

*Kokeshi* dolls are a common souvenir from northern Japan. The first known *kokeshi* is thought to have been made in Togatta Onsen near Zao, and the practice spread to Zao and other onsen towns in northeastern Japan during the Meiji era (1867–1912). The dolls are traditionally children's toys and were bought as gifts by visitors to the onsen. Handmade from wood, *kokeshi* come in many sizes but are generally of a single characteristic shape: a simple trunk for a body and a spherical head. They became popular with collectors during the twentieth century, and *kokeshi*-makers began to sign their work. Despite their simple shape, making a *kokeshi* is not easy. After the wood is harvested, it must be left to dry for one to five years before it can be used, after which it is carved on a lathe. Depending on the style, the dolls will either be made of one or two pieces of wood, and their decorations reflect the locations in which they were made. Sadly, only a few *kokeshi* artisans still live in Zao, and this tradition may soon disappear.