous with most rituals concerning infant death (Harrison 1999: 780). Hashimoto Tetsuma, independent political commentator and later founder of Shiunzan Jizōji (Purple Cloud Mountain Jizo Temple), saw the passing of the Eugenics Protection Law in 1948 as a threat to the Japanese nation because it offered “abortion on demand” (Harrison 1999: 772). He states that, in the past, people erected statues of *Jizō* as a type of *kuyō* or memorial for their aborted children, referencing the many small *Jizō* statues at the Kinshōji, the fourth temple at the end of the pilgrimage route in Chichibu (Saitama Prefecture - East Central Honshū) (Harrison 1999: 774). At the local level, there is further evidence of alternative forms for memorializing children, like the use of *Jizō* statues, which do not involve the use of *kokeshi*. Ooms (1967), in Smith (1974), during his field work in Nagasawa (Yamagata Prefecture), states that while there was some

debate as to whether or not children could be wandering spirits (*muen-botoke*), children were memorialized in the *butsudon* (Buddhist altar) in some homes as “Spirits of All the Wandering Dead” (*muen issai no rei*) instead of “Generation of the Ancestors of the House” (*ie senzo daidai rei*) (48-49). Ooms further saw this distinction between household ancestors and children who died early evidenced in the separation of the main family gravestone bearing the family name and the names of those adults who died as full-fledged members of the household from a smaller stone placed alongside bearing only the names of children (Smith 1974: 48-49). These examples point to the regional variations on the subject of child memorial and *mizuko kuyō*, and the lack of connection with *kokeshi* as a form of child remembrance.



**Figure 33. Kokeshi Zuka in Yamadera. Photo by Jennifer McDowell**

While conducting field work in Tōhoku, I visited several temples specializing in *mizuko kuyō*, and never saw a *kokeshi* on site. Instead, stuffed animals and *Jizō* statues<sup>73</sup> with pin wheels prevailed as a method for honoring children. In Yamadera (Yamagata Prefecture), there is a display dedicated to *mizuko kuyō* where one can buy a miniature *Mizuko Kuyō Jizō* statue for 500 yen (Figure 32). *Kokeshi* are also present in Yamadera at a shop near the train station where tourists can purchase *kokeshi* as souvenirs, and there is a rather large stone *kokeshi* that can be found over a burial mound (*kokeshi zuka* - こけし 塚)<sup>74</sup> (Figure 33) located near the *Mizuko Kuyō Jizō* display along the path leading to the main stairway gate. Recurrent, observations for two years revealed that *kokeshi* were not used interchangeably with the miniature *Mizuko Kuyō Jizō* in the display for *mizuko kuyō*, nor were the little *Jizō* statues taken to the *kokeshi zuka*. These two objects and locations did not appear to intersect in their uses and meanings. A member of the Tokyo *Kokeshi Tomo no Kai* (Tokyo *Kokeshi* Friends Association), Kazuo Ogawa, observed during the 2007 Yamadera *kokeshi kuyōsai*- 供養際 (*kokeshi* memorial service) that there were toys, drinks, and pinwheels in front of the *kokeshi zuka*, and that these were put away after the *kuyōsai*. He hypothesizes that someone might misunderstand that *kokeshi* means killing small children (Ogawa 2007: 14-15). Despite his observances, there must be an effort on

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<sup>73</sup> The form given to the *mizuko* (translated as unseen or unseeing child and water baby or water child) is often the deity *Jizō*, who in Buddhist belief freely roams the six realms of existence helping souls in need. Figures of *Jizō* simultaneously represent the deity and the dead child, serving as a nexus between caring deity and a spirit of a child in need of help (Harrison 1995: 69). The choice of *Jizō* to mark the graves of children is a common one, for children in particular are thought to require his compassionate assistance in crossing the river that bars their way to paradise (Smith 1974: 49-50).

<sup>74</sup> In 1968, the *kokeshi zuka* was erected in Yamadera by the Yamagata *Kokeshi* Association. The *kokeshi zuka* serves two main purposes, the first being to hold memorial services for past *kokeshi* makers, their tools, lumber, trees, discarded *kokeshi* or damaged *kokeshi*, and for members of the general public. The second purpose is to dedicate to the *kokeshi* shrine (opening ceremony 1976) either papers or tools for the preservation and exhibition of *kokeshi*-related materials (Shibata & Minowa 1981: 321-322). The *kokeshi* shrine located away from the main temple and shrine complexes in Yamadera was built by Ishiyama Sanshiro (*kokeshi kōjin*) with private funds. On the shrine site there are three stone monuments dedicated to *kokeshi* and lathe wood turning. The shrine worships Koretaka Shinō, the founder of wood turning, *kokeshi*, and world peace (Shibata and Minowa 1981: 322).

the part of the local *kōjin* to keep the two areas separate as in the following years no such observance was made. The practice of placing *kokeshi* at a temple in accordance with recent *mizuko kuyō* observances appears with more frequency in other regions of Japan, as foreigners traveling in Southern Honshū related to me that they had seen *kokeshi* at *mizuko kuyō* temples there.

So persistent is the image of *kokeshi* with child death that some grieving parents will apparently utilize the *kokeshi* as a memorial for a lost child, placing the *kokeshi* next to a *Jizō* statue for protection in the afterlife. La Fleur, in his exploration of how *Jizō* became connected with children, and ultimately with the practice of *mizuko kuyō*, states that the image of *Jizō* slowly transformed into the “adorable” childlike figure of today as a possible offshoot of the *kokeshi*, acting as a surrogate *mizuko* during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1995: 51). Following this assertion in his book, La Fleur shows a photo of *kokeshi* in a shop; the caption under the photo reads, “[T]he kokeshi dolls (*sic*) originated in the famine-beleaguered northeast and appear to be a folk art related to the *mizuko*” (1992: 52). La Fleur does not directly reference within his text where this information comes from, only stating that “some scholars” speculate that the name *kokeshi* may include the nuanced meaning of “child removal” (1992: 52). A closer look at his bibliography reveals that he is probably indirectly referencing Fukazawa’s fictional work in which Fukazawa described a doll in relation to practices of infanticide in the Tōhoku region.

Mirroring La Fleur’s assumption that there is a connection between *kokeshi* and *mizuko kuyō*, Jill Wright, a *kokeshi* collector in England, is featured in a film in which you hear her earnest narrative about what *kokeshi* are, and what they mean to her. She states that while it is assumed that *kokeshi* were toys for children, there is “strong” evidence that they are linked to death rituals, particularly female infanticide. The camera zooms in, showing the etymology of

the word *kokeshi*, linking it to child and erase and then pans onto a *Narugo kokeshi* for visual emphasis. She goes on to recount a grisly, but not unique, tale of how infants were killed with oleander sap, tight swaddling, squashing with a mortar, and simple smothering. These lost infants were then memorialized as “little” *kokeshi* dolls kept in the private shrines in the family’s house. Wright makes a deliberate shift from talking about *kokeshi* to *mizuko kuyō* services, linking only the red color found on the doll with *Jizō*, “small effigies of babies with red bibs”. Unable to fully mourn the death of her son, who died soon after birth, Wright constructs a perceived cultural and personal connection between the display of *kokeshi* and remembrances for dead children. She ends the film saying, “[T]o be able to openly remember dead babies, and even all that time ago have these little dolls as reminders of their loss, because even after 33 years I still do not feel like I’ve properly grieved for my son” (1973).<sup>75</sup>

The second written work that has greatly influenced the perceptions of *kokeshi* and their connection to child death is Booth’s 1995 travel memoir in which, during a trek through Aomori Prefecture, he stops to philosophize about the possible meanings of *kokeshi*. His ideas have been reproduced repeatedly on the Internet, most notably on the web site *Sai no Kawara, Jizo, Judges of Hell (Underworld)* created by Schumacher (1995). Under the caption for Bride dolls appears a *tsugaru kokeshi* made by Satō Zenji (1925-1985), and a Bride doll (*hanayome ningyō*)<sup>76</sup> followed by a group photo of *tsugaru kokeshi* made by the Hasegawa family,<sup>77</sup> with the caption

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<sup>75</sup> This film appears to have been pulled from the website YouTube where I first encountered a copy of it in 2008. The film’s *url* link also appears to have been lost for reasons presently unknown.

<sup>76</sup> Ellen Schattschneider (Brandeis University) has devoted many years to the study of *hanayome-ningyō*, stating that the doll, “. . . is infused with the spirit of the *bodhisattva Jizō*, functioning as a spirit spouse for the unquiet soul of a child or youth who died before marriage” (2004: 141).

<sup>77</sup> As it is not discernable from the website photo if the *kokeshi* and wooden products were produced individually or in combination by Hasegawa Tatsuo (1905-1985) or Hasegawa Kenzō (1942), they have been identified more generally as products from the Hasegawa family.



“Kokeshi Dolls for the Dead”. When asked, Schumacher stated that his information on *kokeshi* had come from Booth’s work on the subject. The connection between Bride dolls and *kokeshi* presumably was an obvious one to Schumacher, as Booth, in a pure moment of rumination, stated that they could be memorials for the dead. *Kokeshi* artisans in Aomori, especially those in Kuroishi City where the group photo appears to have been taken, were not consulted by Booth, and most remained unaware that a connection had been made between *kokeshi*, Bride dolls, and remembrances for the dead (Related to me in personal conversation with Hirai and *kokeshi* artisans in Kuroishi City: 2009). Appearing much later than other *kokeshi* strains, *tsugaru kokeshi* were first made as children’s toys and then as souvenirs in relation to the *Nebuta* festival<sup>78</sup> and hot spring tourism. It should be noted that the group photo of the Hasegawas’ dolls on the webpage also contains wooden toys, tea caddies, and a wooden container or sugar bowl in the shape of a *kokeshi* head complete with cute rosy cheeks. It is not unusual for *kokeshi* artisans to express their wood turning skills by creating bowls, containers, toys, and popular figures like *Daruma* and *Jizō* for customers.<sup>79</sup> Not only is the label “Dolls for the Dead” insulting to the *kokeshi kōjin* who created these *kokeshi*, but it falsely depicts the items in the photo with remembrances for the dead, when in reality it is a photo of the artistic breadth of the Hasegawa family.

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<sup>78</sup> In Aomori Prefecture, *nebuta* or *neputa* are large floats supporting paper-covered bamboo frames in the likeness of legendary and mythical figures (Walthall 1984: 386). The *Nebuta* Festival takes place in approximately thirty villages and cities across Aomori in early August.

<sup>79</sup> *Daruma* and *Jizō* are popular figures in Japan. *Daruma* is associated with wish fulfillment and dedication to a task, and *Jizō* with protection of travelers, expectant mothers, and children. Along with their spiritual benefits, both of these figures can be cutified, encouraging some *kokeshi* makers to create miniature versions of both deities as strap decorations for cell phones and key chains. Some makers allow the customer to request that their name or the name of a recipient be written on the figure. These strap decorations act as *omamori* (a charm to provide spiritual aid) for the owner and are not created in connection to *mizuko kuyō*. The uses of *Daruma* and *Jizō* overlap somewhat in that they are both linked to the protection of children, as one early use of *Daruma* was to protect children from illness, especially smallpox, and it currently can serve as an *omamori* to ease the pain of childbirth (McFarland 1987:62-63).

#### 4.5 KOKESHI AND MIZUKO KUYŌ AS A SHINTŌ PRACTICE

The practice of *mizuko kuyō* being more closely associated with Buddhist practices than Shintō may indicate why the *kokeshi* has not been included in the ritual with any regularity. *Kokeshi* festivals focus on Shintō shrines, celebrating the spirit of the *kokeshi* (wood), the woodturning profession, and those credited with bringing lathe technology to the Tōhoku region. Hardacre (1997), while exploring *mizuko kuyō* in Shintō practices, states that while Buddhist practices of *mizuko kuyō* focus on mourning the loss of a child, shrines must maintain purity so they refrain from any observances connected with death or blood. At the Kibitsu Shrine, located in Okayama (Southern Honshū), the *chigo* (divine child),<sup>80</sup> associated with purity and divinity, has been used in substitution for *mizuko*'s association with abortion (Hardacre 1997: 238-239). The Kibitsu Shrine offers a *chigo* kit containing a small unpainted *kokeshi* on which clients can draw the face and clothing style of their choice, after which it is prayed over by a priest and then deposited in an above-ground chamber under the *chigo* shrine (Hardacre 1997: 238-239).

Hardacre, in her description of *kokeshi*, carefully avoids making any connection with child death, offering only a description of the doll as being a folk toy of Northern Japan with no movable limbs, representing a child in a *kimono* (1997: 239). While she does not supply a photo of the little *kokeshi* figures used in the *chigo* kit, other unpainted *kokeshi*-like figures in disassociation with *mizuko kuyō*, child remembrance, and even *Jizō* have been used at shrines as offering to ensure a good match in love and marriage. In Matsushima (Miyagi Prefecture), at the *Entsuin* (円通院), a garden compound containing the mausoleum for Date Mitsumune, as well as

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<sup>80</sup>The *chigo* is a prepubescent child of either sex who acts as the receptacle or embodiment of the *kami*'s presence during festivals (Hardacre 1997: 238-239).

other designated cultural properties, you can purchase, for 500 yen, a little *kokeshi* at the *Emusubi Kannon* (絵結び 観音) shrine right inside the *Entsuin* gate. As part of the main shrine, there is a dragon representing a male element and a *Kannon Bosatsu* (Goddess of Mercy) statue riding on this dragon representing a female element linking the shrine's purpose to finding a marriage partner in life. On the *kokeshi* available for purchase, one is instructed to write one's own name on the back and a possible wish or request on the front. This practice was created around 1985, according to the gate keeper, as a way to earn extra income and encourage younger people to see the *Entsuin*. It was only after reading the 2009 *Tabimo* travel guide for Sendai, Matsushima, and Hiraizumi, that I saw a map and layout of what was contained within the garden in Matsushima, an area that I had walked by many times before. In the layout page for the *Entsuin* there is a photo of the *kokeshi* and instructions for how to put a name on it (2009: 46). After visiting, I found that many *kokeshi* placed near the shrine contain no actual requests, only a heart drawn on the center of the *kokeshi's* front, indicating a wish for a good match in marriage.

The *Emusubi* Shrine within the Kyoto Jinushi Shrine (京都地主神社) offers a *Tanabata*<sup>81</sup> *Kokeshi* Festival on July 7<sup>th</sup> where you may purchase or order from the shrine's web page one or more paper *kokeshi* couples on which you write your name, a potential lover's name, or general wishes for marriage. The use of *kokeshi* at both shrines, in this case for singles seeking marriage, further illustrates how the *kokeshi* is popularly utilized apart from *mizuko kuyō*.

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<sup>81</sup> The *Tanabata* Festival, also known as the Star Festival, celebrates the legend of the romantic reunion of two stars, Altair the ox herd boy and Vega the weaving goddess, who were permitted to cross the Milky Way once a year to meet on July 7th (Oumi 2007: 2).

#### 4.6 KOKESHI AND FAMINE

There is an underlying assumption that *kokeshi* originated in Tōhoku as memorials for children because the region was so severely stressed by both the Tenmei (1783-87) and the Tenpō (1833-37) famines, resulting in the purported widespread practice of infanticide and abortion. Tōhoku is known for its heavy snowfall and long winters, the image of this snowy landscape magnifying the effect of harsh living conditions, and the association that a doll was created in remembrance of so many children who fell to the practice of infanticide. It was estimated by the Tokugawa Confucianist Sato Nobuhiro (1779-1850) that in the early nineteenth century, 60,000 to 70,000 infants were “returned” in Mutsu and Dewa Provinces,<sup>82</sup> two areas where the growing season is short and families tended to be exceedingly poor (Law 1997). *Kokeshi* could contain the “spiritual essence of the dead”, serving as honorary remembrances (Saint-Gilles 1998: 21) or objects kept in the home to appease spirits of the dead (Baten 1992: 29 & 1986: 43).

These interpretations, when coupled with the false assumption that *kokeshi* are all representations of little girls, allows authors to make the leap from memorial for all dead, to *kokeshi* being memorials for little girls killed during times of famine, or as remembrances of girls who had to leave home during times of economic hardship (Baten 2000: 55 & 1986: 43; and Gerbert 2001: 85). These authors claim that girls were less desirable than boys during times of famine, and needed to be memorialized within the home after they had been killed or sold into brothels (Baten 2000: 55 & 1992: 29; and Gerbert 2001: 85). Baten states that the most plausible theory for the creation of *kokeshi* was that it was a “souvenir” of a child sold into servitude, or

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<sup>82</sup> Mutsu Province is now Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures. Dewa Province is now Akita and Yamagata Prefecture.

the child's doll kept in the house as a remembrance or prayer for forgiveness (1986: 44). She references the life of the heroine in Yasunari Kawabata's 1956 work of fiction, *Snow Country*, as evidence that a young girl would sometimes voluntarily sell herself to ease her family's poverty, help someone she felt indebted to, or pay the doctor's bill for a loved one who was ill (1986: 44).

Jannetta cautions against assigning a major role to abortion and infanticide in a population that already had a high infant and child mortality rate (1992: 442). Death records from the Ogen-ji Temple in the Hida Region (Gifu Prefecture in Central Honshū) revealed that the number of deaths of children below the age of five was greater in 1823, 1826, and 1845, than during the 1837 famine because of smallpox epidemics in both 1823 and 1845, and a dysentery epidemic in 1826, that took the greatest toll among children ages 0 to 4 (Jannetta 1992: 433). Cornell (1996) concludes that for the Edo period, low birth rates among the rural populations in Japan were not due to the practice of infanticide or what she likes to term "Infant Homicide", but cultural practices of extended breast feeding, reducing fertility rates, and long-term separation of spouses due to seasonal migration of husbands for work (46). Hirai, who recently published a work on the false connection between *kokeshi* and "filicide", argues against the connection of famine in Tōhoku and early *kokeshi* use, as the earliest record for *kokeshi* production (1811)<sup>83</sup> is well after the Tenmei famine, the first of two famines credited with causing the greatest amount of suffering in northeastern Japan. The Tenpō famine, occurring fifty years after the Tenmei famine, also caused widespread crop failure in the Tōhoku region. It is very unlikely that the *kokeshi* would have been created as memorials for lost children during the interim between

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<sup>83</sup> The earliest record of *kokeshi* production comes from the discovery of the Iwamatsu Naosuke Document (岩松 直助文書) by Takahashi (1983) in which it confirms Sakunami (作並) near Sendai City as the earliest location for *kokeshi* production.

famines. During the more recent 1934 crop failures in the Tōhoku region, children were supported through food drives. The events of crop failure and suffering among populations in Tōhoku during times of famine were greatly exaggerated by the media to increase readership interest. One document from Narugo states that although life was difficult, townspeople were able to find various engineering jobs to support themselves, and undernourished children were given food at the local elementary school through a food drive (Hirai 2008 & 2009). The more sensationalist press, though, has cemented Tōhoku in the minds of its readership as the only area to truly suffer population loss during any famine in Japan. Tōhoku is synonymous with famine, while, in reality, famine affected all regions of Japan (Hirai 2008 & 2009).

#### **4.7 MATSUNAGA: *KOKESHI* MYTH MAKING**

Thus far I have only encountered one researcher who claims to have heard firsthand from a *kokeshi* artisan that *kokeshi* were used as memorials for children. Jolivet states that, “A *kokeshi* craftsman of the Tōhoku region informed me that in the past, parents painted a *kokeshi* in memory of each ‘erased’ child, and also pointed out that traditional *kokeshi* dolls always represented girls: the majority victims of the practice” (Jolivet 2000: 91). When asked directly, Dr. Jolivet did not seem to remember this exchange, instead stating that a student of hers from the Tōhoku region acknowledged that everyone knows that *kokeshi* originally were used as memorials for children. Jolivet further responded in her email to me that during preparation for a presentation about her research on Japanese puppetry, she found many photos of *kokeshi*, but was not able to find out their “secret” meaning. She referred me to one web page on which it

stated in Japanese that Matsunaga Goichi, a famous Japanese poet, may be the first published source for *kokeshi* being associated with infanticide (<http://www.weblio.jp/content/kokeshi>).

Further investigation revealed that Matsunaga is the first published source for many if not all misperceptions about *kokeshi*. In 1962, Matsunaga published “*Kokeshi Genzō*” (“*Kokeshi Fantasy*”) as a backlash against what he saw as the “blind” love of *kokeshi* by collectors. After buying the book *Kokeshi Bi to Keifu* (*Kokeshi Beauty and Lineage*), Matsunaga criticizes the collecting philosophy outlined in the book as being akin to prostitution or stock buying, as one is encouraged to collect as many *kokeshi* as possible. Later the same day that he bought the book, Matsunaga begins to theorize through the night in his Yajirō hotel what *kokeshi* really mean. He proposes the following theories all in the same short text: 1) *kokeshi* means *ko-keshi* (child erase); 2) *kokeshi* is the archetype of Chinese Yin and Yang as the *kokeshi* body is “*kiboko*” which he interprets as a wooden boy, and the face painted on this wooden boy body is a female face; 3) the male/female overlap suggests the *kokeshi* was a phallus; 4) he interprets it as *hoko* (female doll form) with the *kanji* reading of *hoko* (矛 - a pike or sharp instrument), the woman using the *kokeshi* to abort a fetus because of adultery or to reduce mouths to feed; 5) Children’s toy; and 6) Sex toy. Matsunaga, focusing on *mabiki*, then constructs a story of a woman who has just aborted her child. The mother asking for forgiveness for aborting her child she makes a *kokeshi* with the help of her husband. “The figures of a crouching beast mothers who were offering prayers at the stone tower comes to mind. Namukanzeon Bōsatsu, please forgive this sin, please let me have the spirit of the fetus that disappeared in the night dirty again in this womb . . . they might have prayed. I keep hearing this voice “*kiboko*” that is stained red with unclear blood. “*Kiboko*” with no face that bears the whole sin. It was the sinful mother who knows the most” (Matsunaga 1972: 370-371). To compensate or make up for their sin, the

couple must make a *kiboko* to decorate the shelf with. “The mother cries, ‘Father please draw the cute face.’ The husband who made her do “mabiki” silently must be blamed too. The husband without a word accepts his wife’s request and with a “hatsubiki rokuro” creates “kiboko” with all their hearts and decides it is a female, although they wouldn’t know the gender of the baby, and paint a pretty face and put on flowers and such as if she is wearing a red cloth. On such a night, with wetness of tears on the cheek, the wife puts her arm around the husband’s waist and whispers, “please hold me still like this.” (Matsunaga 1972: 371-372).



The *kokeshi*'s connection to female infanticide is proved to Matsunaga's satisfaction with the inclusion of what he claims to be a lullaby directly from the Tōhoku area.

*mukai no yama kara mesun tori ton de kita*

From the mountain over there, the female bird flew over

*mesun tori yatsu no iu koto nya*

According to what the female bird said

*neko no hara ni ko ga aru*

There is a child in the cat's stomach

*otoko nara tasukeru*

If it is a male we will save him

*onna nara butsubuse*

If it is a female crush her

*na wa nanto tsuke sōrō*

What shall we name it

*Hachimantarō to tsuke sōrō*

We shall name it Hachimantarō

In Matsunaga Goichi 1972: 372 (My translation)

Matsunaga states that this song is a lullaby that tells the story of *mabiki* in the Tōhoku area, and, knowing that female children were killed, it is possible to solve the mystery of why all *kokeshi* have a female shape. He continues to envision a couple who has killed their female child

and made a “kiboko” in remembrance and recalls the Tenmei famine in which he surmises many children must have been lost. In the end, Matsunaga insists that collectors of *kokeshi* or people who love them are blind to their true meaning and lack the objectivity of someone like himself who hates them (Matsunaga 1972: 374).

Hirai (2009) critiques each of Matsunaga’s statements in turn, as I would, starting first with the obvious observation that Matsunaga does not actually reference anyone else in his text, uses vague language when making his proclamations, does not quote from any existing data on *kokeshi* research, and makes banal and opinionated claims about the use of *kokeshi*. In my opinion, it is highly improbable that the *kokeshi* was created simultaneously as a child’s toy, sex toy, and abortion tool. While Matsunaga very much voices his anger against *Kokeshi Bi to Keifu*, he fails to acknowledge or mention any prior publications, or Amae Tomiya’s much earlier pioneer publication on the topic. It is also extremely odd to make the claim that one can be more objective about a topic when one hates it, as opposed to one who loves it. The melodramatic vision that Matsunaga creates with his “purple prose”, especially the couple turning the *kokeshi* together on a *hatsubiki rokuro* (two person pull lathe), incites the most negative sentiment possible.

Before claiming that Matsunaga was the first to mention in print *ko-keshi*, Hirai looked at the oldest publication on Tōhoku area folklore, the *Tōno Monogatari* (Tales of Tono), the authoritative text written by Yanagita Kunio in 1912, for mention of *kokeshi* and infanticide/filicide practices. Hirai found that no words associated with *kokeshi* or wooden dolls were used in the *Tōno Monogatari*. The only reference to a doll in this volume was the *wara ningyō*, a straw doll used to invoke a curse similarly to voodoo dolls, and the only reference to killing a human was the tradition of *ubuste*, the carrying of the elderly to the mountains to die,

but there was no mention of *kogoroshi* (child killing). Matsunaga's claim that the lullaby was from the Michinoku area specifically is also false, as Hirai found that Matsunaga had published it previously in "*Nihon Komori Uta*" (*Japanese Babysitter Songs*) in 1964 as a lullaby from Gunma, Iwate, and Ibaraki, not just from the Michinoku region (Hirai 2010: 82). As Matsunaga claims to be a scholar of lullabies, Hirai also searched his other works for mention of *kokeshi* or *ko-keshi*, but there is no use of these two words. In one volume called "*Komori Uta no Jinsei*" ("The Life of the Babysitter Song"), there is a section called "*Tōhoku Kikin no Taiken*" ("An Experience of the Tōhoku Famine") about selling daughters, but there is no mention of *mabiki* or *ko-keshi*. Matsunaga's suppositions are very much the product of his imagination, and not actual research. While he proposes the various origins of the *kokeshi*, these same reasons have been assumed by other authors, as stated in the above text. They are similar arguments not because they are based on fact, but easily apparent speculations.

#### **4.8 KOKESHI KŌJIN: LATHE WORK AND PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH KOKESHI**

It is possible for the voices and history of those who actually make *kokeshi* to be overlooked when faced with a constant, more salacious telling of the perceived uses and meanings of *kokeshi*. As illustrated in the examples throughout this chapter, it is not that certain speculations are picked up by one source at a time, but that with each successive interpretation, the same speculations are repeatedly voiced. The *kokeshi* has become synonymous with child death, and therefore there is no need to validate what is supposedly a culturally-based fact. For *kokeshi*

*kōjin*, there is a constant battle against this banal acceptance of a misnomer. *Kokeshi kōjin* conveyed to me two general categories for personal *kokeshi* meanings: (1) A description of *kokeshi* as a wooden doll or very specifically a doll with a wooden body (*ki no ningyō*, *chiboko*, *kokeshi no boko*, *ki no katachi no kodomo*) linking it to how the doll is actually made, and (2) how each strain of *kokeshi* represents the feeling, atmosphere, and people of the place in which it was made.

Unlike the treatment in more popular texts, *kokeshi* researchers in Japan and *kokeshi kōjin* begin their discussions of *kokeshi* with the history of the lathe and the eventual creation of *kokeshi* using the same skills needed to make other lathe-turned products. The lathe was transmitted to Japan via China around the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries (years 400 to 499 and 500 to 599) (Takahashi 2003: 7) <sup>84</sup> and perfected during the Heian period between the years 844 to 891 (Hirai 2000: 3). *Kokeshi kōjin*, celebrating the technical achievement of lathe work and the specialness of their craft, trace the transmission of lathe technology to Prince Koretaka Shinō (844 to 897), who is credited with transmitting lathe skills and technology to the Tōhoku region, and certifying wood working as a profession. Prince Koretaka was in line to succeed the throne from his father, Emperor Montoku, but Fujiwara no Yoshifusa (804 to 872), one of the first great regents of the Fujiwara clan, was able to become *de facto* ruler after getting his young grandson promoted to rank of emperor. Failing in his attempt to regain control of the throne, and facing violent repercussions, Prince Koretaka fled from the then-capital city of Kyoto to Ogura Village, part of what is now Shiga Prefecture located between Eastern and Western Hōnshū). Several theories emerge about how Prince Koretaka became related to people there, and even more specifically to

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<sup>84</sup> During the Nara period (646 to 794) the practice of sending representatives to China called *kentoshi* (*ken* = send and *to* = China) to gather technological skills was prevalent. Skills such as pottery and wood turning were later introduced to areas like Kyoto and further developed by the Japanese.

the Ogura family, who claim Prince Koretaka as their ancestor. Prince Koretaka is credited with teaching lathe skills to woodsmen in the area, and elevating and certifying the profession of *kijishi* or *kijiya* (wood turner)<sup>85</sup> to a profession in Japan. The Ogura family is still famous for producing Yamanaka lacquer-ware in Shiga Prefecture.

How lathe technology spread to northern Hōnshu can also be traced through the Ogura family. Amae (1928) recounts the story of Tomita Hiroshiga who, while visiting a village in Kinjyama (Fukushima Prefecture) in 1925, found an old document of the Ogura family pedigree. According to the document, in the 18<sup>th</sup> year Tenshō (1590), Mitsumasa, the 32<sup>nd</sup> descendant of the Ogura family, came to Aizu with Ujisato Gamo (famous samurai and vassal of Toyotomi who eventually lost to Tokugawa), while in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of Tenshō (1578), Mitsunaga, the 41<sup>st</sup> descendant of the Ogura family, came to live in Kinjyama (Sandai Village).<sup>86</sup> The main product of this village for the last 140 years of this period was *Aizu nuri* (Aizu lacquer-ware) for which the Ogura family supplied the wooden bases until about 1915. This area remained fairly isolated for 300 years, as it was said the Ogura family did not like to out-marry as they felt they were descended from royalty, claiming Koretaka as they did for their ancestor (Amae 1928: 2).

Lacquer-ware artisans, *kijishi*, as well as *kokeshi kōjin*, owe their professions to the lathe, and claim ancestor-ship with Prince Koretaka. As Prince Koretaka has been elevated to the god of wooden containers, this kinship assures the success of wood turning professions. One *kokeshi kōjin* from Fukushima told me that *kokeshi* production first started there because knowledge of lathe technology was first transmitted from Ogura Village to Fukushima by Prince Koretaka.

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<sup>85</sup> Those who turn wood in Japan using a lathe can be called *kijishi* (bare wood person), *kijiya* (bare wood), or *rokuroshi* (lathe person). These terms refer to those who turn everyday household items on the lathe, like wooden bowls or the bare wooden bases for products like lacquer-ware.

<sup>86</sup> The Tenshō era is also known as the Momoyama period starting in July 1573 and ending in December 1592.

This statement says more about regional pride in *kokeshi* production and the significance of lathe technology than actual accuracy of where *kokeshi* were first produced. Amae, similarly, in his explanation of how the wood turning industry came to Japan and the Tōhoku region, retells the story of *Kokichi Ogura: Lord of Hōki -- Founder of the Wooden Factory: The Legend of Prince Koretaka*, found in an old document held by Daijiro Saitō, a *kijishi* in Tsuchiyu (Fukushima Prefecture). This document states that Prince Koretaka hated to live in this world and went to the East, riding a white horse, on March 5<sup>th</sup> in the 17<sup>th</sup> Age of Jōgan (875). After praying for three days in Kishimoto, Aichi-gun (Aichi Prefecture), he traveled up the river where they found a strange stone, and Prince Koretaka directed his vassal to ask the name of this land. A man said, “This place is called the land of Ogura”. This document further draws a connection between Prince Koretaka in Shiga Prefecture and the Ogura family, whose descendants later settled in the Fukushima area to continue wood turning.

Prince Koretaka is honored throughout all of the *kokeshi*-producing regions in shrines dedicated to him. In Narugo (Miyagi Prefecture), while talking with several artisans, I was asked which male *kōjin* I thought was the handsomest. Being impartial (and politic), I stated that all *kokeshi kōjin* are equally attractive. The artisans replied that they had chosen one in particular to play the role of Prince Koretaka in the *kokeshi* parade during the *kokeshi* festival because he was deemed the most handsome and, therefore, the best representative to play the honored Prince. While the *kokeshi* parade is less elaborate today, on the second day of their *kokeshi* festival each *kokeshi kōjin* dedicates a *kokeshi* to the *Onsen Jinjya* (Hot Spring Shrine) and prayers are given in thanks for the continued success of the *kokeshi* profession and for the region as a whole.

Yajirō, near Shiroishi City in Miyagi Prefecture, has one of the more visual displays dedicated to the appreciation of *kokeshi*, the honoring of Prince Koretaka, and the lathe. The

information board in front of the current *kokeshi* shrine states that in 1959, the Onomiya Koretaka Shinō Shrine (小野宮喬親王神社) was erected in Southern Yajirō as a place to worship Prince Koretaka as the god of wood turning after receiving from the main shrine in Shiga Prefecture part of his remains. The unofficial but popular name for this shrine is the *Kokeshi Jinjya* (*Kokeshi Shrine*). In the same year as the shrine construction, the first All Japan *Kokeshi* Contest was held in Shiroishi City in commemoration of the marriage of the then-Emperor, His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince. A new shrine was erected in the Shiroishi City Yajirō *Kokeshi* Village (*Shiroishi Shi Yajirō Kokeshi Mura*) in 2003.<sup>87</sup> This new shrine was built to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Shiroishi City Yajirō *Kokeshi* Village with donations from local and *kokeshi* fans from all over Japan (Information board in front of current shrine, The Yajirō *Kokeshi* Guild). While the Shiroishi City erected and owns the *kokeshi* museum located in the village, *kokeshi kōjin*, as a point of pride, very adamantly told me that they own the *Kokeshi Shrine* collectively. There was an attempt to move the old shrine to the new location, but because of its age they could not. While the old shrine is not available for comparison, the roof line of the current *Kokeshi Shrine* supports three *kokeshi* representing the three main Yajirō *kokeshi*-producing families: Satō, Nīyama, and Ogura (佐藤, 新山, and 小倉). Starting in 1967, on every January 2<sup>nd</sup>, the first *kokeshi* of the year is created by an honored Yajirō *kokeshi kōjin*.

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<sup>87</sup> Information was translated by the author from the All Japan *Kokeshi* Concourse 50th anniversary catalogue (2009: 66).

This event is called the “first pull” (*hatsubiki* - 初挽き) representing the first pull on the lathe to make the *kokeshi*. Before the electric-powered lathe, a prevalent form of lathe in this region was the two-person lathe (*ni nin hiki rokuro* - 二人挽きろくろ) which required two people, one to work the wood and the other to pull a cord back and forth to move the turning mechanism of the lathe.

A third location for the worship of Prince Koretaka and *kokeshi*, mentioned previously, is the *Kokeshi Shrine* in Yamadera (Yamagata Prefecture). At the shrine, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April, worship is held and, in the surrounding garden, the *Haiku Society* of Yamagata sometimes visits and creates poetry. As part of the shrine complex, there is a stone found in Hirutani (Shiga Prefecture) which has a story related to Prince Koretaka. On one of the surrounding stone monuments (now a bit faded with weather erosion) there is a poem by Ishiyama Sanshiro (Yamadera *kōjin*), “*Te mo ashi mo yoko mo nai kokeshi ka na*” (No hands, no legs, and no desires / earthly desires). On a second stone there is a *haiku* by Saitō Genkichi titled “*Mamago tomo akite kokeshi to soine kana*”. Saitō’s granddaughter is tired of playing house, and now she is getting tired and falls asleep with a *kokeshi*. When he finds his granddaughter asleep with the *kokeshi*, he also finds many playthings associated with playing house scattered in the room, so he imagines that she must have been playing this. The third stone was donated by Tsuyuki Kiyoshi, a *kijishi*, who lived in Odawara in Kanagawa (Kanagawa Prefecture).

A large part of becoming a *kokeshi kōjin* is the transmission of lathe skills and techniques needed to produce the different body forms of *kokeshi*. Apprentices first practice their craft by preparing the wood prior to placement on the lathe by cutting it into precise pieces or pucks. Through this process they learn the hardness of each type of wood, how the wood must be aged, and the importance of even wood grain to add stability to form and balance when turning on the



lathe. To fully learn how to turn dolls that are balanced in shape and wood thickness, apprentices practice up to a year making spinning tops (*koma*), *daruma* (which has a more simple, but still balanced shape needed to make the *kokeshi*), and key chain straps. At a *kokeshi* competition, I saw the son of one *kokeshi kōjin* being taught by another *kōjin* how to make a spinning top. An observing collector was given the finished top, and exclaimed to the child's mother, also a *kokeshi kōjin*, that she wanted to keep it as the boy might be a famous artisan someday. The mother reacted with surprise as it had been the first time for her son to make a finished piece on the lathe and she was disappointed that it had not gone to her, as his mother, instead. Apprentice *kokeshi kōjin* will also seek out teachers who exhibit a high skill in wood working to further improve their craft. One of the artisans who saw himself as *kijishi* first and *kokeshi kōjin* second, said that he had trained the sons of several other *kokeshi kōjin*, as their fathers were too old to take on the task at the time. Another important skill related to me was the making of one's own woodworking tools. The tools used in lathe turning as well as the more specific tools needed to turn *kokeshi* cannot be bought at a shop, and must be made several times a year. As with wood working skills, apprentice *kokeshi kōjin* occasionally seek out other *kokeshi kōjin* to teach them the skills of tool making.

Deeply important to *kokeshi kōjin*, and much overlooked by speculation about the *kokeshi*'s meaning, is the maintenance of *kokeshi* design and style within each generation of a particular family, passed on through the skills expressed above. On a visit to Narugo, after getting to know a *kokeshi kōjin*, I watched as he selected several dolls and told me, "This is my Grandfather's doll, this is my Grandmother's doll, this is my Father's doll, this is my Mother's doll, and these are my dolls." Maintenance of the design of a particular strain and a family's particular design within that strain is emphasized, as one artisan stated when I asked him the

meaning of *kokeshi*, “[It is the] *kokeshi* of the family” (*kanai no kokeshi* - 家内 のこけし). *Kokeshi* are also perceived as the achievements and life history for families, one *kokeshi kōjin* in Fukushima stating, “*Kokeshi* means to me my home, my family. My mother was called “*kokeshichan*” when she was a child. It is part of my life”. Connections with family run deeper than just an association with one specific type of *kokeshi*, as artisans often see their own children in the faces of the dolls they make, and many intentionally model dolls to reflect their own children’s faces. One *kokeshi kōjin*, the mother of several children, commented to me, “[M]y children are Yajirō children, so I try to make *kokeshi* like them.” This same artisan related in her *kokeshi* guide biography that each *kokeshi* she makes is made with care and affection as they look like her children, so, as she makes them, they are imbued with motherly love (Translated from Kamei *kokeshi* guide book, 2003).



**Figure 34. *Ejiko Kokeshi*, Top Row from Left to Right: Kamata Takashi (Yajirō Strain), Satō Masahiro (Tōgatta Strain), and Hasegawa Tatsuo (Tsugaru Strain). Front Row from Left to Right: Kakizawa Koretaka (Narugo Strain), Onodera Masanori (Kijiyama Strain), and Satō Ryōko (Tōgatta Strain). Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

While there is a preoccupation with child death in association with *kokeshi*, *kokeshi kōjin* have always connected *kokeshi* with children in positive ways, as evidenced in previous narratives. The current flat-bottomed shape of most *kokeshi* is a more recent development for collectors, enabling the *kokeshi* to stand up on shelves for display. Early *kokeshi* had very narrow bodies that did not allow them to stand, as they were intended only for a child to hold them in their arms.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> The *Sakunami* strain of *kokeshi* still retains its very narrow body. In museums, the dolls are often displayed in a reclining position so they do not topple over. One main complaint by collectors, and a prominent reason stated by those who did not wish to own *kokeshi*, is the doll's tendency, due to its relatively large head in relation to its narrow body, to topple over in earthquakes, a frequent event in Japan. During *kokeshi* festivals, occasionally the sound of clunking *kokeshi* can be heard as one is accidentally tipped over by a hand, sending any surrounding *kokeshi* down like dominos around it.

Several *kokeshi* forms such as the *ejiko kokeshi* represent babies placed in a *wara* (a round basket) to keep them safe in the fields while their parents farmed, and baby sitter *kokeshi* (*komori kokeshi* - 子守り こけし) a child on the back of the baby sitter wrapped in a blanket. (Figures 34 and 35) Both of these forms not only honor childcare practices in the region, but child protection as well.



**Figure 35. *Komori Kokeshi* from Left to Right: Niyama Keimi (Yajirō Strain), Inoue Harumi (Yajirō Strain), and Umeki Naomi (Zaō Strain).  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

As each strain of *kokeshi* is linked to a particular region within Tōhoku, it has come to represent the atmosphere and people of Tōhoku and the districts therein. *Kokeshi kōjin* expressed these connections generally as *kokeshi* being uniquely Tōhoku *mingeihin* (Tōhoku folk art) or more specifically, as one maker in Yajirō said, “When people look at my *kokeshi* dolls they will be reminded of the Yajirō town. I think people will sigh when they see my *kokeshi* [It is implied that they will sigh because they remember the peacefulness of Yajirō town after they return home]” (Kamei *kokeshi* guide book, 2003).

There are several non-Japanese collectors who have worked against the supposed connections between *kokeshi* and child death. Two well-recognized authors and collectors in the *kokeshi*-collecting world, Funk (2003) and Stern (2003), have emphasized in their works the connection *kokeshi* have with skilled wood working, children’s toys and hot spring culture. Funk, while devoting significant attention to identifying the various strains of *kokeshi*, also concentrates on how *kokeshi kōjin* uniquely create *kokeshi* from start to finish, first with the cutting and aging of wood, and then later carving and painting the *kokeshi*. Despite the efforts of these authors and others, there is still an undercurrent of possibility that the *kokeshi* in the past was used for something more dubious than just a toy. English texts in particular perpetuate an air of mystery around the *kokeshi*’s origins by stating in somewhat contradictory terms that while there have been more than a dozen books written about *kokeshi*, the etymology of the word *kokeshi* is unknown (Yamada 1955: 75), or that while *kokeshi* are first and foremost a product of their environment, specifically the cold harsh regions of Tōhoku, the exact chronology of *kokeshi* development is unknown (Pate 2008: 168). These continued suppositions prompted Narugo, an area supporting the largest population of *kokeshi kōjin*, in an attempt to educate the general Japanese public, to invite both Dr. Hirai and Dr. Takahashi to lecture about the meaning of

*kokeshi* and history of the *kokeshi* name. There was a positive reception by both the public and *kokeshi* *kōjin* after this lecture series, but, among the non-collecting population within Japan, meaning based on the *ateji* of *kokeshi* still persists. One day, the head of a *kokeshi* section of a local museum offered me a ride home as it was getting late in the day, and, on the way, we picked up her children from daycare. When I was introduced to the daycare director as a *kokeshi* researcher, the woman commented that she thought that the doll was connected to child death (*kodomo wo kesu*). My friend replied that this meaning of *kesu* was connected to detective stories. While the woman seemed embarrassed by this comment, it was clear that her preconceived notion of the meaning of *kokeshi* would take more than just one mention of an alternative positive interpretation to change her understanding. This false etymology may continue to exist within and outside of Japan as authors embrace both speculative and documented meanings for *kokeshi*, but the continuing education and correction of misperceptions will help place the negative connotations of *kokeshi* firmly in the past.

## 5.0 *KOKESHI*: MEANING AND INTERPRETATION

The Tōhoku region serves as an ultimate traditional Japanese space and the theoretical *furusato* (hometown) for many Japanese. As *kokeshi* are one of the more visible folk art forms produced in and originating from this area, their image is symbolic of several themes within Japanese tradition, and are perceived as traditional signifier for the Tōhoku region and Japan as a whole. A collector of modern *kokeshi* stated most emphatically to me that, “*kokeshi* is part of our culture and we need to send our culture to the next generation. It is part of our wooden culture and Japanese identity.” In the same vein, the *kokeshi*’s features and perceived qualities act as metaphors for Tōhoku as each strain simultaneously represents the locally unique, and the regionally collective, personalities of the Tōhoku people. This chapter explores the prevailing discourses of tradition and the encompassing impressions of *furusato* and regional love found in descriptive information about and creative works featuring *kokeshi*. In contrast with those creative works found in Chapter Four, which emphasized *kokeshi* as being memorials for children, the creative works here support three primary overlapping themes: 1) *kokeshi* as the ultimate embodiment of tradition, and their connections to the female form, 2) *kokeshi* personified with the “spiritual climate” of Tōhoku and its people, and 3) *kokeshi* allied with a traditional space and the longing for a *furusato* by those who have left it behind.

## 5.1 *KOKESHI*, WOMEN, AND *KOKESHI*-WOMEN: KEEPERS OF TRADITION



**Figure 36. Yajirō *Kokeshi* with Nude.**  
**Issued by Isei *Kokeshi* Association (1977). Photograph by Jennifer McDowell**

Doll, my primitive pet,  
I look into your painted face  
With its nose slim as a flower stalk,  
Its mouth neat as a bud  
Of a red-tipped daisy,  
And wonder what your eyes,



Those dark pools under your gently-sweeping lids,  
See in my pale blue gaze  
The red flowers, freshly painted by a swift  
And clever hand, the brush of Spring,  
Adorn your body's naked bough  
Like a new kimono, perfectly fitting.  
—Doll, my primitive pet,  
I stroke the shining fringe of your hair,  
And lay my hand among your flowers  
To find the wood's heart, their secret festival.

To Harue of Sendai, who painted it for me

“*Kokeshi Kokeshi*” James Kirkup 1962

Although *kokeshi* do not all have female forms, artistic imaginings have forced supposed female emotions and characteristics onto the *kokeshi*. This is supported by the perception that women are somehow closer to nature and tradition as is the *kokeshi*. As part of Yanagi Sōetsu's theory of *mingei*, he “ . . . espoused an approach to beauty and (non)-creativity which, in *chokkan* [perception, direct], was anti-intellectual and anti-verbal, it can be argued that his *mingei* philosophy also supported a ‘feminine’ aesthetic, since it is women who are usually seen to be ‘emotional’, ‘non-verbal’, ‘intuitive’ and so on” (Moeran 1997: 214). These same sexist

qualifiers have already been seen in several creative works on *kokeshi* as it is considered to be a sweet, silent, wooden doll. *Ofukuro-san*, a colloquial word used by Japanese literally meaning “bag lady” in reference to mothers and the protective “wrapping” qualities of their love (Hendry 1993: 24 and Robertson 1995: 98) is linked with the perceptions that females are repositories of “traditional” values of *furusato-zukuri* programs (Robertson 1995: 98). In Japan, women are crowned Miss *Furusato* and are both custodians of the landscape and travel companions on packaged tours of *Furusato* Japan (Robertson 1995: 98). In Narugo, at each *kokeshi* festival officials crown two Miss *Kokeshi*. Young women in their early 20s must compete for their titles by memorizing *kokeshi* facts, and, if chosen, must learn the *kokeshi* dance featured in the nighttime festivities, give a speech, and attend all events of the festival including painting their own *kokeshi*. Like the actual (as opposed to honorary) villagers of *furusato-mura*, the Miss *Furusato* women are both custodians of the landscape of nostalgia and travel companions on a packaged tour of *Furusato* Japan (Robertson 1995: 99).

Just as folk art captures the proper feminine aesthetic, women have also been implicated in traditional landscapes. Early advertisements of the Canadian Rockies helped to create an association between the mountains and a particular version of female beauty (Squire 1998: 91). The railway also made extensive use of female imagery to “decorate” and/or “enhance” both wilderness scenery and hotel facilities and attractions (Squire 1998: 91). While women in these advisements were occasionally depicted as active mountaineers, most were female models passively looking at the scenery or posed in provocative swimsuits (Squire 1998: 91). Martinez, who also discusses how women’s bodies are perceived to exist in traditional landscapes, describes the images on travel posters as slim divers starrng off into the distance while their white, wet, see-through clothing clings intimately to their breasts (Martinez 1990: 100). These

images are in great contrast to the actual diving women who wear thick protective wetsuits and are usually middle aged. Often, women are culturally constructed as marginal to the nation state, or residing in the margins within that state. Women working in “traditional” occupations increase the probability of being part but nevertheless apart from the national whole, so much so that entire geographical regions because of their ambiguous status can cast them in a feminine shadow. An apt example of this phenomena is from Probyn’s study of Québec, where outside of the nation is an established primarily francophone male population while the inner discourses of the less established nation continue to be figured in the terms of the vulnerable and female (1999: 55). As Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem propose, the monolithic characterization of woman allows nations to be able to, “. . . transcend modernities and to become a timeless and homogenized entity” (1999: 7). Yano argues that meanings given to spaces have transformed the local into the national, a process that involves the same ambiguity and therefore difference within those locations and the people and objects that reside in them (1999: 158). The recognition of or the exclusion of women and the resulting all in one national female image enhances what Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem discuss as the spectacle of women (1999: 55) and what I would argue the spectacle of perceived womanly objects. Just as women in Tōhoku are imagined as embodying motherly love, exotic sexuality, and tradition, the *kokeshi* is rendered female as well and therefore embodies those same characteristics.

Women who travel to distant landscapes are also involved simultaneously in self-discovery and sexual discovery. “Display is conflated with sightseeing: the sights to be seen become the women themselves, with landscapes reduced to stage settings for dramatized moments of double discovery and recognition by the onlooking male traveler” (Ivy 1995: 40). It

makes sense, then, that any feminine-like product associated with travel, like the *kokeshi*, can also be viewed in a sexual manner. Ideal feminine sexuality imagined in idealized traditional landscapes is not unique to Japan, but in the exploration of feminized objects like *kokeshi*, their expressions and form often described by men echo these idealized traditional female sentiments. In the figure above, while the men at a party assured me that this image and the other three featuring nudes with *kokeshi* were just art, it is very obvious the sexual connection between the *kokeshi* and the women. As *kokeshi* shifted in use from a children's toy to that of a collectable, the male gaze became more focused on the female form of *kokeshi*. Berger in his exploration of women depicted in art, states that they are depicted differently from men not because of a difference in gender, but because the ideal spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him (1972: 64). The male gaze on *kokeshi* is no different as it enhances the male perception of themselves by providing the closeness and intimacy assumed in traditional spaces like Tōhoku.

## 5.2 KOKESHI AS TŌHOKU AND JAPAN

As traditional *kokeshi* were first created in the Tōhoku region, they are perceived to be deeply rooted in the cultural climate of that region (Ano 1992: 3). In a lecture for Japanese language students at Tōhoku University, Ano further describes the *kokeshi* as a doll of “reticence” and “modesty” that never expresses feelings overtly or aggressively, but keeps them hidden, mirroring the non-aggressive character of the people of Tōhoku. As the *kokeshi* was born out of the soil of Tōhoku, it then mirrors the hearts of the people who live there and, when looked at,

the viewer returns to emotions deep inside (Ano 1992: 7). These characteristics contrast with the perceivably more open-hearted, candid, and talkative Japanese people living in the southern areas of Japan (Ano 1992: 8). *Kokeshi kōjin* themselves see their *kokeshi* as being infused with local character. The *Miroku Kai* is described by its Chair, Jinnohara Yukinori, as a group who tries to learn a lesson from past *kokeshi* whose “traditional beauty was cultivated in the *Michinoku* climate and history” (1992: 1). The group is devoted to the “simple-ness” of this art form that symbolizes the Tōhoku climate. “The expression of the *kokeshi* reflects the creator’s life and heart (feelings). It is hoped that as many people as possible will be in touch with *kokeshi*, to be close to, and to experience in the traditional *kokeshi* the inherited layered history and local culture” (Jinnohara 2002: 1). For each *kokeshi* strain explanation in a prominent *kokeshi* artisan guide, Takahashi (2003), concludes with a statement that further enhances the unique regional characteristics with which each strain is imbued: “the *kokeshi* artisans of the *Kijiyama* strain attribute to this doll the expression of a healthy young woman growing up in the countryside . . . for the *Hijiori* strain it is said that this *kokeshi*’s simple form, but strong expression is a reflection of the deep snowy climate in which it is made . . . and for the *Zaō* strain its unique style and use of decorative elements impart to this *kokeshi* a calm feeling and a mild personality” (Takahashi 2003: 12-18).

In a very commercial application of tradition, Hello Kitty, herself an ambassador of sorts for Japanese culture, is on many designed cell phone and key chain straps featuring local specialties found throughout Japan. For her *kyōdo gangu* (folk toy)<sup>89</sup> series, eleven different Daruma, seven *kokeshi*, and five traditional *kokeshi* toys were produced. The explanation for

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<sup>89</sup> *Kyōdo* literally means one’s native province, home or one’s birthplace.

this series stated that *daruma* and *kokeshi* are folk toys with the heavy scent of *furusato* (Sanrio 2006). Now, while you can no longer find this series, which first appeared as prizes in Morigana chocolate snacks, a special Tōhoku version Hello Kitty *kokeshi* strap is currently produced by the Sanrio Company. This strap can be found at most tourist locations in Tōhoku, but, presumably to save on design costs, only the more recognizable Narugo *Kokeshi* Kitty was designed. Just the image of *kokeshi* is understood as Tōhoku, and the *kokeshi* acts as an ambassador for the traditions that lie within.

For non-Japanese, the *kokeshi* is a recognizably traditional Japanese folk art doll. It is not surprising that in one of the few English language guidebooks on the Tōhoku region, the chapter on Miyagi Prefecture (home to five of the eleven strains of traditional *kokeshi*) begins with, “Miyagi is handcrafted kokeshi dolls, a 1,200-year-old castle, and handmade paper lantern hung out to dry in front of a thatched-roof farmhouse” (Brown with Kmetz 1982: 63). The *kokeshi*, because of its unique and recognizable form, has also been imagined as standing in for something Japanese. Marling (1997) does not mention *kokeshi* in her ode to souvenir shopping in Japan and the enjoyment therein, but in the only photo included in her article, four traditional *Tōgatta kokeshi* are featured with the title, “Japanese *Kokeshi* doll. Wood”. Presumably these dolls need no introduction as they are already understood as being quintessentially Japanese.

While traditional *kokeshi* are only produced in Tōhoku, they are sold throughout Japan, along with other types of *kokeshi*, and are a ubiquitous souvenir at many famous locales. Knight (1994), while researching in Hongu (Wakayama Prefecture: Southeastern Honshū), noted that a public map of special product designations did not depict “simple reflections of a local consensus” as *kokeshi* were listed as a local specialty, but they were unknown to its residents (1994: 614). *Kokeshi* may have been listed as it is more easily recognizable for tourists than the

*kishu hina*, also a lathe-turned doll, now listed on the Wakayama Tourism Federation's home page as a regional specialty (My interpretation). All forms of *kokeshi*, not just the traditional ones, can represent Japan and its traditions. Works by modern *kokeshi* artisans position their own *kokeshi* within *furusato* spaces. The Usaburo *Kokeshi* Factory (Chapter 2) produces a souvenir curtain with modern *kokeshi* along with the poem, “*kokoro kara kokoro he -- nihon no kokoro wo -- yasashiku -- katari kakete kureru -- kokeshi*” (From heart to heart *kokeshi* speak to us about Japan's heart kindly). A calligraphy board with a modern *kokeshi* drawn by Kano Chiyo-matsu features the brief poem, “*kokeshi no omokage ni furusato ga koishiku*” ([In] the face of *kokeshi* I long for my home town).<sup>90</sup>

During one visit to Narugo, I stopped by a coffee shop. After I explained my interest in *kokeshi*, the proprietor pointed to an old cultural campaign poster prominently featuring a local *kokeshi*, and asked, “Do you know what that means”? To encourage him to give his own explanation, I implied that I did not, and he replied that at first he did not know what it meant either, but after thinking about it for a while, he understood the meaning of the words and image on the poster. The poster was for the 1995-1996 9<sup>th</sup> Hello Japan Campaign. In Japanese, under the figure of the *Narugo kokeshi*, was printed “*Anata wa, “nihon” no koto wo tadashiku kataremasuka*” (Do you really know “Japan”?). The challenging implication was that the reader did not know Japan, even if they thought they did. Under the Japanese was an explanation of what *kokeshi* are in both Japanese and English, followed by an explanation of the campaign in Japanese. The purpose of the campaign, or, as they stated it, “Make Friends For Japan Campaign”, was to deepen international friendship and mutual understanding between Japan and

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<sup>90</sup> *Omokage* is usually used when referring to people. It is used when talking about a remembrance, image, or visage.

other foreign countries, introducing the true Japan and making the world come closer together. The initial question in Japanese presumably meant for a native Japanese to begin thinking about their own culture, the details of which they would need to know in order to teach it to foreigners. The *kokeshi*, because of its multiple forms and styles, as opposed to other types of folk art, is more visible within everyday Japan. The image of the *kokeshi* on the poster in its place of origin further encouraged the native speaker to think locally about Narugo traditional culture, then more regionally of Tōhoku, and finally to consider the country as a whole. The fact that the *kokeshi* featured was also a *Narugo kokeshi*, the most recognizable *kokeshi* for Japanese, a relationship could more readily be made between its image and something intrinsic to “true” Japanese traditional culture. The explanation in English and Japanese read, “*Kokeshi*: A wooden doll originating from the Tohoku region in northern Honshu. *Kokeshi* first became popular as children’s toys due to their natural simplicity of construction, attractiveness, sturdiness and low price. In recent times the beauty of this form of folk art has come to be appreciated. An example of a famous style of *kokeshi* is the *naruko kokeshi* from Miyagi Prefecture.” While brief, this explanation utilizes terms that purposely position the *kokeshi* within the realm of a “traditional” past with its natural and simplistic construction, and the present as a possible folk art to be appreciated and purchased. Being inspired by the friendship campaign tutorial, Japanese and foreigners alike can venture out to explore the Tōhoku countryside and purchase their own *kokeshi*, a piece of true Japan, as suggested by the poster.

Creighton (1995) states that, “Re-affirming heritage crafts, such as silk weaving, calms fears about a vanishing cultural identity, and assuages nostalgia for a way of life from which people feel themselves increasingly separated” (1995: 436). Though the purchasing of *kokeshi* is not the same as the weaving activities that Creighton experienced, the *kokeshi*’s existence within



the lexicon of folk art reaffirms it as a continuing Japanese tradition, even if one needs to be reminded of it from time to time. For each regional *kokeshi* festival and competition there is a corresponding poster, often featuring a prominent display of *kokeshi*. For the 50th Shiroishi All Country *Kokeshi* Concourse poster, the general public was asked to submit designs for the poster. Usually the winner's *kokeshi* was featured front and center on the poster, but that year, according to the head of tourism, the committee chose a junior high school student's picture of the local Zaō Mountains with the river running down next to a rendition of a *Yajirō kokeshi* (the locally produced *kokeshi* strain). For this auspicious event, the committee felt it was important to include the community as much as possible, the concourse a reminder of a long history of traditional folk art in the region and the community's ties to it.

### **5.3 KOKESHI IMBUED WITH TRADITION, NOSTALGIA, AND FURUSATO**

The same signifiers that make something traditional in Japan are also allied with the more psychological atmosphere of *furusato*. The *kokeshi* is one of those things that signify a *furusato* space, and can visually evoke feelings of nostalgia and longing for that *furusato* space. The *furusato* lifestyle invokes images of *soboku* (artless rustic simplicity) embodied in peaceful landscapes filled with fields, rivers, forests, and thatched-roof houses (Robertson 1995: 16 & 1998: 89). "In tourist literature, for instance, the word *furusato* is often used to endow places with a traditional essence and spirit, thereby conjuring up images of antiquity, rural peace, and order missing from modern cities. In short, the term is a key word that, by its very use, creates expectations of tradition and reassures people that such aspects still remain in Japan" (Reader

1987: 290). These same narratives surface in introductions to *kokeshi* in Japanese, and Non-Japanese literature echoes these narratives. The Traditional Craftwork of Miyagi pamphlet in English and Japanese asserts that, “The charms of the traditional Kokeshi are considered to exist in the beauty and simplicity of form of the neat and lovely body”. While the English pamphlet titled “Miyagi Kokeshi” states, “These highly appealing dolls with their extremely simplified form comprising only a head and body, have a charm and beauty all their own, given to them by creators, who are both honest and innocent, working surrounded by the natural beauty of the mountain villages in this area of Japan” (Date unknown). The pamphlet continues by explaining saying that *kokeshi* are not mere wooden toys, but are special interior ornaments that give a room a serene atmosphere. Pate (2008) describes *kokeshi* in his Japanese doll book as a, “. . . celebration of minimalism, the creative conversion of simple wood elements into objects that delight the adult and entertain the children for which they were originally created” (2008: 168). Takahashi (2003), under his subsection titled “The expression (*hiyōjyō*) of *kokeshi*”, it says that, “They say there are four types of expression of man, but *kokeshi* has pleasure (*tanoshimi*) and a slight smile (*bijyō*). An expression of tenderness invites feelings of homesickness and nostalgia (*kyōshū*)” (Takahashi 2003: 19). The qualifiers of wooden, innocent, and simple enable the *kokeshi* to be positioned more deeply within the faraway mountainous landscapes that can evoke feelings of a *furusato* and as something that is truly Japanese. A non-lover of *kokeshi* told me that a *kokeshi* could definitely be identified as a Japanese thing because of its simplicity.

Songs and poems in the same style as *enka* (traditional folk songs) have also been composed expressing the traditional-ness and the regional-ness of *kokeshi*. Because the *kokeshi* is made in the Northeast and its image is used heavily along with what Robertson (1995) calls “popular concrete and affective associations” of *furusato*, it contains within images, including, “.

. . *ataakai* (warm, intimate), *shusshinchi* (birthplace), *ryōshin* (parents), *haha* (mother), *soboku* (naïve, pristine, simple) and *kokoro ga yasumaru tokoro* (place where the heart-mind can find solace) in that order” (Robertson 1995: 503). I would say that it is impossible to discuss tradition without the inclusion of *furusato* and the vast vocabulary that enhances the meaning of the term as, “Furusato thus imbues whatever it names or is prefixed to with traditionalness and cultural authenticity” (Robertson 1995: 496). The following poem appeared at the beginning of the 1971 NHK television special “*Kokeshi no Uta*”. Its strategic placement at the beginning of the program sets the stage for the nostalgic overtones of the program about *kokeshi*.

*michinoku wa haruka nare domo*  
*yume ni made kokoro no yama made*  
 mountain  
*kokoro no kokeshi*

Although it is a faraway place  
 Even in my dreams the heart of the  
 [mountain (in/of my) heart]  
 Heart of *kokeshi* [*kokeshi* of (the/my) heart]

Fukasawa Kaname: 1971 (My translation)

The *kokeshi* and the heart of the individual are deeply embedded in this faraway landscape, and its visualization brings back memories. At the end of the program, children are seen playing in the snow as the *Narugo kokeshi* song is sung and Itō Matsusaburō (See Chapter Four) paints his *kokeshi*. In the final scene, the *kokeshi* is on the train, looking out the window, leaving Narugo, as suggested in the song.

*narugo kokeshi wa kawarete itte*

*kitto kijiya wo omoidasu*

*kawaii kokeshi wa dokoka no ie de*

*yoru wa Narugo no yume wo miru*

*narugo kokeshi wa Narugo wo hanare*

*oyu no nioi ga koishikaro*

The Narugo *kokeshi* was bought and went away

surely remembering the wood turner's shop

The pretty *kokeshi* somewhere in the house

at night dreams of Narugo

The Narugo *kokeshi* leaves Narugo

missing (yearning for) the smell of the hot springs.

“Naruko *Kokeshi*” 1971 (My translation)

The word that occurs with the largest number of *enka* songs and is among the highest in frequency is *yume* (dream) (Yano 2003: 94). People are often dreaming of past loves, mothers and *furusato* (Yano 2003: 94). In this song, and those that follow, the *kokeshi* can only dream of its hometown, reinforcing its traumatic detachment from it.

The overlap between children, the *kokeshi* artisan, and the *kokeshi* is purposefully nostalgic, as it implies the eventual leaving of these children and the sense of loss they and their communities will feel in their absence. At the beginning of the 2006 television program re-visiting the Narugo area, a family is seen traveling back home on the train with their young son who is holding a *kokeshi* which is later revealed to have been made by his grandfather, Okazaki Seiichi. The *kokeshi* being held by the little boy on the train acts as a visible bridge between the home his parents left behind and links the present with the past. Children have been used in travel campaign advertisements taking part in traditional festivals and events to suggest a “continuous generational transmission of native folk ways” (Robertson 1995: 513). The little boy holding the *kokeshi* on the train, as Robertson would suggest, “. . . effectively traditionalizes the new” but I would say that instead of “simultaneously perpetuating seemingly old traditions”, as Robertson continues, the *kokeshi* held by the little boy in effect links the new with the

continued tradition of *kokeshi* production. It is also significant that this family is traveling by railroad as it allows for a relatively quick transportation back to both the countryside and a nostalgic frame of mind (Robertson 1995: 510). “For some, especially those who had grown up in rural areas, memories of childhood permeated the very meaning of ‘countryside’ ” (Aitchison, Mac, & Shaw 2000: 65).

“Modern travel campaigns suggesting a return to Japan’s rural past also imply a return to a Japanese *kokoro* that is nonrational, nonurban, and definitely non-Western” (Creighton 1997: 244). In several *kokeshi* production areas, songs have been composed, often very similar in form, but mirroring those nostalgic, yearning sentiments within *furusato*. *Enka*, which may provoke tear-jerking memories of *furusato*, resort most frequently to three categories of *furusato* symbols: rural landscape, estrangement, and “old village” lifestyle (Robertson 1995: 496-497). The following song, while very similar in lyrics to the “Narugo *Kokeshi*” song, includes the artisan who, like any parent, yearns for the return of their loved ones. “*Furusato* conjures up family members who live in the hometown but also the lover long ago left behind. The unbridgeable distance between ‘here’ and ‘there’ echoes the heartbreaking sadness of lost love” (Yano 2003: 173). These visions of loss in the context of this song are not of a lost lover, but stand in for children who have left home.

*Neruyu kokeshi wa oyome ni itta  
kawai kokeshi wa dokoka no ie de  
yoru wa Neruyu wo yume ni mite  
tooi kokyō wo shinobu daro  
magokoro komete tsukutte yatta  
ano te ano kao me ni ukabu*

The Neruyu *kokeshi* goes to get married  
The cute *kokeshi* somewhere in the house  
At night dreams of Neruyu  
Longing for the faraway place it grew up<sup>91</sup>  
With all my heart, I created [them]  
[I can almost] see those hands and faces

“Neruyu *Kokeshi*”<sup>92</sup> Date unknown (My translation)

*Kokeshi* artisans, especially female ones, have indicated a deep connection with the *kokeshi* they make and their own children. The *kokeshi* are an extension of their children’s personality and physical appearance. The *kokeshi*’s appeal is often cited as being linked to this innocent and childlike appearance along with the “calmness” that one feels when looking at it. “The round shape of *kokeshi* gives peace of mind to a man who looks at it. We feel warmth because it is made of wood and also the polished head and roundness of the cheek, it looks like an innocent child. I want to take it into my hand without thinking or knowing why” (Takahashi 2003: 19).

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<sup>91</sup> Robertson (1988) states that the term “*yamatokotoba*”, a “really real” Japanese word like *furusato*, appears more natural, familiar, and culturally relative than *kokyō*, a Chinese loan word that also is a word that can be used for hometown (496). It does not appear that in the context of this particular song that the meaning of longing is less than if *furusato* were used instead.

<sup>92</sup> This song was written by Mori Hidetarō (*Tsugaru kōjin*), date unknown. This song is displayed at Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Museum (Kuroishi: Aomori Prefecture). The song appears as it would on a lyric sheet and, in a following paragraph the song is reproduced in *hiragana* above all *kanji* for ease of reading and understanding for the general Japanese public who may not be able to read certain *kanji* featured in the song.

*saibō no hitotsu hitotsu*

each cell

*kogesu no ippon ippon  
sono hitotsu hitotsu ga  
yome sa igu  
yome sa ittara  
menkogararede  
igidei de ike  
daiji ni sarete  
isshō oware  
yome sa igu dogya*

in each *kokeshi*  
each of them  
the bride goes  
[The] bride goes off to get married  
be loved  
keep on living  
be taken good care of  
finish your life [end your life]  
When you go off to get married you  
will be glorious in appearance  
[I will see you off] with a smile, but  
with tears in my eyes

*haresugata  
naki warai de  
okutte yanbe  
nanto kirei na  
yomegoryō*

how beautiful the bride is  
the bride

“Inoue Harumi’s Poem” In Yamasaki 2005: 178 (My translation)

Harumi’s poem (above) was composed instead of a biographical statement in a *kokeshi* artisan guide book. This poem emphasizes the intense tie that artisans have with their dolls, asking for the buyer of her *kokeshi* to care for them as they would a child, or the daughter who has moved away from her home town to live with her husband’s family. One artisan said that, “Women paint from the heart, and that people from the Kansai area only think of *ko-keshi* (child erase), but I think of my heart in the dolls”. Nīyama Mayumi (Yajirō *kōjin*) states, “My children are Yajirō children so I try to make *kokeshi* like them. Yajirō children have an interest in the flowers and trees – nature. The *kokeshi* are like my children”. The *kokeshi*’s human form allows it to be anthropomorphized, the artisan imploring the buyer to treat it with care.

<i>kokeshi no namae</i>	The <i>kokeshi</i> 's name
<i>kokeshi kattara</i>	Once you buy the <i>kokeshi</i>
<i>namae wo tsukete</i>	give [it] a name
<i>samishigarasezu</i>	[so as] not to make [it] feel lonely
<i>sodatete okure</i>	[and please] raise it

<i>namae tsuketara</i>	Once you give a name
<i>tokidoki yonde</i>	call [them] sometimes
<i>nanika kotoba wo</i>	some words
<i>katatte okure</i>	[Please] tell them something

<i>kokeshi kokeshi yo</i>	Oh <i>kokeshi</i> Oh <i>kokeshi</i>
<i>kawareta ie de</i>	At [our] home [you] were bought
<i>kawaigararete</i>	be loved
<i>kurashite okure</i>	be cared for and live

“*Kokeshi no Kokoro*” (Kokeshi’s Heart)<sup>93</sup> (My translation)

Yano found that *kokoro* was the second most often used word in *enka*. Although *kokoro* is not mentioned as part of the above song, its title is very telling as the *kokoro* is often in turmoil, yearning, and throbbing (Yano 2003:96). The *kokeshi* must be cared for and treated like a family member as it is likely to be yearning for its hometown and must find a sense of belonging with its new family. The term *kokoro no furusato*, equally, denotes a spiritual sense of belonging, a cultural and emotional home intrinsic to the Japanese experience (Reader 1987: 290).

Corresponding with the 54<sup>th</sup> 2008 All Japan *Kokeshi* festival in Narugo, two new area maps were designed, titled “How To See Naruko Kokeshi & Hot Spring -- *naruko kokeshi kobo meguri mappu*” (A Visiting Naruko Kokeshi Studio Map). Tokyo-based illustrator, Sugiura

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<sup>93</sup> Written by Takahashi Mansaburō (高橋 満三郎), date of publication unknown. Accessed from internet website at <http://www.vega.ne.jp/~kokeshi/> by Sugawara Kazuhira (Narugo).



Sayaka, drew colorfully detailed routes to all *kokeshi* artisan's workshops, prominent local *kokeshi* features, basic *kokeshi* information, and details of visits within artisan workshops and stores by a cartoon version of Ms. Sugiura herself. On the back of one of the versions of these maps are photos laid out in the style of *sugoroku* (Japanese board or paper game) taken by Genqui Numata, a Tokyo-based photographer, of model/"poem actress" Tamaki Kenmotsu, wearing *geta* (traditional Japanese footwear) and dressed in a *yukata* (summer *kimono*) covered with a *kokeshi* pattern.<sup>94</sup> Ms. Kenmotsu starts her journey in front of a vintage *Omoide* (memory/remembrance) Train.<sup>95</sup> This particular train is not the normal train that goes to Narugo via Sendai, but was part of a special vintage train travel campaign for which an additional fare allowed the rider to experience travel on a special train. The purpose of the train trip is proclaimed on its front signboard as "School Trip". Again, children are linked with these nostalgic feelings for a traditional space like Narugo, while evoking nostalgic school memories for adults as well. The train makes a second appearance in the photo montage on the map, this time on the track with the mountains behind it, making its way to Narugo, while the model stands in the foreground in front of a stream, holding her basket of *kokeshi* and a *kokeshi* fan. The mountains, natural setting, and train all are easily-read symbols of *furusato*. The model, by her association, becomes an active participant within that *furusato* space along with the *kokeshi* she carries with her throughout her trip. The photos on the pamphlet follow the model's imaginary journey through the "back lanes" of Narugo as she visits artisans' shops, looking at

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<sup>94</sup> *Sugoroku* is either a board game similar to the American board game Shoots and Ladders or is a paper game in which each square on the paper changes the player's outcome. The paper *kokeshi* map indicates to a starting point "*furidashi*" and an ending point with "*agari*" after the player or the visitor to Narugo has completed all the tasks on the map. The paper version first emerged in the Edo period. (<http://www.sugoroku.net>)

<sup>95</sup> The Omoide Train and seven other vintage trains were brought back into service briefly during the early spring and summer of 2008, for a Japanese Railroad travel campaign in the Tōhoku area.

their materials, and generally interacting with the Narugo environment. A short poem, line by associating line, accompanies the appropriate photos. As the photos progress in depicting the trip, the words in Japanese, with clarifying *hiragana* above the *kanji*, say:

*tabisuru otome no ikoi*

It is a restful trip by a young girl

*naruko kara naruko e tabi wo suru otome*

A young girl who goes on a trip from Naruko to Naruko

*chizu wo kata te ni roji kara roji e*

A map in one hand, going from lane to lane

*naruko no uramichi ni wa rokuro no oto ga natteiru*

In the back lanes of Naruko the sound of the lathe sings (makes noise)

*rokuro to geta no ne nante suteki na tabi no ongaku*

The music of the trip -- the sound of the lathe and geta is wonderful

*kitto deaeru watashi ni nita kokeshi*

I will surely encounter the *kokeshi* that resembles me

*itsuka deaieru watashi ni nita kokeshi*

Someday I can encounter the *kokeshi* that resembles me

*ai rabu kokeshi watashi no kokeshi*

I love *kokeshi* -- my *kokeshi*

*koisuru naruko rabu kokeshi*

I love Naruko -- love *kokeshi*

*hitori pochijanai itsumo kokeshi to issho no tabi*

I am not alone [while] traveling [always] together with *kokeshi*

(My Translation)

At the end of the photo journey, the model stands in front of a bath house and invites the reader, *ne dakara tabi ni demashō goisshō ni* “So, let’s go on a trip together”. Later, the visitor to Narugo will supposedly go on the same journey through the back lanes wearing traditional foot wear and discovering *kokeshi* that indeed remind them of their true Japanese self.<sup>96</sup>

On the back of the second map is featured a full poster-sized photo of a little girl in a *yukata* standing in a field of wildflowers with the local Eai River flowing in the background and the mountains in the distance. Strapped to her back with a red *furoshiki* (wrapping cloth) is a large (approximately 60 cm) *kokeshi*, this image symbolic of and nostalgic of how mothers and

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<sup>96</sup> At Narugo, guests are offered *geta* and a passport to walk through the streets. The *geta* package costs approximately 2500 yen and is good for discounts at souvenir shops, hot springs, and restaurants. Japanese still wear *geta*, but it is more unusual today. Hot spring guests often wear *yukata* like a robe to feel more comfortable and may wear *geta* when walking through the streets as regular footwear would be inappropriate if worn with the *yukata*.

baby sitters carried babies and young children on their backs.<sup>97</sup> Above the little girl and printed in English are the words “Sentimental Kokeshi Smile”, and, in small Japanese print running vertically from her hand touching a flower, the phrase, “*utsukushi mono kara me wo hanashite wa ikenai*” (Do eyes move away from beautiful things). Apart from the obvious nostalgic overtones of this poster in English, with the use of rural landscape and traditional dress, the little girl, who looks about five, simultaneously represents the face of the *kokeshi* on her back and the *kokeshi*, in turn, represents the face of the little girl and a plaything for children in the past. The little girl bridges the temporal distance between herself and the traditional mountains in the far background along with the natural environment in which she is photographed. Folklorists have emphasized that *furusato* refers not to one’s village and one’s family per se, but rather to the nearby mountains as the spirits of one’s ancestors were thought to return to the nearby mountains (Ivy 1995: 107-108). According to Creighton, an encounter with a peasant on a mountain path is both a metaphoric and metonymic encounter with the Japanese past. Japanese mountains are also a metonymic link to Japan’s past as they are equated with distance in both time and location (Creighton 1995: 437). While Creighton contrasts the mountain distance and ancientness with new, modern, and international, this poster links youth, albeit represented in a nostalgic form with the distant and historic landscape. A poem printed beneath the girl highlights the love for *kokeshi* the little girl has in the photo.

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<sup>97</sup> The image of *komori* (babysitters), young women who were charged with taking care of infants and young children while their parents worked, is a nostalgic image within Japan. As seen in Chapter Four, *komori kokeshi* have been made as part of a repertoire of *kokeshi* forms that celebrate popular traditional images. Japanese parents and grandparents still hold children on their backs, and a special winter coat can be purchased with a compartment for a young child incorporated within the coat’s back. The use of a *furoshiki* to wrap the child to one’s back is rarer, but is a prominent feature of souvenir *komori kokeshi* produced in the 1950’s and 1960’s.

*kokeshi gāru wa koishiteru*

The *kokeshi* girl is in love

*tsubura na hitomi wa kokeshi nite*

The round eyes [of the girl]resemble/  
are reflected in [the eyes] of the  
*kokeshi*

*koisuru kokeshi rabu kokeshi*

The *kokeshi* is love --- love *kokeshi*

*yume miru otome no rabu kokeshi*

The love *kokeshi* of a young  
dreaming girl

*Naruko no shyōjyo wa kiyoraka na*

A girl of Naruko is playing with a  
*kokeshi*

*menkoi kokeshi de azonderu*

that is pure and pretty

*kokeshi no urei wo dakkoshite*

Holding the sorrow of the *kokeshi* in  
her arms

*kokeshi no hohoemi ohbushite*

Carrying the smile of the *kokeshi* on  
her back

*kokoro wa itsumo hogara kasan*

[Her] heart is always bright/cheerful

PEACE & SMILE (In English)

“こけし萌” (Kokeshi Moe)<sup>98</sup> 2008 (My translation)

The girl in this poem and the girl visually represented in the photo are both depicted supporting *kokeshi* emotionally. The poem also reinforces the calming effects of *kokeshi* as it is part of the equally calming Tōhoku landscape. “The positive attributes of the country include the natural way of life, peace, innocence and simple virtue” (Aitchison, Mac, & Shaw 2000: 51). The Miyagi Zaō *Kokeshi* Museum pamphlet states in Japanese and then English, “*kokeshi ni deou to, naze ka kokoro ga nagomu* (An encounter with *kokeshi* makes you feel calm and happy for no particular reason)”. Although these maps are new, the photographic images allow for

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<sup>98</sup>*Moe* - 萌 is a slang word originally derived from the verb *moeru*, which means to sprout or bud. Since the late 80's and early 90's, the word has taken on a new meaning, especially in *anime* (Japanese animation), manga (comics), and video games. The word *moe* stands in for the feelings expressed when people see a pretty girl and feel happy (Kayanon 2006). There are more salacious meanings for the word as well, but generally it expresses feelings of excitement or obsession usually associated with adorable or cute characters.

what Reader calls nostalgic fantasy that transforms a modern development into an old tradition (Reader 1987: 291). These two maps appear to be marketed towards young female travelers in their twenties and thirties. The youthfulness of the illustration style coupled with the vintage feel of the map produce an aura of, but for a less distant past, sometime during the 1950s. This is a tradition filled with kitsch. On the front cover of the fold out map is a woman dressed in a short *kokeshi* dress and handkerchief on her head, walking with a man wearing a fedora and bow tie. These two characters actually are representations of the illustrator and photographer, and the latter does wear both a fedora and a bow tie daily. For those not in the know, however, the illustration represents a distant though approachably cute scene.

#### 5.4 *KOKESHI*, OSHIN, AND TRADITION



Figure 37. Oshin Pictured with Her Mother and *Kokeshi*. Photo from Izu Family Webpage

One of the more visible uses of *kokeshi* signifying tradition, women and *furusato* is the 1983 to 1984 NHK Japanese television drama series “Oshin”. The program begins in the “present” 1983, with the disappearance of Oshin, the matriarch of the family, leaving as a clue to her whereabouts only an old battered *kokeshi*. Her beloved step-grandson Kei is the only one who knows how to interpret this clue, as Oshin had told him that the doll was a gift from her mother, given to her at a particular traumatic moment in her impoverished childhood. Kei therefore sets out on a journey to the remote mountainous area of Yamagata Prefecture where Oshin grew up, and there he finds his grandmother, who begins to tell him the story of her life (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 132). Morris-Suzuki asserts that Oshin is a Japanese Citizen Kane, whose battered *kokeshi* plays precisely the same symbolic role as the sled “Rosebud” in Orson Welles’s classic.<sup>99</sup> Oshin’s *kokeshi* is different from Kane’s sled in that it does not represent a lost innocence, but is a parable of nation (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 134). Harvey (1995) points out that as Japanese audiences watched Oshin at the height of Japan’s material success, they were able to indulge in nostalgia for the hardships of the past (1995: 86-88). The program flashes back on Oshin’s life from the end of the Meiji period to her present. “. . . Oshin is impelled by a desire to review her life and discover something which has been forgotten or lost, with the specific purpose of teaching the younger generation” (Harvey 1995: 86-87). Oshin’s geographical journey from Northern Japan to Tokyo finally was emphasized by a detailed booklet produced by NHK with oral histories and chronology, creating a commonality between the audience’s and the characters’ lives (Fujime 1983: 133). As Oshin was considered a profoundly admirable character despite her human failings, viewers are able to identify greatly with her, and her rediscovery of

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<sup>99</sup> Morris-Suzuki does not refer to the doll found as a *kokeshi*, but as a “battered wooden doll”. Further research with *kokeshi* artisans, collectors, and on the Internet revealed that the doll indeed was a *kokeshi* specially produced for the television series. For emphasis I have replaced battered wooden doll with *kokeshi*.

her past is their rediscovery of their own past (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 134). As this connection with the past is so significant, Oshin's role as a business woman is overshadowed by her symbolic role as a symbol of continuity between the past and the present. Havey also concludes that even though Oshin is an independent modern woman with a business, she is very much the embodiment of traditional Japanese female virtues of self-restrain and self-sacrifice (1995: 76).

As Oshin tells the story of her life to her step-grandson, she begins with the painful tale of having to leave her family, with the *kokeshi* given to her by her mother to remind her of home and herself. As the television show achieved great popularity, audiences clamored for a *kokeshi* of their own. Oshin's mother at the time of the story was working at the Ginzan Hot Springs in Yamagata Prefecture. The Izu family, who had been producing *kokeshi* at the Ginzan Hot Springs since 1922, was approached by NHK to make the original doll for the drama. They soon developed a new *kokeshi* to sell as souvenirs at the hot springs along with their own traditional family *kokeshi*. On the Izu family's web page is a statement in Japanese about the origins of the "Oshin *Kokeshi*". According to the webpage, the *kokeshi* was necessary for this television drama. During the drama, Oshin, who was going to work as a *komori hōko* (baby sitter) at a rice wholesale dealer, went to visit her mother, was working at the Ginzan *onsen* (hot spring), and her mother bought her something that was called a "Ginzan *Kokeshi*". Oshin identified this *kokeshi* with her mother, and in order to console her heart (*kokoro no sasaei*) at losing her family, she would talk to the *kokeshi* like it was her mother.



The Izu family was not able to sell their new *kokeshi* specifically as a *Ginzan Kokeshi* as mentioned in the drama as NHK has a policy of disassociating any place and company name associated with a product. The Izu family changed the program *kokeshi* slightly with a new hair style, calling it “*Oshin Kokeshi*” (Translated from the Izu Family web page).



**Figure 38. Izu Family *Kokeshi*: Izu Tooru and Izu Mamoru.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

Oshin *Kokeshi* became so popular that they inspired many *kokeshi* considered fakes that sprang up and were erroneously labeled “Oshin *Kokeshi*”. The Izu family’s original connection to the doll created for the drama, and their own history of wood turning and *kokeshi* production in the area, gave them credence to the title of producing the true and authentic “Oshin *Kokeshi*”. The Izu family now makes both Izu *kokeshi* and Oshin *kokeshi*. The Izu family is foremost respected for their dedication to wood turning, and the continued practice of producing traditional *kokeshi*. Izu Sadao participated in the Yamagata Prefecture *kiji kōshūkai* (wood turning short course) in Ginzan (Yamagata Prefecture) in 1922 and 1924. After learning wood turning, he began to produce *kokeshi* and toys, but he was sickly and died from an undisclosed illness in 1938, at the age of 34. His younger brother, Izu Mamoru, learned wood turning on his own. Before WWII, he made toys and little wooden items, but not *kokeshi*. After coming back from the war, he resumed lathe work, and, around 1949, using his brother’s *kokeshi* as a model, began to produce his own *kokeshi*. According to Shibata and Minowa (1981), the *kokeshi* produced by Izu Mamoru at this time were child-like and weak with a thin touch of the brush. Around 1960, Mamoru concentrated on running a diner and it was not until 1966 that he researched his brother’s work from each era and created several *kokeshi* designs. Around 1970, he experimentally made his own style of work and designs with lined up chrysanthemum flowers, but he could not reach the level of Izu Sadao. Meanwhile, Izu Mamoru’s son, Toru, graduated from a technical high school in 1971, and joined the army. After his discharge in 1973, he began training in lathe work.

At first, he specialized in wood processing. Around 1975, he started to make just the bodies of *kokeshi*, and it was not until 1978 that he started to paint *kokeshi*. Collectors, who prefer the original designs, state albeit supportively that after Izu Mamoru once more researched the style of his brother, he now produces a work that is “closing in” on his *kokeshi* (Shibata and Minowa 1981).

The Oshin *Kokeshi*, like Oshin herself, very much represented the disenfranchisement of a generation with their true sense of Japanese self and their own childhood losses. This is not the first Japanese doll to purposefully use the discourse of lost youth and a sense of self to promote a product. Cox’s explanation of *Kōbe-ningyō* reveals that despite the obviously racial elements present in the doll, there was also a strong sense of nostalgia in the invocation of childhood and loss. As the advertising pamphlet from the Kitoshiyama store which sold the dolls at the time makes clear: ““Souvenirs from Kobe, they will remain with you forever. The *Kōbe-ningyō* are a local folk-craft since the beginning of the Meiji period and they will help create cheerful moments whether you are happy or depressed”” (exact date unknown) (Cox 2010: 180).

The *kokeshi* is described with the same calming and weightless properties as the *kokoro* (Lebra 1976: 161). Nostalgia travel campaigns promised a chance to find a “Japanese self, by traveling back to the rural areas in order to return to the womb of Japan and the Japanese *kokoro*” (Creighton 1997: 244). The *kokoro* is described in Zen philosophy “. . . as one’s spirit before existence, one’s pure state before the world, culture, and other influences penetrated one’s being” (Creighton 1997: 244). The *kokeshi* is deeply implicated in these philosophies of a Japanese *kokoro*, and creatively shares a connection with the Japanese *kokoro* and its source in the “far north. It is only by taking a journey, leaving your everyday environment, or moving inside the Japanese archipelago that allows you to go deeper inside yourself” (Guichard-Anguis (2009: 7).

“The cogency of *furusato*, as a sentimentally evoked topography, increases in proportion to the sense of homelessness experienced by Japanese individuals or groups” (Robertson 1995: 92). Fictionally and literally the *kokeshi* calls this topography home, and as each creative work suggests, invites you to find your true sense of self through it.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

The image of folk art has continued to evoke feelings of nostalgia. An important Japanese expression, it helps to clarify an ever present connection to imagined and real *furusato* spaces. The inclusion of nostalgia is therefore central in the discussion of the promotion of folk arts in relation to cultural nationalism. Perceptually, folk arts in Japan, especially those produced in Tōhoku, have been periodically appropriated to promote a sense of national cohesion. “Through their regional and subregional differences, residents become bound to local spatial identities, but when these differences come together under the umbrella of *furusato*, then being a ‘local’ means being a national citizen” (Yano 2002: 21). Moeran postulates that the concept of *natsukashisa* (feelings for nostalgia) helps the Japanese strengthen tenuous personal relationships and the appropriation of the past helps individuals deal with the present (Moeran 1997: 16). A relationship forms between folk art and social organization as periods of rapid industrialization affects the way we see art, leading many to look back with nostalgia for, “. . . art or craft which somehow evoke a pre-industrial, golden age of simplicity, or *across in space* to objects produced in other, less ‘civilized’ cultures” (Moeran 1997: 17). Folk art is an ideal medium for framing Japaneseness. Artisans, collectors, and the non-collecting Japanese populace have adopted several divergent perceptual traditions that define and shape *kokeshi* as it relates to its production origins and localities within perceived traditional landscapes. Artisans and collectors have

elevated the image of *kokeshi* to symbolic ambassador, highlighting the cultural uniqueness of the Tōhoku region. The non-collecting populace recognizes the *kokeshi* as being both a part of traditional Japanese culture and a Tōhoku specialty. This same population is also engaged in the collective assumption that the *kokeshi* was originally created as a memorial for children killed by their parents during times of famine and hardship. This assumption is closely aligned with the continued perception of the Tōhoku region as somehow inferior, exotic, and culturally different from the rest of Honshū. Persistent negative images of the region appear to be grounded in the very processes contributing to a cohesive sense of self and nation state. A large part of imagining a nation involves what Yano argues is the transformation of the local spaces into the national. “In producing meaning of these spaces, provincial regions have been both generalized as center(s) of a true identity, as well as particularized national culture. They are at once core and periphery, internal and exotic, whole and apart” (Yano 1999: 158). These opposing qualities allow for a familiar quality to persist in the perceived traditional landscapes and objects that surface within, while still allowing for an exotic or, in this case, the macabre to exist.

Helms (1993) aptly hypothesizes that geographical distance is frequently thought to correspond with supernatural distance, “. . . such that as one moves away from the social center geographically one moves toward places and people that are increasingly ‘different’ and, therefore, regarded as increasingly supernatural, mythical, and powerful (Helms 1993: 7). She argues that it is the contact between artisans and geographically distant people and places that concepts of ancestors and origins can be expressed (Helms 1993: 48). I would argue that the reverse is equally true. In Japan, it is the contact with artisans and their products in geographically distant regions that enhances an attachment to origins and a sense of self. The main purpose of travel becomes a quest for knowledge (Helms: 1988 In Chambers 2000: 5).

*Kokeshi* collecting booms and increased interest in folk art have started and stopped in direct relation to increased nationalist feelings for traditional Japanese objects and the spaces they inhabit. *Kokeshi* are incorporated into romantically nostalgic discourses of the *furusato* movement as folk arts remind Japanese of their heritage. The residents of Tōhoku have used these perceived differences of the region as a focal point to increase awareness of their cultural achievements, presenting a unique difference to consumers that also highlights these objects as emblematic of the Tōhoku region and its people. “Furthermore, *furū(i)* signifies the patina of familiarity and naturalness that objects and human relationships acquire with age, use, and interaction” (Robertson 1988: 495). Non-collectors of *kokeshi* may not be aware of or care about the vast stylistic differences or basic strain names, but a potentially dismissed souvenir or consumable is rendered familiar and approachable through narratives of regionalism and cultural tradition. These narratives are an expected part of traditional spaces and are used in the case of *kokeshi* to evoke a connection to the past through a discourse of nostalgia. For consumers, the *kokeshi* may not be esthetically pleasing or practical at first, but stories of generational transmission and demonstrations of production techniques by artisans themselves, subvert the original doubts of the consumer as it is recognized as an important cultural tradition and helps to develop an emotional attachment. Bestor proposes through his use of “traditionalism”, defined as “. . . the use of social idioms or metaphors that seek to clothe the present in a mantle of venerable antiquity” (1989: 258), that, in order for images of traditionality to have a proper effect, they must be equally valued by both actor and audience (1989: 264).

As a category of folk art and souvenir, the *kokeshi* is deeply embedded in the perceptual parameters of Japanese culture. The assumptive recognition of this doll as Japanese often subverts regionally specific origins for a more culturally generalist one. Raymond Firth,

capturing in his definition larger individual, cultural, and social work in artistic production and contemplation, defines art as, “. . . primarily a matter of perception of order in relations, accompanied by a feeling of rightness in that order, not necessarily pleasurable or beautiful, but satisfying some inner recognition of values” (In Coote and Shelton 1994: 16). The values expressed in *kokeshi* are signified as simplicity of form, color use, and culturally relevant designs that together produce the perceivable Japaneseness of the object. As one type of consumable, they are used to recover displaced cultural meaning and “. . . cultivate what is otherwise beyond our grasp” (McCracken 1988: 104). Consumer goods can be used in this way because they are “. . . easily appropriated repositories of discrete style elements; their status as already circulated and advertised forms provides the requisite distance from the present while allowing ready recirculation” (Ivy 1995: 56).

While I did not concentrate on the reactions to *kokeshi* by foreign visitors in Japan, English information provided for *kokeshi* sold in locations frequented by foreigners, like airports, mirrors the general descriptions of *kokeshi* written in Japanese elsewhere. At the Narita Airport in Tokyo, one can pick up a new style *kokeshi* as a last minute souvenir or gift. A sign next to the dolls in one shop states, “Kokeshi is the most famous Japanese wooden doll around the world. All of our kokeshi dolls are hand-made by renowned and highly-skilled craftsman [*sic*]. We recomend [*sic*] this doll for souvenir!!!”. Another sign at a similar shop states explains, “Kokeshi was first made in the northern provinces of Japan about 150 years ago. Kokeshi originally made as a toy for children of farmers, has developed into a modern craft from a simple toy in the countryside. Having outgrown the status of being a toy for children, Kokeshi is now recognized as one of the traditional folk arts in Japan. Kokeshi is handmade by skilled crafts men entirely from wood cutting and painting”. Clearly, the descriptions are closer to traditional



*kokeshi*, but those for sale at the airport at the time of research were more creative or new style. Nevertheless, the descriptions fit the national and accepted perception of *kokeshi*, regardless of type or strain. The same discourse used in the descriptions of the new style *kokeshi* that were available signifies the complicated relationship between regionally produced products and nationally recognized traditional cultural products.

## 6.1 KOKESHI FUTURES

Before conducting fieldwork, I wondered if the dialogues of nostalgia for a *furusato* or *furusato* experience so prevalent in anthropological works on folk art and tourism in Japan during the 1980s and 1990s still held sway presently for Japanese in their 20s and 30s. During my second year of field work, the Japanese Railroad Group launched the 2008 Sendai • Miyagi Destination Campaign as part of their nationwide “Large Scale Sight Seeing Campaign” (*oogata kankō kyanpēn*). This campaign ran from October 1, 2008 until December 31, 2008, with the main purpose of attracting tourists to the area, and to encourage the use of various train services to Sendai and Miyagi prefectural areas. The campaign’s start coincided with the region’s autumnal leaf display and, more coincidentally, with Narugo’s All Japan *Kokeshi* Festival. I observed a poster that was hung in a Narugo-bound train advertising the September *kokeshi* festival in Narugo and the following month’s start of the Destination Campaign. The poster featured five *kokeshi* strains, their images surrounded by smaller photos of the Narugo Gorge, known for its spectacular views of the surrounding autumnal landscape, bathers relaxing inside one of Narugo’s famous hot spring baths, and the *Omoide* Train (see Chapter Five), one of the special

train services offered during the campaign period. After the campaign period ended, I began to hear grumblings from *kokeshi* artisans that the campaign had been a complete failure because, aside from Narugo, it had not brought expected tourists into *kokeshi* producing areas. The complaints of the artisans were understandable as their regions are struggling economically, but do not have equal draws of the campaign's feature cities of Sendai City, Matsushima, and Narugo. These artisans live in areas without easy access to rail travel, in sharp contrast to Narugo, which can be accessed directly from the station without the extra use of a bus to reach its *kokeshi* producing areas. The drawbacks of the Destination Campaign do highlight the continued struggle faced by artisans to find markets for their products and encourage visitors to the areas of production. While it is true that collectors within Japan are the primary source for income among *kokeshi* artisans, and that tourists may be looked down on for their fleeting interaction with artisans and their wares, artisans realize that, for the economic health of their home towns, they must develop new ways to attract visitors.

Historically, Sendai's specialty souvenir was *kokeshi*. Even Japanese living in other regions of the country told me before my research period that Sendai was "the" place to study them. The reality in Sendai, though, is that despite maintaining strong ties to *kokeshi* culture, the *kokeshi*'s popularity as a souvenir has greatly waned because of the worsening of Japan's economy and a combination of an aging collector and artisan populace. The owner of the largest folk art and souvenir shop in the Sendai area of Tōhoku has continued to develop new ways to attract a customer base who are not necessarily interested in *kokeshi*. In 2008, he designed two sets of souvenir *kokeshi* featuring the now popular edible Sendai souvenirs *gyutan* (cow tongue), *zunda* paste (mashed green soy beans) and, *sasakamaboko* (bamboo leaf shaped fish cakes). The handmade sign in front of the shop advertising the *kokeshi* versions of these edibles states, "You

probably are not able to eat them (*taberare nai kedo*) -- Why [the] cute *kokeshi*? (*naze ka kawaii kokeshichan tachi*) -- Memories of Sendai (*sendai no omoidasu ni*).” (Figure 39 and Figure 40)

The corresponding *kokeshi* were produced in both a creative and traditional style of the three local specialties. It is too early to gauge the success of these new specialty *kokeshi*, but the consensus among traditional *kokeshi* collectors with whom I spoke was that they were very odd. The dismissive statements by collectors do not seem to have been a deterrent to the popularity of these dolls as they continue to be offered for sale by the shop two years after their debut.



Figure 39. Advertisement for Sendai Specialty *Kokeshi*. Photo by Jennifer McDowell



**Figure 40. Sendai Specialty *Kokeshi* in both “Creative” and “Traditional” Styles.  
Photo by and Collection of Jennifer McDowell**

The primary population of *kokeshi* collectors in Japan has been men who are now in their late 60s to early 70s. Young collectors still are relatively rare as the attendance of several new female members at the local *kokeshi* association this year was so unusual that it merited a photo and spot on the association’s blog. Outside of the official association, however, a younger audience has become attracted to folk art, especially *kokeshi*. Within the last three years, there have been several *kokeshi* publications illustrated and written by young women in their late twenties to mid-thirties. The rhetoric of the *mingei* and *furusato* movements and the format of scholarly works on *kokeshi* have been appropriated by this younger generation of more causal collectors who are eager to take part in the appreciation and consumption of a nationally known and regionally produced folk toy. This new collector population has selectively appropriated their own types of nostalgia, as their parents’ nostalgia does not necessarily reflect their own yearnings for the past.

While still listing the eleven strains of *kokeshi*, these new works also emphasize the interaction with *kokeshi* in the everyday living environment and a new personal connection with *kokeshi*. Kozima Noriko, author of the *kokeshi no tabi no hon* (*Kokeshi Travel Book*), a graphic compilation of her travels through the *kokeshi* producing regions, emphasized in her travels not necessarily the sole goal of purchasing *kokeshi*, but to experience these regions, often with friends, and document her own personal experiences while learning about *kokeshi*. Sugiura Sayaka, illustrator of the Naruko *kokeshi* maps, is featured in one photo in Cochae's *kokeshi* book looking at her *kokeshi* along with pictures of couples and young mothers with their children. When I first met Sugiura, she told me that she had impulsively bought a limited edition thirty-eight individual artisan miniature *kokeshi* set when she had started to collect *kokeshi*. Sugiura is also the author of two illustrated travel books with *kokeshi* sections. These new publications are more approachable for younger generations who have a broader interest in graphic design and art. The collector's journey is no longer as perilous (See Chapter Three), but cutified, becoming a journey a cartoon character can take. Anxiety is abated as the latest guide attests that while you can purchase *kokeshi* at an association meeting, it is more fun to visit the artisans themselves. Illustrations guide you through the process, including the call to the artisan's shop and eventual appreciation and purchasing of their *kokeshi*.

The appeal of *kokeshi* is not its tradition, or those traditions now associated with it, but its vintage character. "Although referential nostalgia may still dominate much of Japan's mass culture, the ascendant urban youth and trendsetting copywriters and media workers have produced an aggressively evacuated nostalgia: nostalgia as style. . . . There is, in short, an emphasis on mass culture and materiality that comes close to the fascinated dynamics of kitsch. Or rather, in keeping with the imperatives of neo-nostalgia, there is the emergence of neo-kitsch

and the epiphany of vintage Japan” (Ivy 1995: 58). The more recent timeframe of vintage 1950s and 1960s is accessible for generations who did not experience the Meiji restoration, World War II, or the economic bubble bursting of the late 1980s first hand and, therefore, may not feel closely allied with the *furusato* feelings appropriated from the Edo period. Kitsch objects as discussed by Stewart (1993) are souvenirs that re-create novelty within an exchange economy. Nostalgia for these objects rests on their saturation of materiality that is split into contrasting voices of past and present, mass production and individual subject, oblivion and reification (Stewart 1993: 167). The *kokeshi*’s appeal again is contextualized within the framework of aesthetics, not one of an amassed collection, but of a renewed appreciation for the traditionally fashionable.

## APPENDIX A

### CHRONOLOGY OF IDENTIFIED TRADITIONAL *KOKESHI* STRAINS BY AUTHOR AND DATE

The following tables trace how the current eleven traditional *kokeshi* strains in bold (Tsuchiyu, Yajirō, Tōgatta, Zaō, Hijiori, Yamagata, Sakunami, Narugo, Kijiyama, Nanbu, and Tsugaru) came to be, starting with the first dedicated publication on traditional *kokeshi* (Amae 1928) and ending with the most recent (Kamei 2010). Below each of the current strain names is any variation for that strain name or sub-strain name used by an author. Authors and publication years 1928 to 1971, excluding Yamanaka 1969, were translated directly from Shikama and Nakaya (1971: 175-177). Years 1981 to 2010, including Yamanaka 1969, were added to the original chart by the author. Each author and year on the tables, though not listed, corresponds to a publication which contains the author's strain name choices. Author's works can be found in the bibliography of this dissertation. Some variations of strain names are in keeping with older names for prefectures and locations throughout the Tōhoku region. In 1869, during the Meiji Period, four countries were created from the two main northern provinces of Mutsu (modern day Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures) and Dewa (modern day Akita and Yamagata Prefectures). In 1869, Mutsu Province was divided into four countries: Rikuchū (modern day

Iwate Prefecture), Rikuzen (encompassing most of modern day Miyagi Prefecture and some parts of Iwate Prefecture), Iwaki (modern day eastern Fukushima Prefecture), and Iwashiro (the western half of modern day Fukushima Prefecture). Dewa Province in the same year became Ugo (modern Akita Prefecture and some parts of Yamagata Prefecture) and Uzen (most of modern Yamagata Prefecture). In 1871, Japan established the prefectural system, and the current 47 prefectures were established in 1888.



**TABLE A 1: Chronology of Identified Traditional *Kokeshi* Strains by Author and Date**

AUTHORS WHO HAVE CATEGORIZED <i>KOKESHI</i> INTO STRAINS AND SUB-STRAINS							
<i>KOKESHI</i> STRAINS w/ strain variations and sub-strains	Amae 1928	Tachibana 1939	Tsuchihashi 1942	Nishida 1943 <sup>17</sup>	Shikama 1943 <sup>18</sup>	Shikama 1954 <sup>19,20</sup>	Tsuchihashi and Nishida 1956
<b>Tsuchiyu</b>							
Iwashiro Tsuchiyu/Iwashiro Kijivama <sup>1</sup>							
Sabako sub-strain							
Nakanosawa sub-strain							
<b>Yajirō</b>							
<b>Tōgatta</b>							
Shinchi <sup>2</sup>							
Hotta <sup>3</sup>							
Shinchi sub-strain							
Zaō-Takayu sub-strain <sup>4</sup>							
Akiu sub-strain <sup>5</sup>							
Hotta sub-strain							
Hijiori sub-strain							
Nozoki sub-strain <sup>6</sup>							
Yamagata sub-strain							
Sendai sub-strain							
<b>Zaō</b>							
Zaō Takayu							
<b>Hijiori</b>							
<b>Yamagata</b>							
Yamagata Sakunami <sup>7</sup>							
Yamagata sub-strain/Sendai sub-strain							
<b>Sakunami</b>							
<b>Narugo</b>							
Rikuzen Narugo <sup>8</sup>							
Soto Narugo <sup>9</sup>							
<b>Kiiyama</b>							
Ugo Kiiyama <sup>10</sup>							
<b>Nanbu<sup>11</sup></b>							
Rikuchyu Kiiyama <sup>12</sup>							
Hanamaki <sup>13</sup>							
<b>Tsugaru</b>							
Mutsu Nuruyu <sup>14</sup>							
Nuruyu <sup>15</sup>							
Nuruyu sub-strain							
Owani sub-strain <sup>16</sup>							

**TABLE A 2: Chronology of Identified Traditional *Kokeshi* Strains by Author and Date**

<i>KOKESHI</i> STRAINS w/ strain variations and sub-strains	AUTHORS WHO HAVE CATEGORIZED <i>KOKESHI</i> INTO STRAINS AND SUB-STRAINS						
	Tsuchihas hi 1958	Tsuchihas hi 1965	Shikama 1966 <sup>21</sup>	Tsuchihas hi and Nishida 1968	Yamanaka 1969	Shikama and Nakaya 1971 <sup>22</sup>	Shibata and Minowa 1981
<b>Tsuchiyu</b>							
Iwashiro Tsuchiyu/ Iwashiro Kijiyama <sup>1</sup>							
Sabako sub-strain							
Nakanosawa sub-strain							
<b>Yajirō</b>							
<b>Tōgatta</b>							
— — — Shinchirō <sup>2</sup> — — —							
Hotta <sup>3</sup>							
Shinchi sub-strain							
— — — Zaō Takayu sub-strain <sup>4</sup> — — —							
Akiu sub-strain <sup>5</sup>							
Hotta sub-strain							
Hijori sub-strain							
Nozoki sub-strain <sup>6</sup>							
Yamagata sub-strain							
Sendai sub-strain							
<b>Zaō</b>							
Zaō Takayu							
<b>Hijori</b>							
<b>Yamagata</b>							
— — — Yamagata Sakunami <sup>7</sup> — — —							
Yamagata sub-strain/Sendai sub-strain							
<b>Sakunami</b>							
<b>Narugo</b>							
— — — Rikuzeu Narugo <sup>8</sup> — — —							
Soto Narugo <sup>9</sup>							
<b>Kijiyama</b>							
Ugo Kiiyama <sup>10</sup>							
<b>Nambu<sup>11</sup></b>							
— — — Rikuchvu Kiiyama <sup>12</sup> — — —							
Hanamaki <sup>13</sup>							
<b>Tsugaru</b>							
— — — Mutsu Nuruyu <sup>14</sup> — — —							
Nuruyu <sup>15</sup>							
Nuruyu sub-strain							
Owani sub-strain <sup>16</sup>							

**TABLE A 3: Chronology of Identified Traditional *Kokeshi* Strains by Author and Date**

KOKESHI STRAINS w/ strain variations and sub-strains	AUTHORS WHO HAVE CATEGORIZED KOKESHI INTO STRAINS AND SUB-STRAINS						
	Saitō 1989	Ono 1992	Shibata 1999	Matsukawa 2002	Kamei and Takahashi 2003	Hirai 2009	Kamei 2010
Tsuchiyu							
Iwashiro Tsuchiyu/ Iwashiro Kijiyama <sup>1</sup>							
Sabako sub-strain							
Nakanosawa sub-strain							
Yajirō							
Tōgatta							
Shinchi <sup>2</sup>							
Hotta <sup>2</sup>							
Shinchi sub-strain							
Zaō-Takayu sub-strain <sup>4</sup>							
Akiu sub-strain <sup>5</sup>							
Hotta sub-strain							
Hijiori sub-strain							
Nozoki sub-strain <sup>6</sup>							
Yamagata sub-strain							
Sendai sub-strain							
Zaō							
Zaō Takayu							
Hijiori							
Yamagata							
Yamagata Sakunami <sup>7</sup>							
Yamagata sub-strain/Sendai sub-strain							
Sakunami							
Narugo							
Rikuzen Narugo <sup>8</sup>							
Soto Narugo <sup>9</sup>							
Kijiyama							
Ugo Kijiyama <sup>10</sup>							
Nanbu <sup>11</sup>							
Rikuchyu Kijiyama <sup>12</sup>							
Hanamaki <sup>13</sup>							
Tsugaru							
Mutsu Nuruyu <sup>14</sup>							
Nuruyu <sup>15</sup>							
Nuruyu sub-strain							
Owani sub-strain <sup>16</sup>							

## Appendix A Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> **Iwashiro Kijiyama and Iwashiro Tsuchiyu:** Iwashiro or the Country of Iwashiro is the old Japanese province for what is now the western half of modern Fukushima Prefecture.

<sup>2</sup> **Shinchi:** Shinchi is an area in Tōgatta, and corresponds roughly to the *Kokeshi* Village Area, located about ten minutes on foot outside of the Tōgatta Hot Springs area.

<sup>3</sup> **Hotta:** Hotta or Zaō Village Hotta is the old name for the Zaō Hot Springs area.

<sup>4</sup> **Zaō-Takayu:** Zaō Takayu refers to the Zaō Hot Springs and the Takayu Hot Springs located in the Azuma Mountain Range that separates Yamagata Prefecture from Fukushima Prefecture.

<sup>5</sup> **Akiu sub-strain:** Akiu is a hot spring area located in Miyagi Prefecture about 45 minutes by bus from Sendai City. Today, the *Akiu kokeshi* is considered by most researchers to be a *Tōgatta* strain *kokeshi*, but some authors still refer to it as a sub-strain of *Tōgatta kokeshi*.

<sup>6</sup> **Nozoki sub-strain:** Nozoki is a town in Yamagata Prefecture and one production site of *kokeshi*.

<sup>7</sup> **Yamagata Sakunami:** Similarities between the *Yamagata* strain and the *Sakunami* strain as well as research that linked Sakunami artisans with Yamagata instructors caused many researchers to link these two strains together. It was not until the discovery of the Iwamatsu Naosuke Document by Takahashi in 1983 that gave evidence for Sakunami as being an independent *kokeshi* production area, that *Sakunami* was recognized by most authors as the eleventh strain of *kokeshi*.

<sup>8</sup> **Rikuzen Narugo:** Rikuzen or The Country of Rikuzen is now currently Miyagi Prefecture.

<sup>9</sup> **Soto Narugo:** Soto Narugo is area around Narugo.

<sup>10</sup> **Ugo Kijiyama:** The Country of Ugo is now Akita Prefecture and some parts of Yamagata Prefecture. The Country of Uzen is now most of Yamagata Prefecture.

<sup>11</sup> **Nanbu:** The area around Morioka (major Iwate Prefecture city) was known as Nanbu during the Edo period.

<sup>12</sup> **Rikuchū Kijiyama:** The Country of Rikuchū covered most of modern day Iwate Prefecture.

<sup>13</sup> **Hanamaki:** Hanamaki is a city in Iwate Prefecture and one production site of *kokeshi*.

<sup>14</sup> **Mutsu Nuruyu:** Mutsu is a city located in Northeastern Aomori Prefecture and refers to the province that covered modern prefectures of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima.

<sup>15</sup> **Nuruyu:** Nuruyu is a hot spring area in southern Aomori that is still a major *kokeshi* production site.

<sup>16</sup> **Owani:** Owani is a hot spring area in southern Aomori near Nuruyu Hot Springs that is still a major *kokeshi* production site.

<sup>17</sup> **Nishida 1943:** Nishida included in the *Tōgatta* strain, the *Hijiori* sub-strain, and *Nozoki* sub-strain of *kokeshi*.

<sup>18</sup> **Shikama 1943:** Shikama includes seven sub strains for the *Tōgatta* strain including *Shinchi*, *Akiu*, *Hotta*, *Hijiori*, *Nozoki*, *Yamagata*, and *Sendai*.

<sup>19</sup> **Shikama 1954:** Now Shikama only includes *Shinchi*, *Zaō Takayu* and *Hijiori* sub-strains for *Tōgatta* strain.

<sup>20</sup> **Shikama 1954:** *Tsuchiyu* and *Yajirō* strain are also called the Maki Group (Lathe line Group), *Shinchi* sub-strain, *Zaō Takayu* sub-strain, *Hijiori* sub-strain, *Sakunami*, *Narugo*, and *Kijiyama* strains are also called the Kiku Group (Chrysanthemum Group), and *Nabu* and *Tsugaru* are also called the Bōzu Group (Boys with shaven head or Priest Group).

<sup>21</sup> **Shikama 1966:** *Tsuchiyu* and *Yajirō* strain are also called the Maki Group (Lathe line Group), *Tōgatta*, *Zaō Takayu*, *Hijiori*, *Sakunami*, *Narugo*, and *Kijiyama* are also called the Kiku Group (Chrysanthemum Group), and *Nanbu* and *Tsugaru* are still called the Bōzu Group (Boys with shaven head or Priest Group).

<sup>22</sup> **Shikama and Nakaya 1971:** These authors of the *Kokeshi Jiten* (*Kokeshi* Dictionary) also include a strain called *Zatsukei* (*Zatsu* strain) for *kokeshi* that are traditional, but do not fit into any *kokeshi* strain well.

## APPENDIX B

### ORIGINAL REGIONAL DIALECT WORDS (*HŌGEN*) FOR TRADITIONAL *KOKESHI* BY PREFECTURE

#### **Aomori Prefecture:**

Aomori (*naga-oboko*)

Neruyu (*nagaoboko* and *inkko-oboko*)

Owani (*ki-oboko*)

#### **Iwate Prefecture:**

Hanamaki (*kikkara-botsuko*, *kogeshi*, *kogesu*, and *hogeshi*)

Namari (*kikura-bokko*, *kokeshi-bokko*, and *kikura*)

Kitakami (*kinakinabō*)

Isawa (*kunakuna-kogesu*, *kikukikubō* and *kinakinabō*)

Ichinoseki (*kinakina-zunzoko*, *kinakina-bokko*, and *kogeshi*)

#### **Akita Prefecture:**

Ōyu (*kogeshi*)

Kakunodate (*kakkura* and *kakkurabō*)

Odata (*kakkurabonbo* and *kakkurabo-bokko*)

Ogatsu (*kakkura* and *kakkurabō*)

Kijiyama (*kokeshi-bonbo* and *kiboko*)

Yuzawa (*kokeshi-bonbo*)

Yuda (*kokesukko*)

**Yamagata Prefecture:**

Sakata (*kokesu* and *hyōtan*)

Yamagata (*degunobō*, *nbokko*, *degu*, *ningyō*)

Zaō (*degunobō* and *ningyō*)

Kamiyama (*degunobō* and *kokesu*)

Hijiori (*kogesu* and *degunobō*)

Onogawa (*degu* and *Kamasaki-ningyō*)

Atsumi (*kingyo* and *bonbo*)

**Miyagi Prefecture:**

Narugo (*kōgesu*, *kōkesu*, and *kōkeshi*)

Sendai (*kinboko*, *kiboko*, *kibokko*, and *kogesun-boko*)

Tōgatta (*ki-oboko*, *kiboko*, *kokesu*, *kogeshi*, and *kokeshi*)

Kamasaki (*kiboko* and *oboko*)

(Ootaki)Nametsu (*kiboko*, *degunobō*, and *degu*)

Aone (*kiboko* and *kogesu*)

**Fukushima Prefecture:**

Iizaka (*kideko*)

Fukushima (*kideko*)

Tsuchiyu (*deko* and *kokeshi*)

Aizu (*odekosama*)

Original text by Hirai 2000 (My translation)

## APPENDIX C

### LIST OF ARTISAN ASSOCIATIONS, COLLECTOR ASSOCIATIONS, AND *KOKESHI* MUSEUMS

#### *Kokeshi* Artisan Associations and Guilds

1) Tsuchiyu *Kokeshi Kōjin Kai*<sup>100</sup>

Tsuchiyu *Kokeshi* Artisan Association

2) *Tako Bōzu Kai*

*Tako Bōzu* Association

3) *Yajirō kokeshi Gyō Kyōdō Kumiai*<sup>101</sup>

Yajirō *Kokeshi* Worker's Guild/Association

4) *Yajirō Dentō Kokeshi Kōjin Kai*

Yajirō Traditional *Kokeshi* Artisan Association

5) *Shiroishi Kōjin Kumiai*

Shiroishi Artisan Guild

6) *Tōgatta Dentō Kokeshi Kiji Gangu Gyō Kyōdō Kumiai*

Tōgatta Traditional *Kokeshi* Wooden Toy Worker's Guild/Association

7) *Narugo Kiji Gangu Kyōdō Kumiai*

Narugo Wooden Toy Guild/Association

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<sup>100</sup> The term “*kai*” means a meeting or gathering, but can also refer to an association or society.

<sup>101</sup> The term “*kumiai*” can mean an association, guild, or a union.



8) *Sendai Chiku Dentō Kokeshi Kyōdō Kumiai*

Sendai Area Traditional *Kokeshi* Guild/Association

9) *Zaō Takayu Kei Dentō Kokeshi Kōjin Kai*

Zaō Takayu Strain Traditional *Kokeshi* Artisan Association

10) *Yamagata Ken Kokeshi Kai*

Yamagata Prefecture *Kokeshi* Association

11) *Yonezawa Dentō Kokeshi Kōjin Kai*

Yonezawa Traditional *Kokeshi* Artisan Association

12) *Akita Ken Kokeshi Kōjin Kai*

Akita Prefecture *Kokeshi* Artisan Association

13) *Tsugaru Kokeshi Kōjin Kai*

Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Artisan Association

### **Collector Associations:**

1) *Tokyo Kokeshi Tomo no Kai*

Tokyo *Kokeshi* Friend's Association (Tokyo)

2) *Gunma Dentō Kokeshi Aikō Kai*

Gunma Traditional *Kokeshi* Lovers Association (Gunma Prefecture)

3) *Nagoya Kokeshi Kai* (Nagoya Prefecture)

Nagoya *Kokeshi* Association

4) *Ise Kokeshi Kai*

Ise *Kokeshi* Association

5) *Ōsaka Kokeshi Kyōshitsu*

Ōsaka *Kokeshi* Classroom (Ōsaka Prefecture)

6) *Kokeshi to Katarō Kai*

*Kokeshi* and Sharing (literally to tell) Association (Fukushima Prefecture)

7) *Fukushima Kokeshi Aikō Kai*

Fukushima *Kokeshi* Lovers Association (Fukushima Prefecture)

8) Koriyama *Kokeshi Shūgaku Kai*

Koriyama *Kokeshi* Enjoyable/Fun Collection Association (Fukushima Prefecture)

9) Aoba *Kokesh Kai*

Aoba *Kokeshi* Association (Sendai: Miyagi Prefecture)

10) Sendai *Kyōdo Gangu no Kai*

Sendai Folk Toy Association (Sendai: Miyagi Prefecture)

11) *Kogesui Kai* Shinjō

*Kogesui* Association Shinjō (Yamagata Prefecture)

12) Iwate *Kokeshi Kai*

Iwate *Kokeshi* Association (Iwate Prefecture)

13) Kita kami *Kokeshi Kai*

Kita kami *Kokeshi* Association (Iwate Prefecture)

14) Akita *Kokeshi Kai*

Akita *Kokeshi* Association (Akita Prefecture)

15) Hokkaidō *Kokeshi Kai*

Hokkaidō *Kokeshi* Association

16) Nihon Dentō *Kokeshi Kyōgi Kai*

Japan Traditional *Kokeshi* Consultation Association (Narugo: Miyagi Prefecture)

17) *Jinashi no Kai*

Earth Pear Association (Fukushima Prefecture)

18) *Ichi Kin Kai*

First Friday of the Month Association (Tokyo)

## ***Kokeshi* Museums:**

- 1) Nishida *Kinen Kan* - Nishida Memorial Museum (Fukushima Prefecture - 1995)

The Nishida Memorial Museum is dedicated to Nishida Minekichi who was a devoted *kokeshi* scholar, and served as Chairman for the Tokyo *Kokeshi* Friend's Association from 1956-1991.

- 2) Yajirō *Kokeshi Mura* - Yajirō *Kokeshi* Village (Yajirō: Miyagi Prefecture - 1993)

- 3) Miyagi Zaō *Kokeshi Kan* - Miyagi Zaō *Kokeshi* Museum (Tōgatta: Miyagi Prefecture - 1984)

- 4) *Nihon Kokeshi Kan* - Japan *Kokeshi* Museum (Narugo: Miyagi Prefecture - 1975)

- 5) Tsugaru *Kokeshi Kan* - Tsugaru *Kokeshi* Museum (Tsugaru: Aomori Prefecture - 1988)

- 6) Kamei *Kinen Tenjikan (Kupu Kupu)* - Kamei Memorial Museum (Sendai: Miyagi Prefecture - 1994)

Displays roughly 14,000 of a total of 160,000 butterflies from around the world collected by the late Kamei Bunzo, as well as art work, and displays roughly 150 *kokeshi* produced before WWII, collected by acting chairperson and CEO of Kamei Corporation, Kamei Shogo. Museum also hosts special *kokeshi* exhibits and other collectors' *kokeshi*.

- 7) Yamagata *Dentō Kokeshi Kan* - Yamagata Traditional *Kokeshi* Museum (Yamagata City: Yamagata Prefecture)

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