Kokeshi: Shifting Signifiers and Wooden Tradition

Jennifer McDowell

I. Introduction

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). It was further explained that this combination of local dialect words was chosen to signify *ko* (tree)[1] and *kezuru* (to plane down wood), thereby linking the name to how the doll is made, and not to the subsequently more sensational meaning of "child death"[2]. The connection of *kokeshi* with the concept of infanticide, 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 early dialectical name variations not utilizing the combination of *ko* and *kesu*, and the creation of the term during a time when *kesu* was not connected with the action of killing.

This article 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

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[1] 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*).

[2] The translation of ko (tree) and kezuru (to plane down wood) was related to me in personal conversations with Shogo Kamei (CEO of the Kamei Corporation, kokeshi collector and researcher) and several kokeshi makers during field work in Tohoku during 2007-2009.

Note: Preliminary field work was carried out during the summer of 2006, with a scholarship from the National Science Foundation's East Asia and Pacific Summer Institute in conjunction with The Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). Field work during 2007-2009 was generously provided by a Monbukagakusho (MEXT) Scholarship. During both preliminary and two-year research periods, Tohoku University served as my host institution and Dr. Ichiro Numazaki (Anthropology) graciously acted as my host researcher.

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 Northern region of Honshū (Tohoku) as being a land of loss and hardship, and the assumption that the doll can act as a memorial for the dead. Secondly, this article will concentrate on how *kokeshi* artisans (*kokeshi kōjin* -こけし工人) 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 Tohoku 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 Tohoku area, as well as its industrial achievements.

II. Perceived Meanings of the Word *Kokeshi*

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

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 verbally articulate a connection between the *kokeshi* and child death, the piece supposes 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*.

III: 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,* published in 1928[3] 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 a Chinese character as a phonetic symbol rather than for its meaning. Attempting to decipher what *kokeshi* means using *kanji*, scholars translated *keshi* as either 芥子 (poppy seed) or 消し (to delete or erase). The use of these two *kanji* for the word *keshi* ignores the many

[3] This publication was revised in 1977, with a second booklet featuring photos and commentary.

hōgen for this doll; the term *kokeshi* was established by collectors and researchers from areas outside of Tohoku, 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 twelve *kokeshi*-producing regions within Miyagi, Fukushima, Yamagata, and Iwate Prefectures (1928, 1977:14). 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, 1977:15). 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)[4], 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)[5] (Dobashi 1973: 234). Further, regional variations are categorized into five distinctive forms (*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; Kanno, Dobashi & Nishida 1968:34; Matsukawa 2002:4; Nishida 1961:26-28)[6]. Within each *gata* there can be 6 to 19 variations. The *kogesu*

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[4] Hirai's (2009) also lists *kiboko* along with these three terms for Sendai.
[5] Hirai's (2009) publication lists in addition to terms mentioned for Kamasaki, the term *ningyō*.
[6] 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 & Kanno, Dobashi, 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).

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).

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 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 (1928:13, 1977:13).

In 1940, when deciding on the encompassing term "*kokeshi*" to describe the lathe- turned wooden dolls of Tohoku, 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 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*)[7]. 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*, a historical name for Northeastern Honshū, approximately corresponding to the area now covered by Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate and Aomori Prefecture (Hare 2001:2). As *kokeshi* are one of the most visible and popular folk arts of the region,

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[7] *Michinoku no Ningyōtachi* is credited by *kokeshi* researchers and collectors in Japan as being one of the first, if not 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 devise than actual fact (Related to me in 2007, by Dr. Fumio Ano, avid *kokeshi* collector).

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 Tohoku region, who spoke in a broad Tohoku dialect (Hirai 2000:251 in Hare 2001:45).

IV: 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. 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)[8] still produced in Tottori Prefecture (Southwest Honshū) 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. The *kokeshi's* limbs are implied, and several makers have added hands holding either an umbrella or fan and little feet on the underside of the *kokeshi*[9]. Also, as there are limitations to the shapes that can be

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[8] *Hakota ningyō* are part of the wider *oboko* (おぼこ) family of papier maché dolls.

[9] Ogura Ishizou (小椋 石蔵) painted small hands holding fans or umbrellas on the sides of his *kijiyama kokeshi* (Akita), and later taught his student Miharu Fumio (三春 文雄), who continues the

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, not classified as *kokeshi*, that include movable wooden arms to emphasize motion as the toys are being pulled.

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 *nambu 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*[10], 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 (Fig.1). It is not unusual to find *kina-kina* with nuts used as heads on which a baby supposedly may gnaw or suck. *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.

Both Japanese and non-Japanese interpretations have reasonably linked the possible origins of *kokeshi* as being later forms of similarly shaped dolls within the Tohoku region[11], but the *kokeshi* is more likely to be indirectly linked through local dolls with the *gosho-ningyō* (御所 人形)[12], a specialty of Kyoto. The widespread

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practice today. The late Satou Yoshiki (佐藤 佳樹) is also known for painting little feet on the bottoms of his *tsugaru kokeshi* (Aomori).

[10] The name *kina-kina* is a Japanese onomatopoeia for the rattling sound the doll's head makes.

[11] Two dolls, the *sansuke-sama* (さんすけさま) from the Tsugaru district of Aomori and the *oshira-sama* (おしらさま) from the Tohoku region, have been tentatively linked as possible early versions of *kokeshi* (Dobashi & Nishida 1968; Saitō 1989). Munsterberg (1958) links *kokeshi* to being possible offerings presented at shrines to insure the prosperity of a family's descendants (92-95). Another 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).

[12] 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).

popularity of *gosho-ningyō* in Edo-period culture is seen in the frequency of *gosho*-like features in other doll forms like the clay versions from numerous kilns across Japan that provided inexpensive versions of *gosho-ningyō* for those who 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)[13], 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 *mizuhikite* (水引手) head decoration, a congratulatory symbol, which also appears on the *tsutsumi-ningyō* and later on the *kokeshi.*[14] Takahashi theorizes that the prosperous connotations of this mark, and the fact that *gosho-ningyō* usually represent boys, indicates that scholars have falsely defined *kokeshi* as little girls and memorials for dead children (2003:6-7). Further, the *tsutsumi-ningyō*, the smaller versions called *keshi* (けし)[15], 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). Takahashi's theories emphasize that the

[13] 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 (4-5:1989).

[14] *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).

[15] The term *keshi* is used to describe miniature dolls in general. While Amae and others have 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.

kokeshi's origins stem from more refined forms of dolls in Japan, instead of similarly shaped doll forms found in Northern Japan. Walthall (1984) concludes that in 19th 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 (386). The use of local products in the production of *kokeshi* and earlier doll forms like the *tsutsumi-ningyō* in Tohoku is indicative of this regional pride and taste.

Fig. 1 Various *kina-kina kokeshi*, center *kina-kina* with nut for head.

Photo by and collection of Jennifer McDowell.

V: *Kokeshi,* Child Death, and *Mizuko Kuyō* as a Buddist Practice

The practice of *mizuko kuyō*, modeled on memorial services for ancestral spirits (*senzo kuyō*), has been described by scholars (Harrison 1999; Harrison & Midori 1995; 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 killed through the practice of *mabiki* (literally meaning the thinning out or pulling of seedlings).

During 17th and 18th 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). 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). Gradually, as opposition to the assumed widespread practice of infanticide, 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

on the end pilgrimage route in Chichibu (Saitama Prefecture - East Central Honshū) (Harrison 1999:774). At the micro level there is further evidence of alternative forms for memorializing children like the use of *Jizō* statues that 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 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.

While conducting field work in Tohoku, I visited several temples specializing in *mizuko kuyō*, and never saw a *kokeshi* on site. Instead, stuffed animals and *Jizō* statues[16] 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 (Fig. 2). *Kokeshi* are also present in Yamadera at a shop near the train station where tourists can purchase *kokeshi* as souvenirs, and a rather large stone *kokeshi* can be found

[16] 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).

over a burial mound (*kokeshi zuka* - こけし 塚) [17] (Fig. 3) located near the *Mizuko Kuyō Jizō* display along the path leading to the main stairway gate. The *kokeshi* are not used interchangeably with the miniature *Mizuko Kuyō Jizō* in the display for *mizuko kuyō*, nor are the little *Jizō* statues taken to the *kokeshi zuka*. These two objects and locations do not appear to intersect in their uses and meanings. This does not mean, however, that the practice of placing *kokeshi* at a temple in accordance with recent *mizuko kuyō* observances does not exist in Japan, as foreigners traveling in Southern Honshū related to me that they had occasionally seen *kokeshi* at *mizuko kuyō* temples there.

Fig. 2 *Mizuko kuyō* display in Yamadera, Jennifer McDowell.

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[17] 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 either papers or tools for the preservation and exhibition of *kokeshi*-related materials (Sibata & Minowa 1981: 321-321).

Fig. 3 *Kokeshi zuka* in Yamadera, Jennifer McDowell.

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 19th 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 Tohoku 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)[18].

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,

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[18] This film appears to have been pulled from the website *YouTube* where I first encountered a copy of it in 2008. The films url link also appears to have been lost for reasons presently unknown.

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 Satou Zenji (佐藤 善二), and a Bride doll (*hanayome ningyō*)[19] followed by a group photo of *tsugaru kokeshi* made by the Hasegawa family (長谷川ご家族)[20], with the caption "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* being an obvious one to Schumacher, as Booth, in a pure moment of rumination, stated that they could be memorials for the dead. *Kokeshi* makers 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[21] 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. Not only is the label "Dolls for the Dead" insulting to the *kokeshi kōjin* who created these *kokeshi*, but it falsely depicts

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[19] 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" (141:2004).

[20] As it is not discernable from the website photo if the *kokeshi* and wooden products were produced individually or in combination by Hasegawa Tatsuo (長谷川 辰雄) or Hasegawa Kenzou (長谷川 健三), they have been identified more generally as products from the Hasegawa family.

[21] 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.

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. 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[22].

VI: *Kokeshi* and *Mizuko Kuyō* as a Shinto 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 woodworking profession, and those credited with bringing lathe technology to the Tohoku 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)[23], 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).

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[22] *Daruma* and *Jizō* are poplar 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*.

[23] 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).

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 (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 other designated cultural properties, you can purchase, for 500 yen, a little *kokeshi* at the *Emusubi Kannon* (絵結び 観音), Goddess of Love and Marriage shrine right inside the *Entsuin* gate. On this *kokeshi* you are instructed to write your 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[24] 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 previously 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 your 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 or love.

The *Emusubi* shrine within the Kyoto Jinushi Shrine (京都地主神社) offers a Tanabata[25] Kokeshi Festival on July7th where you may order from the shrine's web

[24] *Tabimo* is advertised as the やさし旅のガイド本 (Easy travel guide book), most likely aimed at young female travelers.
[25] 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).

page, or buy in person, one or more paper *kokeshi* couples on which you write your name, a potential lover's name, or general wishes for love and marriage. The use of *kokeshi* at both shrines, in this case for singles seeking love and marriage, further illustrates how the *kokeshi* is popularly utilized apart from *mizuko kuyō*.

VII: *Kokeshi* and Famine

There is an underlying assumption that *kokeshi* originated in Tohoku 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 widespread practice of infanticide and abortion. Tohoku is known for its heavy snowfall and long winters, the image of this snowy landscape multiplying the effect of possible harsh living conditions, and the probability 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[26] Provinces, 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 (Baten 2000:55, 1986:43; Gerbert 2001:85). These authors claim that girls were less desirable than boys

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[26] Mutsu Provence is now Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures. Dewa Provence is now Akita and Yamagata Prefecture.

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; 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 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 (1992) 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: Central Honshū), revealed that the number of deaths of children below the age of five was greater in 1823, 1826, and 1845, than in the famine year of 1837 because of smallpox epidemics (1823 and 1845) and a dysentery epidemic (1826) that took the greatest toll among children ages 0-4 (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 Tohoku and early *kokeshi* use, as the earliest record for *kokeshi* production (1811) [27] is well after the Tenmei famine, the first of two famines credited with causing the

[27] 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.

greatest amount of suffering in northeastern Japan. The Tenpō Famine, occurring fifty years after the Tenmei famine, also caused widespread crop failure in the Tohoku region. It is very unlikely that the *kokeshi* would have been created as memorials for lost children during the interim between famines. During the more recent 1934 crop failures in the Tohoku region, children were supported through food drives. The events of crop failure and suffering among populations in Tohoku 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 Tohoku in the minds of its readership as the only area to truly suffer population loss during any famine in Japan. Tohoku is synonymous with famine, while, in reality, famine affected all regions of Japan (Hirai 2008, 2009).

VIII: *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 paper, 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. It is widely known that the lathe was transmitted to Japan via China around the 5th or 6th century (Takahashi 2003:7), but *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 (844-897), who is credited with teaching woodsmen in the Tohoku region how to make wood products using the lathe, 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, 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. Where the prince fled depends on which legend, and from which wood artisan's account you read, but for *kokeshi kōjin*, Prince Koretaka fled to the unincorporated Northern region of what is presently Fukushima prefecture. Several theories emerge about how Prince Koretaka became related to woodworkers there, more specifically to the Ogura family, who claim Prince Koretaka as their ancestor. The Ogura family is still famous for producing Aizu-nuri (lacquer-ware from the Aizu region in Fukushima). Lacquer-ware artisans as well as *kokeshi kōjin* owe their profession to the lathe, and have elevated Prince Koretaka to the god of wooden containers and the success of the wood working profession. One *kokeshi kōjin* from Fukushima told me that *kokeshi* production first started there because knowledge of lathe technology was first transmitted in Fukushima by Prince Koretaka. 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. 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 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 *kokeshi* shrine and prayers are given in thanks for the continued success of *kokeshi* profession and the region as a whole.

Yajirō near Shiroishi City (Miyagi Prefecture) has one of the more visual displays dedicated to the appreciation of *kokeshi*, the honoring of Prince Koretaka, and the lathe. In 1959, the Onomiya Koretaka Shinō Shrine (小野宮喬親王神社) was erected near the Yajirō village honoring Prince Koretaka and as a place to pray for increased and improved skill in wood working. The unofficial, popular name for this shrine is the *Kokeshi* shrine (*Kokeshi Jinjya-*こけし神社). 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-*白石市弥次郎こけし村) in 2003[28]. While the Shiroishi City erected and owns the *kokeshi* museum located in the village, *kokeshi* artisans, as a point of pride, very adamantly told me that they

[28] Information was translated by the author from the All Japan Kokeshi Concourse 50th anniversary catalogue (2009:66).

own the *Kokeshi* Shrine collectively. There was an attempt to move the old shrine to the new location, but because of its age they were not able to do so. While the old shrine is not available for comparison, along the roof line of the current *Kokeshi* Shrine, three *kokeshi* representing the three main Yajirō *kokeshi*-producing families, Satou Family, Niyama Family, and Ogura Family (佐藤ご家族, 新山ご家族, and 小倉ご家族) can be seen. Starting in 1967, on every January 2nd, the first *kokeshi* of the year is created by an honored Yajirō *kokeshi kōjin*. 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 was the two person lathe (*ni nin biki/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 large part of becoming a *kokeshi kōjin* is the transmission of lathe skills and techniques to produce the different body shapes for *kokeshi*. Apprentices first practice their craft by preparing the wood before it is placed 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. 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 wood worker first (*kijishi*-木地師) 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 and 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 to several children, commented, "[M]y children are Yajirō children, so I try to make *kokeshi* like them." This same artisan related in her *kokeshi* guide bio 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).

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 from previous narratives. The current shape of most *kokeshi* with a flat bottom is a more recent development for collectors, enabling them to stand *kokeshi*

up on shelves for display. Early *kokeshi* had very narrow bodies that did not allow them to stand, meant only for a child to hold them in their arms.[29] Several *kokeshi* forms such as the *ejiko kokeshi* (Fig. 4) represent babies placed in a *wara* (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) (Fig.5) with a child on its back wrapped in a blanket. Both of these forms not only honor childcare practices in the region, but child protection as well.

As each strain of *kokeshi* is linked to a particular region within Tohoku, it has come to represent the atmosphere and people of Tohoku and the districts within. *Kokeshi kōjin* expressed these connections generally as *kokeshi* being uniquely Tohoku *mingeihin* (Tohoku folk art -東北の民芸品) 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).

[29] 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 accidently tipped over by a hand, sending any surrounding *kokeshi* down like dominos around it.

Fig. 4 *Ejiko kokeshi*, top row from right to left: Hasegawa Tatsuo (長谷川 辰雄) Tsugaru *kei*, Satou Masahiro (佐藤 政廣) Tōgatta *kei*, Kamata Takashi (鎌田 孝志) Yajirō *kei*. Front row from right to left: Satou Ryouko (佐藤 良子) Tōgatta *kei*, Onodera Masanori (小野寺 正徳) Kijiyama *kei*, and Kakizawa Koretaka (柿澤 よし伸) Narugo *kei*.

Photo by and collection of Jennifer McDowell.

Fig. 5 *Komori Kokeshi* from right to left: Umeki Naomi (梅木 直美) *Zao kei*, Inoue Harumi (井上はるみ) *Yajirō kei*, and Niyama Keimi (新山 慶美) *Yajirō kei*.

Photo by and collection of Jennifer McDowell.

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 ageing of wood, and then later carving and painting of 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. 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, 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 the doll was connected to child death (*kodomo wo kesu* - 子供を消す). 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.

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