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## **How should cultural and economic policies be integrated to preserve traditional crafts? A case study of Japan**

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### 1. Introduction

Cultural economics has typically focused on the arts rather than crafts, but what is the difference between the two? Both have cultural and economic dimensions: Artists are involved in the arts, and artisans in crafts. What, then, is the difference between artists and artisans? Art is assumed to be important for creativity and innovation, but what role do crafts play the knowledge economy? This paper will reassess the structure of craftsmanship and explore the possible integration of cultural and economic policies for crafts to address the question of how crafts can be sustained culturally and economically in the globalized market.

Traditional crafts are considered an intangible cultural heritage according to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The objective behind safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is to respect human rights, promote sustainable development, and create employment. Cominelli and Greffe (2013) point out that “manipulators of symbols,” such as craftsmen and designers, can be expected to become key players in the knowledge economy and the global economy.

The mechanisms for protecting tangible heritage generally relate to public support, including tax incentives for the conservation and maintenance of tangible objects. In contrast, intangible cultural heritage is a living entity, and the key issue in safeguarding it is the transmission of the relevant knowledge and skills to future generations. Therefore, the policy for safeguarding intangible heritage is quite different from that for tangible heritage.

Cominelli and Greffe (2013) discuss the structure of traditional craftsmanship. They draw a line between the tangible and intangible and between common and private resources. Craftsmanship entails intangible/common, intangible/private, tangible/private, and tangible/common components. These researchers also advocate a possible policy for transmitting the relevant skills and identifying the challenges therein, suggesting the principle behind the “Living National Treasure” in Asian countries. The Living National Treasure system was established in Japan in 1954. Thus, compared with Western

countries, Japan has a far longer history of safeguarding its intangible heritage.

The Living National Treasure is an effective means of passing on craft skills to future generations in Japan. However, these skills depend on the endurance of the crafts industry. If the crafts industry is not sustainable, it will be difficult for such skills to survive. In 1975, an industrial and economic policy for traditional crafts began in Japan to promote the economic aspects of crafts. Nevertheless, the output of traditional crafts products has declined since 1975.

Targeting crafts involves a certain amount of overlap between Japan's cultural and economic policies. However, the two policies are handled by different ministries. The economic policy focuses on the private aspects of crafts, including intellectual property, clustering, distribution, and industrial organization. This paper will redefine the structure of craftsmanship based on a case study of Japan, arguing for possible integration of Japan's cultural and economic policies. It will also address how crafts can find new markets that appreciate their cultural value at the regional, national, and global levels. The paper concludes by discussing what kinds of policies are meaningful.

## 2. Reassessing crafts: Japanese experience and perspective

This section explores craftsmanship and reassesses crafts with reference to the history of crafts in Japan.

### (1) Craftsmanship in Japan

Craftsmanship and crafts culture are strong in Japan. Handmade goods, through which skills are acquiring through a long process, are highly valued. Craftsmen have long been respected. For example, the social structure of early-modern times (Edo era) in Japan had four levels: Samurai (warrior) had the highest rank, followed by farmers, then craftsmen, and lastly merchants.

Even through this social structure collapsed in modern times (Meiji era), the values of craftsmanship are still alive in Japanese society. For example, the Japanese phrase *Shokunin Waza*, which means "skills of craftsmen" is often used to refer to highly professional skills and spirit. *Shokunin Waza* is necessary to solve problems and to achieve excellent solutions. *Shokunin Waza* is also necessary for high quality. Each occupation needs the skills and spirits of craftsmen.

Sennett (2008) challenges the established theory in the West regarding craftsmanship. He argues that craftsmanship is the desire to do a job well for its own sake. Craftsmanship cuts a far wider swath than

skilled manual labor. Sennett also points out the intimate connection between the hand and head in craftsmanship. He criticizes the deep-rooted separation of the head and hand in Western civilization. He discusses the development of skills and concludes that skills begin as bodily practices and then technical understanding develops through the power of imagination. He also mentions that good craftsmen use solutions to uncover new territory, and problem solving and problem finding are intimately related in their mind.

Sennett suggests the intimate connection between imagination and bodily practices. The traditional Japanese point of view is well aligned with Sennett's argument. Moreover, the Japanese perspective stresses 'the spirit of crafts'. I had interviewed several craftsmen what are their motivations and what are the meaning of acquiring the skills (Goto, 2013). Their answers are below.

- Craftsmanship should not be understood superficially. Crafts are embedded with deep meaning.
- The spirit behind the skills should be passed on from generation to generation.
- Tradition is a source of innovation. Craftsmen create new products using traditional skills. Professional craftsmen make things fast and perfect. Acquiring skills in youth is important.
- When a craftsman makes a perfect product that meets his standards, he feels deep satisfaction.
- Through learning traditional skills, craftsmen mastered the perception for judging quality of crafts.

The interview shows the integrity of the hand, head, and spirit in craftsmanship. Craftsmen strongly care about the quality of products. The statement that traditional skills are used for new products and can be a source of innovation is important.

## (2) History of defining arts and crafts in Japan<sup>1</sup>

Craft is not just humdrum work in which craftsmen make the same products without thinking. In the West, the arts are assumed to be highly creative but crafts are not. However, arts and crafts were not regarded as separate until 1868 in Japan. It took long time to separate arts from crafts in Japan. In this session, I quickly looked at the history of the definitions of crafts, fine arts, and industrial design in Japan. Over the course of this history, the concept of 'economic crafts', which are distinguished from artistic crafts and manufacturing, was established.

Japan did not have the word "arts" (*Bijutsu*) until 1868 when the country was opened up. Instead, crafts encompassed paintings, pottery, dying, textiles, Japanese lacquerware, goldsmith, and the others.

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<sup>1</sup> This session owes much to Mori (2009) for providing knowledge and insight. Mori (2009) explores the history of crafts in Japan and investigates the thoughts behind them.

In Japanese, the word for crafts is *Kougei*. Both of the characters used to construct this word refer to skills acquired through long training (Mori, 2009). There was no hierarchy between arts and crafts. After the opening of Japan in 1868, the government started to display traditional Japanese crafts at international expositions. Then, people recognized the concept of arts.

It was difficult to establish the concept of arts. It took almost thirty years. Finally, paintings, artistic crafts, and sculpture were defined as fine arts. Then, crafts were divided into two categories: artistic crafts and industrial crafts. However, the border between them was vague.

Crafts were important products for export in Japan at the beginning of the Meiji era (1868~). Therefore, design was necessary to make crafts sophisticated. Painters of Japanese paintings (*Nihonga*) provided designs for dying, pottery, and textiles in Kyoto, where these traditional crafts have long history. Craftsmen improved their skills with those designs. For painters who lost their patrons with the collapse of the social ranks of Samurai and Court-noble, providing design was a good opportunity to earn money (Yoshinobu and Daicho, 2018).

At the Vienna World's Fair in 1873, Japanese traditional crafts were admired as Japonism. However, when the boom of Japonism was gone, Japanese crafts displayed at the Paris World's Fair in 1878 were strongly criticized. The critics said that they were industrial products rather than arts. Furthermore, the products displayed at the Paris World's Fair in 1889 were strongly criticized for having old-fashioned designs (Mori, 2009).

One reason behind this criticism was that success at the Vienna World's Fair in 1873 prevented innovation of crafts. The other reason might be that the concept of fine arts in Japan was not fully established and so the displayed crafts were assumed to be industrial products. Japanese people did not have enough knowledge of Western art history or fine art techniques. As a result, it was difficult to show creativity of crafts in the context of Western art history. Through these experiences, the government changed its cultural policy to catch up with "Western fine arts". Artists started to learn Western techniques and Western styles of art, which are quite different from Japanese paintings. Two kinds of paintings—western-style paintings and Japanese-style paintings including Japanese prints—have coexisted in Japan.

On the other hand, the concept of crafts was well developed. First, artistic crafts were separated from crafts. Second, economic crafts and manufacturing were separated. At the beginning of the Meiji Era (1868~), Japan was a backward country in terms of manufacturing. Technology was not yet developed at that time. Most products were made by hand using simple tools. Therefore, crafts products and

manufacturing products are almost the same.

After the technologies were introduced, crafts were divided into economic crafts and manufacturing. Economic crafts are different from artistic crafts. The prices of artistic crafts are high. On the contrary, the prices of economic crafts are relatively low. Products of economic crafts were used for everyday life. However, they have beauty, called the 'beauty of use'.

Hisashi Matsuoka, who advocated economic crafts, found the usefulness of German product design. According to his analysis, German product design was leading the way in industrial development and exports. In 1921, The Tokyo High School of Crafts was established to develop economic crafts. Mr. Matsuoka was a first principal of the school. Economic crafts are assumed to be combination of art and technology and were expected to enrich daily life (Mori, 2009).

Artistic crafts are aesthetic creations, whereas economic crafts are functional. However, economic crafts include beauty of use. If economic crafts lack design and beauty, they would not survive in the competitive global market where consumer tastes are highly developed. The Tokyo High School of Crafts had played important role in developing economic crafts. Matsuoka emphasized originality and usefulness. (Mori, 2009).

### 3. Policy and education for crafts

#### (1) Cultural policy for intangible cultural heritage

Just five years after the end of World War II, in 1950, the law for preserving cultural heritage was established. The policy for cultural heritage includes tangible and intangible heritages. Intangible heritage is defined as skills of traditional performing arts and traditional crafts. The policy stresses the importance of skills. Intangible heritage policy targets skills of 'traditional crafts', not crafts in general. Intangible heritage should have historical and aesthetic value.

The reason why intangible heritage policy includes crafts was that manufacturing developed but the traditional skills of crafts began disappearing. For example, paper manufacturing developed using technology, whereas Japanese handmade paper made from plant fibers diminished. However, Japanese handmade paper has distinguished historical and cultural value. Thus, it became a target of preservation. The traditional skills of pottery, dying, Japanese lacquerware, metalworking, wood and bamboo crafts, and doll making are addressed as intangible heritage.

In 1954, Living National Heritage was established. A Living National Treasure is a person who carries

important traditional skills from the past to the future. A person recognized as a Living National Treasure receives \$20,000 per year for educating young craftsmen in order to pass on traditional skills. The payment of \$20,000 is not an award, it must be used for education. The number of Living National Treasures of Crafts was 176 in 2017. Cominelli and Greffe (2013) argue that the principle behind the Living National Treasure system is a possible policy for transmitting these skills. This is true. However, the number of recognized Living National Treasure is very limited because of the limited budget of the Agency for Cultural Affairs in Japan. It hardly covers all crafts and craftsmen to allow them to survive. Besides the targets of the policy are traditional artistic crafts.

## (2) Higher education system for crafts

As mentioned above, the Tokyo High School of Crafts was established for develop economic crafts in 1921. After World War II, it was absorbed into the Faculty of Engineering of Chiba National University in 1951, where it became a part of industrial design. On the other hand, Tokyo University of the Arts has a tradition of researching and teaching artistic crafts.

Therefore, the crafts education after World War II seems to be divided into artistic crafts and industrial design. The border between them, which is economic crafts, was neglected in Tokyo. In contrast, Kanazawa College of Arts was established to supply craftsmen in the region in 1946. Kyoto Institute of Technology was established in 1948 to research and teach crafts (Mori, 2009). Both Kanazawa and Kyoto have a long tradition of crafts.

Many schools for teaching specific techniques for crafts are supported by regional and local governments. However, these are not colleges or universities. They are rather practical, embodying the idea that crafts are hand labor.

## (3) Economic policy for crafts

### (3)-1 Policy aim

The Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries was established in 1974. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is entrusted with the promotion of craft industries. The rationale for the promotion of the traditional crafts industries is that they can enrich people's lives and stimulate regional economic development. This might seem to overlap with the duties of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, but the two organizations have different policy aims: The Agency for Cultural Affairs focuses on the cultural aspect of craft, while METI focuses on the economic and industrial aspects of crafts and promotes regional traditional craft industries and their trade.

The Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries addresses 225 traditional craft goods produced in specific districts. The law promotes only crafts considered to be traditional, but a given craft can be a target of both intangible cultural heritage policy and the industrial policy of METI, so there can be overlap.

To be designated as a traditional craft under the law, goods must meet the following five conditions:

1. The craftwork is used in everyday life.
2. Main production processes affecting quality must be performed by hand.
3. The craftwork is produced by traditional skills and expertise passed on for more than one hundred years.
4. The primary materials have been used for more than one hundred years.
5. The crafts industry should be concentrated in a specific regional district.

Two elements are critical to sustaining traditional craft industries: inheritance of skills and developing craft industry regions. The Association for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries cooperates with METI, local governments, and regional craft unions, and certifies traditional craftsmen. Certification requires at least twelve years of work experience in a district specialized in a specific craft industry and passing an examination.

### (3)-2 How to promote clustered crafts industries

Traditional craft industries tend to cluster, and craft districts play important roles and functions. The functions of craft districts include the following:

1. Skills can be passed on within the district. Expertise and knowledge spread within the district, encouraging innovation.
2. Small companies cooperate and compete in these districts, and the resulting “flexible specialization” helps to adjust to consumer demands.
3. Districts can establish a brand.
4. Traditional craft districts comprise craftsmen, small- and medium-sized companies, and wholesalers.

METI subsidizes 225 production unions and associations for traditional craft goods in their production districts. Notably, individual craftsmen do not receive METI subsidies. The aim of METI subsidies include the following:

1. education in craft skills aimed at developing successors for traditional crafts;

2. archiving of skills;
3. research on acquiring materials for traditional crafts;
4. marketing to increase demand for traditional crafts; and
5. creation of new designs.

### (3)-2 Consequences of the economic policy for crafts

Despite the policy, the output of traditional crafts has decreased since 1975. The output of traditional crafts in 2009 was a quarter of what it was in 1975. The number of enterprises and employees has also decreased dramatically. The output of traditional textiles decreased rapidly, whereas the output of traditional pottery and traditional Japanese lacquerware increased until the beginning of the 1990s and then decreased. The decrease in the output of traditional pottery is slower than that of traditional textiles.

METI points out three problems. The first is decreased demand for traditional crafts products. The second is low productivity because traditional crafts products are made by hand. Traditional materials and skills are costly. Furthermore, complicated production processes take time and the scale of enterprises is small. The third problem is a decrease in the number of craftsmen, especially in the younger generation.

Table 1 shows the number of certified craftsmen by age, as of 2010<sup>2</sup>:

Table 1

Age	Number	Percentage
30–39	98	2.2%
40–49	424	9.5%
50–59	916	20.6%
60–69	1483	33.4%
70–79	1178	26.5%
80+	342	7.7%

These numbers show that most craftsmen are aged 60 years or older, and there are relatively few young craftsmen. In 2010, there were 4,441 certified craftsmen, including 569 women. Young

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<sup>2</sup> As described in *Economics of Creative Industries, Contract, Copyright and Tax Incentives* (Goto, 2013), I obtained these figures through an interview at METI.



women are increasingly interested in craftwork and undergoing training. This is a good sign for the sustainability of crafts.

Cultural policy for intangible heritage is important to preserve the skills of crafts. However, the number of Living National Treasures and the system's budget are limited. The policy focuses on artistic crafts that have distinguished historical and cultural value. So, crafts for daily use are outside the scope of the policy.

The economic policy focuses on traditional crafts for daily use and aims to promote craft districts. Despite the policy, the output of traditional crafts and the number of craftsmen have decreased.

#### 4. Case study: Hasami ware in Hasami Town

The output of pottery has decreased slower than that of the traditional textiles. There are several different pottery regions and districts. The type of traditional pottery with the highest production volume is Mino ware, which is produced in the Mino region of Gifu Prefecture, near Nagoya City. The second is Arita ware, which is produced in the Arita region of Saga Prefecture, on Kyusyu Island. The third is Hasami ware, which is produced in the Hasami region of Nagasaki Prefecture, on Kyusyu Island.

Mino region and Arita region have Living National Treasures. At the same time, the mass production of pottery is highly developed in Mino region. Pottery from Arita is highly sophisticated. Yamada (2013) investigated pottery regions and districts in Japan<sup>3</sup>, including the Arita region, which was established four hundred years ago. Arita is the name of both a town and its surrounding region, which includes 230 companies and families that own the kilns and produce porcelain ware.

Yamada (2013) also analyzed the history and industrial organization of the Arita pottery region, and found that three types of kiln coexist. The first type is large kilns that have adopted mass production systems using machines and division of labor. The second is mid-sized kilns like the Imaemon kiln and the Kakiemon kiln. These kilns pass on the skills of Living National Treasures. The third is independent, small kilns. The first type forms the economic foundation of the region, and the second type establishes the strong brand image of Arita pottery.

The Hasami pottery district is located in Hasami Town near Arita. There no Living National Treasure

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<sup>3</sup> Yamada,K.(2013) *Business system and Entrepreneurship in the traditional production center*, Yuhikaku

who makes Hasami ware. Hasami ware is made by traditional skills and is used in daily life. Hasami ware was sold as Arita ware for a long time. It did not have its own name and brand. A hundred kilns, fifty trading companies, and small production studios cooperate without a hierarchy<sup>4</sup>.

The policy of indicating the geographical origin of Hasami ware became strong in the 2000s. Kilns and trading companies in Hasami Town decided to become independent from Arita. Hasami ware became an original name and brand in 2007. However, they faced an identity problem. It was difficult to define the identity of Hasami ware because kilns had produced pottery at the request of the Arita region. Arita has a strong identity in terms of color, design, and technique. In contrast, Hasami ware did not have specific features. They are economic crafts for daily use rather than artistic crafts.

Innovative kilns and trading companies started to display their products at the largest pottery fair 'Tableware Festival' in Tokyo where consumers with sophisticated taste buy their products directly. Trading companies themselves create new products. Kilns and trading companies have established the Hasami brand as "casual and rich", which corresponds well with contemporary lifestyles. Hasami ware are made by traditional skills, but the design and concept of the products are innovative. The kilns and trading company propose new lifestyles using Hasami ware.

The union plays an important role in exchanging information and promoting the Hasami brand. Students from various universities of arts and crafts come to learn traditional pottery-making skills. Young artists, various craftsmen, and designers are attracted to the Hasami district and take up residence there to work. The union for promoting Hasami ware introduced tourism in the district.

The output of Hasami ware increased until 1991. After 1991, the output began on a long-term downward trend. However, output increased in 2003, 2005, and 2008. Hasami ware is steady compare with other traditional crafts products. Young people enter kilns that make final products and trading companies, whereas small studios that make white earthenware ready for color and baking have difficulty getting young successors. The production process is highly divided in Hasami ware. Division of labor increases efficiency. Each craftsman handles one production process. The certification of traditional craftsmen requires at least twelve years of experiences.

The skills of craftsmen ensure the quality of the products. Making white earthenware ready for color,

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<sup>4</sup> I visited Hasami on 26 March 2018 and interviewed members of the union that promotes Hasami ware and the companies.

painting, and baking requires the skills of craftsmen. Creative design cannot be implemented without craftsmen's skills. Therefore, the lack of successors for these steady processes is a serious problem.

Despite this problem, the Hasami district has been revitalized since the late 2000s. One reason is good collaboration among kilns and trading companies located in Hasami. Trading companies in Hasami are very strong and openminded. One of them has several branches worldwide, with locations in Tokyo, the United States, Singapore, and the Netherlands. This trading company collaborates with foreign designers, produces new designs, and distributes Hasami ware in domestic and global markets. The other trading companies collaborate with innovative craft retailers and produce original pottery for them. In addition, the trading companies invite kilns to the Tableware Festival in Tokyo. Kilns that make Hasami ware can meet face-to-face with consumers and understand their tastes. This learning process could improve the design and quality of Hasami ware. Without these trading companies located in the Hasami district, kilns could not expand their markets.

The power of trading companies near kilns and good collaboration between kilns and trading companies are strengths of the Hasami district.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper examined the effectiveness of intangible heritage policy and industrial policy for crafts in Japan. The intangible heritage policy and Living National Treasure system are important for preserving traditional craft skills. However, the number of Living National Treasure is limited. Moreover, products made by Living National Treasure are extremely expensive. They are distinguished artistic crafts rather than crafts for daily use.

Japan's economic policy aims to preserve traditional crafts for daily use and promote clustering of crafts. However, a consequence is that the output of traditional crafts has decreased since the policy was established. These two aims of this policy are important but are not enough to find new market.

Redefining traditional crafts, I looked at the history of crafts, arts, and manufacturing in Japan. Fine arts were separated from crafts. Crafts were divided into artistic crafts, economic crafts, which are used in daily life, and manufacturing. Hasami ware falls under economic crafts rather than artistic crafts. However, original designs of Hasami ware are created based on both tradition and an established brand. The white color of the pottery and its sturdy design for daily use are a basis of originality. Artists, craftsmen, and designers attracted to the Hasami district create an atmosphere of innovation. The system for indicating the geographical origin of products has played an important role in establishing

the identity of the products. This is a good case for reconsidering the creativity of traditional crafts that are used in daily life, not for aesthetic purposes.

From consideration of this case, two policy proposals can be made. First, the economic (industrial) policy for traditional crafts should promote collaboration between kilns and trading companies located near kilns. Much research has focused on the production side. However, in the case study of Hasami district, distribution side which is constructed by innovative trading companies plays important role to stimulate innovation of Hasami ware. Crafts are a part of creative industries, which are a combination of creativity and business. Hasami kilns on the production side collaborate with trading companies on the business side, and in this way, they have expanded their domestic and global market.

Second, the industrial policy for traditional crafts should take into account new perspectives, such as the indication of geographical origin and intellectual property. However, a lack of successors for skills is serious problem. In particular, skills for making the foundation of products have hardly attracted young people. Further research is required.

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