In the Tohoku dialect of Japan, "bekokko" is the synonym for a beast of burden (a cow or bull), which is the symbol of hard work. There are two kinds of bekokkoes: golden and red.

The golden bekokko was made in the Iwate prefecture, a region in northern Honshu. (Honshu, the site of the capital, Tokyo, is the largest of the four chief islands of Japan and is considered the mainland.) Originally, such a bekokko was made of solid gold cast from gold nuggets gathered by panning. Only the rich could afford such a bekokko. The golden bekokko was a knickknack used as a symbol of wealth, although it also served as a good luck charm or as a wish for a good life. The poor made bekokkoes of wood and painted them gold as a symbol of hoped-for wealth or good fortune. The wooden bekokko had a box (or satchel) on each side into which coins could be placed, although usually the boxes were not hollow.

The red bekokko was a toy rather than a knickknack and was made in the Fukushima prefecture (a region in northeastern Honshu). The red bekokko was made in the likeness of a cow or bull and had a bobbing head and hollow body made of papier-mâché. Originally, this type of bekokko was blue or brown, but in the early 1920s, the Japanese government decreed that red would be the standard color. The making of the red bekokko started as a cottage industry, employing samurai warriors who were out of work.

The golden and red bekokkoes are pictured on a stamp issued by Japan in 1961 to commemorate the year of the cow and bull.