

Visualising Oriental Crafts: Contested Notion of ‘Japaneseness’ and the Crafts of the Japanese Empire

Yuko KIKUCHI

Research Centre for Transnational Art Identity and Nation (TrAIN), University of the Arts London

I. Introduction

As the Japanese empire expanded into the North East China in the 1930s, Japan opened its interest in the cultures of greater China including Taiwan. Japan’s continuous obsession with the idea of the ‘Japaneseness’ in its culture since the 19th century had to be redefined as part of the ‘Orientalness’ rather than the antithesis or as a variation of the ‘Occidentalness’, trying to locate its identity in-between the Occident and the Orient. It opened up the binary positioning of Japan and the Occident into the three-way positioning of the Occident-Japan-Orient. Publications on ‘Shina’ (China) and ‘Hokushi’ (North China/Manchuria) drastically increased during this period due to the urgency for a national understanding of China, while Taiwan also re-emerged as an important base for southward advancement. The clear shift of political and general interest from the West to the East occurred. In visual culture, the formal idea and debate on the ‘Japaneseness’ also matured during this period. Japanese tradition was rediscovered—experiencing a ‘neo moment’, and Japanisation of foreign media reached an interesting form of modern hybrid. The idea of hybrid in this period is not restricted to a hybrid of Japan and the Orient (*wayō secchū*) like in the 19th century to the early 20th century, but a hybrid of multiple and different shades of Orientals. My interest is in how Japan encountered these multiple Orientals with a wider notion of Japan as part of the Orient, and in this process how Japan restructured its relation with and interest in Taiwan when the overwhelming new cultural interest in North East China/Manchuria consumed it. This paper is an attempt to deal with this issue through the window of crafts, in particular, daily utilitarian crafts and craft-design for export, which became an increasingly important area through which Japan could articulate the ‘Japaneseness’ during the 1930s to 1945.

II. The Context of Modern Craft Development

In the craft field, the 1920s period is characterised by three major streams of development and division through systematic institutionalisation. The first is the flourishing of ‘studio crafts’- the modern western idea of ‘studio craft’ that is based on the idea of crafts as individual and original artistic creativity. The 1920s saw a phenomenal rise in the birth of modern craft artist groups.¹ The climax was the creation of the ‘Craft Art’

1 The Japan Craft Art Association (1926), *Mukei* (Non Form, 1927), *Kōjinsha* (1927), *Keiji Kōbō* (Ideal Form Atelier, 1928),

section in the most prestigious national exhibition, Teikoku Bijutsu Tenrankai or Teiten (The Imperial Fine Arts Exhibition) in 1928. This was a watershed in the craft field in that it had been recognised within the modern fine art centered system that derived from the western system. The second stream of development is the Mingei 民芸 movement—a Japanese version of the Arts & Crafts movement led by elite intellectuals such as Yanagi Sōetsu (Muneyoshi) 柳宗悦 based on ‘discovery’ of what he named ‘mingei’ or folkcrafts as ‘innate and original’ Japanese essential beauty and creation of new folkcrafts for modern ‘Japanese-style’ life.² Yanagi’s seminal writing *Kōgei no Michi* was published in 1927–28. The third stream of development is that of industrial crafts and daily life craft design for export. This is directly related to the national trade and economic policies that dated from the 19th century, but systematic development emerged when the dedicated national design research institute Kōgei Shidōsho (工芸指導所 Industrial Arts Research Institute: IARI) was established in 1927 in Sendai. This institution trained the people who became the first generation of Japanese industrial designers after the War. It was also centered on the national exhibitions for export design. Originally starting as Nōten or Nō Shōmushō Bijutsu Kōgei Tenrankai (農商務省美術工芸展覧会 Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce Art Craft Exhibition) in 1913, it later changed to Shōkōshō Kōgei Tenrankai (商工省工芸展覧会 Ministry of Trade and Industry Craft Exhibition). Eventually this exhibition merged with Shōkōshō Yushutsu Kōgei Tenrankai (商工省輸出工芸展覧会 Ministry of Trade and Industry Export Craft Exhibition since 1933) to form Bōekikyoku Kōgeihin Yushutsu Shinkōten (貿易局工芸品輸出振興展 Trade Bureau Craft Export Promotion Exhibition) in 1939. These three streams or divisions are artificial in terms of visual cultures because the activities of studio craft artists, the people involved in the Mingei movement and designers for export crafts often overlap. Nevertheless, these divisions were institutionalised and socially categorised separately.

Toward the late 1930s to 1945, the first stream—the studio craft movements—diminished, and the second and third strands were contained tightly under national control in order to ensure their work was directed at war mobilisation. The material controls included the prohibition of the use of metals for crafts in 1938, the ban on making luxury crafts (aka 7.7 prohibition order) in 1942, and the total government intervention in 1942 through the creation of the Great Japan Craft Association (later to become the Japan Art Patriotic Association). The purpose of this association was to register all artists and craft makers so that those who were regarded as having proper ‘art’ making and craft ‘skills’ could be protected for the sake of national tradition, while using rationed art materials in order to work for specific purposes to meet the nation’s need only. Therefore, the freedom of artists and craft makers was completely removed. On the other hand, during this period, the second stream (the Mingei movement) became an important contributor to the cultural project for the Japanese Empire, while the third stream of export design received the most investment and became the most focused national craft agenda in Japan. The Mingei movement expanded its agenda to

Kinomesha (Leaf Bud Society, 1927) to name a few.

2 For the Mingei movement, see Yuko Kikuchi, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism*.

embrace the discovery of folkcrafts of Japan’s empire, in particular, in North China/Manchuria and Taiwan in the 1940s, and their activities peaked in 1943–44 during the period when the war intensified. During the period of the Japanese empire, the Mingei movement cooperated with national projects for studying and collecting indigenous folkcrafts that would inspire and suggest ideas for the creation of new Manchurian and Taiwanese crafts for domestic consumption and export. The Mingei movement was also actively engaged in propaganda efforts to Euroamerica during the prewar period, exhibiting Mingei objects at international exhibitions such as the one in New York organised by the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (国際文化振興会 The Society for International Cultural Relations) in 1938. It also disseminated through a propaganda magazine such as *Nippon*, Yanagi’s politicised view of Japan as a ‘kingdom of righteousness by beauty’ where ordinary people like Yanagi having a fulfilled, simple and healthy life despite the country being at war. The third stream (export crafts) saw the most thriving activities and Kōgei Shidōsho (Industrial Arts Research Institute: IARI) rose to an important organisation that would continue the development of export craft design and carry out the urgent national agenda, through which export crafts were described as a ‘weapon of international economic war.’³ The Ministry of Trade and Industry and IARI even invited three eminent designers: Bruno Taut (German architect-designer) in 1933–36, Tilly Prill-Schloemann (German interior designer) in 1939 and Charlotte Perriand (Swiss-French designer) in 1941 to improve export design at the IARI. The turning point for the craft activities was the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 when the development of export crafts became the single intensive national agenda, while the free creative studio crafts movement suffered the most and ceased activity until after the war. Professor Sugiyama Toyokichi 杉山豊桔 of the progressive national college of craft design—Tokyo Higher School of Industrial Arts (東京高等工芸学校 Tōkyō Kōtō Kōgei Gakkō), states in 1937, ‘The purpose of all crafts...is for export crafts for the promotion of Japan’s trade...thus our design, skills and production have to be all focused for export crafts.’⁴ The interest of the Mingei movement on ‘folk art’ and that of the industrial export craft movement on ‘export and daily life products’ were merged into the idea of ‘daily life folk products for export’, and both movements continued to be concerned about Euroamerica for Japan’s cultural identity and export.

III. The Context of Export Crafts

In the 1930s the marketing business of export crafts was more centralised and focused. The Nihon Yushutsu Kōgei Rengōkai (日本輸出工芸連合会 The Japan Export Craft Association) was founded within the Ministry of Trade and Industry to organise craft exhibitions abroad, and in 1933 this association was restructured as an independent organisation outside the ministry to expand activities in order to organise craft exhibitions abroad, organise exhibition space in European and American oceanliners, disseminate information, and act as an agent for export crafts. Export design also received more focused attention through Yushutsu Kōgei Tenrankai (輸出工芸展覧会 Export Craft Exhibition) later called Bōekikyoku Kōgeihin

3 Kunii Kitarō, ‘Honpō kōgyō no kōeiteki shinten o nozomu,’ 2.

4 Sugiyama Toyokichi, *Yushutsu shiryō toshitenō Hokushi kōgei*, 3.

Yushutsu Shinkōten (貿易局工芸品輸出展覧会 Trade Bureau Craft Export Promotion Exhibition) in 1933–1941.

Export crafts to the US have been part of the major national agenda and the national exhibitions were surprisingly active up until around 1940 just before the outbreak of the war between Japan and the US. Japan as a nation actively attended the San Francisco Golden Gate International Exhibition and New York International Exhibition in 1939. The Japan Export Crafts Association funded by the Ministry of Trade and Industry opened a marketing and sales office and created exhibition space for Export Craft in the International House of Rockefeller Center in New York in 1939. The Ministry of Trade and Industry and IARI sent a metal craft artist and craft critic Takamura Toyochika 高村豊周 and National Ceramic Institute designer Mizumachi Wasaburō 水町和三郎 to North, Central and South America for research and marketing of crafts in 1940. Japan's export to the US, in particular Japanese ceramic products, including copies of western products, steadily increased, but the US sensing a threat to US manufacturers, implemented control and restrictions. Around 1938 protectionism increased in the States and large anti-Japan product movements promoted the non-buying of Japanese products,⁵ and Japan had to find other ways of attracting the US market with products with new 'Oriental taste', and this situation created the debate on what is the 'Japaneseness' and 'new Japanese taste'.

In China, although the Manchurian incident in 1931 triggered anti-Japanese trade movement for a while, it saw China's own development of light industry and the advancement of American, British and German industry, and trade with Japan was also gradually restored until it fell again because of the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. As the war broke, the market became restricted to Asia and the Japanese empire, and therefore development of new crafts for domestic consumption in Asia and for the market of the expanding Japanese empire became necessary. This tense political climate began to reflect on the craft world, and discussion on crafts was increasingly politicised as issues such as *Jikyoku to Kōgei* (時局と工芸 The State of Affairs and Crafts), *Shintaisei to Kōgei* (新体制と工芸 The New Order and Crafts) which began to appear after 1937. It was argued that trade to the Central and South regions of China should be covered by trade with the North East where Japan had its power base, while a shift of focus towards the South Seas was also discussed. For example, the export expansion plan through centralised Tianjin Trade Agent of the Japanese Ministry of Trade and Industry was announced in 1938.⁶ Therefore the focus was increasingly on the development of production in North East China and the South Seas.

IV. 1938 Round Table Discussion on 'Japaneseness' of Export Crafts

A radio programme was broadcast in 1938 comprising a round table discussion on export crafts. The six panellists included the Director of IARI Kunii Kitarō 国井喜太郎, three professors of the Tokyo School

5 See Yuko Kikuchi, "Russel Wright and Japan: Bridging Japonisme and Good Design through Craft Design" for further information.

6 'Hokushi honpōhin yunyū keikaku,' 121.

of Fine Art - painter Wada Sanzō 和田三造, metal craft artist Takamura Toyochika 高村豊周, lacquer artist Yamazaki Kakutarō 山崎覚太郎, the Managing Director of Japan Ceramic Co. Iino Ippei 飯野逸平, and the Managing Director of international art dealer Yamanaka Co. Okada Tomoji 岡田友次.⁷ The central topic of this discussion was how to break off the current stagnant and declining situation of export craft after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, and what necessary radical innovation and strategy should be considered. The panellists discussed 'Japaneseness' as a crucial issue.

Takamura starts the discussion by saying that the 'Japaneseness' for the first phase of export crafts in the Meiji period was a passive response to satisfy the curiosity of westerner's taste for exotic 'Japanese' by exporting, for example, Satsuma, Kutani and Imari wares. It was a temporary curiosity and therefore they soon got bored. Now we are currently in the second phase, and we have to consciously and proactively design 'Japaneseness' by taking a long-term view. Moreover this 'Japaneseness' should not be only be understood by Japanese, but also it needs to be sufficiently modern and universal to fit the 'demands and taste of the people of different cultures and lifestyles'. For example, although the patterns of pine, bamboo and plum do not have any auspicious meaning to them, they can be aesthetically rearranged to cater to international taste, or Japan's unique techniques for lacquer work need to be strengthened by modern scientific research to be adaptable for use in any climate in the world. Takamura's view was summarised by Yamazaki as 'restructuring Japanese motifs with a new international sense.' Other suggestions include foreign experts' advice and selection of Japanese crafts; studies on classical fine art and collection of folk utilitarian crafts which the Mingei movement had been conducting; and more active involvement of designers for design ideas and national agencies which centrally market the new products with 'Japaneseness.'

V. Japanese Views on 'Chineseness' and 'Taiwanese' in Crafts of China (North East/Manchuria) and Taiwan in Relation to 'Japaneseness'

As this round table discussion exemplifies, the question of 'Japaneseness' became a crucial issue for export design for Euroamerica. Furthermore, 'Japaneseness' was questioned in relation to 'Chineseness' and 'Taiwanese', and as part of 'Orientalness'. I will discuss this issue by examining different views on crafts of China (North China/Manchuria) and Taiwan by Japanese craft and design experts.

1. Colonial Official's View

1a. North China/Manchuria

Colonial official materials set the tone for mainstream colonial discourse that would justify Japanese imperialism. The characteristic discourse claims that, despite its glorious past, contemporary China has degenerated, therefore deserves colonisation. For example, the official guide on Manners and Customs of Manchukuo published in 1935 by the Manchurian Information Bureau, says of Manchurian folkcrafts that compared to the pinnacle of sophisticated tradition in Chinese art provided by their ancestors, Manchukuo

⁷ Nihon yushutsu kōgei rengōkai, 'Yushutsu kōgei o kataru.'

is filled with ‘hardly cultured’ people who like art to be ‘simply practical and of low class taste’, to be ‘primitive’ and ‘childish’ and inferior to that of Southern Chinese people.⁸ Also when the ‘Manchurian Folkcrafts’ collected by the South Manchurian Railways were exhibited in Japan in 1939, similar discriminatory and derogatory tones were expressed.⁹ As the title ‘Dozoku’ (derogatory term for indigenous) shows, discussions were focused on ‘primitiveness’, ‘lack of sophistication’, ‘lack of materials’, and ‘lack of dexterity’. For example, they took the example of a red lacquered toiletry case with a mirror, describing it as ‘typically Manchurian’ with ‘gory colours and rough finish’ showing ‘Manchurian people’s penchant for a mirror as a sign of the low class culture’ and incomparable to Japanese folkcrafts which are characterised by a variety of materials and sophistication in form.¹⁰

1b. Taiwan

In comparison to the respectable, old but currently stagnant image of ‘Shina’ – a vague notion of mainland China, the general notion of Taiwan is young and modern. Although Taiwan had been a Japanese colony since the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and a limited form of craft industry had already developed, Taiwan’s craft industry re-emerged after the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 as an important ‘nanshin no kichi’ or the base for Southward advancement.¹¹ Unlike the Shanghai and Beijing areas where British and European investment in the craft industry had developed carpet and lace industries, there was no large-scale craft industry in Taiwan before Japanese colonisation. Therefore, Taiwan became a laboratory and was regarded as a *tabula rasa* for experimentation in developing new crafts for trade in the South Seas.¹² Although Taiwan has been regarded as a periphery of China with a short history and therefore culturally of little importance, the Japanese found it to be exciting, principally because of its ‘southern exotic’ image.

2. Mingei Specialist’s View

2a. North China/Manchuria

It was mainly through Yoshida Shōya 吉田璋也 that the Mingei movement branched and flourished in the North China/Manchuria area during the 1940s. Yoshida is described by the IARI designer Koike Shinji who visited him in Beijing in 1942 as the only activist of the craft movement in China who was ‘trying to develop craft industry as a side business for peasants.’¹³ Indeed, he was the most influential force for establishment of various colonial organisations and projects such as *Manshū Kōgei Kyōkai* (満州工芸協会 Association for Manchurian Craft Artists, 1942), *Kōa Zōkei Bunka Renmei* (興亜造形文化連盟 Association for Prosperity Asian Creative Art Culture, 1942), *Manshū Mingei Chōsadan* (満州民

8 *Manshū Jijō Annaisho* ed., *Manshūkoku no shūzoku*, 113.

9 ‘Manshū dozoku kōgeihin o kakomu zadankai’, 320–323.

10 *Ibid.*

11 For example, Shinji Saitō, ‘Nanshin no kichi Taiwan’.

12 Toyoguchi Kappei, ‘Taiwan kōgei zatsuroku’, 194.

13 Koike Shinji, ‘Shina kōgei bunka no genjō—zoku’, 330.

芸調査団 Manchurian Folkcrafts Research Mission, 1943) and a series of exhibitions of his collection of old Mingei and new Mingei produced under his direction, as well as the blueprint for Manshū Mingei Kyōkai (満州民芸協会 Manchurian Folkcrafts Association) and Manshū Mingeikan (満州民芸館 Manchurian Folkcrafts Museum, 1944).

Yoshida was by profession an ear, nose and throat specialist, and was drafted into the North China Dispatch Army as an army surgeon in 1938. After being discharged from the army he lived in Beijing as an elite Japanese working for a Japanese hospital as well as for the army as a welfare and industry officer until 1945. During his period in Beijing, as an enthusiast of folkcrafts, he enjoyed leading a creative life combining medical responsibilities with a ‘cultivated Japanese life using and surrounded by local Chinese folkcrafts’ at his home with his family.¹⁴ Supporting his calls for the ‘Japanese mission to preserve’ the disappearing ‘handicrafts created by the Chinese tradition and blood on the land of China,’¹⁵ he picked out and collected these examples of the dying folk crafts from the plethora of European copies manufactured in Shanghai and the low quality cheap Japanese daily products that were flooding the market in China. His collection comprises either antiques or items actually used by street vendors, but no longer manufactured. His taste is typically that of Japanese Mingei specialists —natural, rough, simple colour and design. Yoshida was attracted to the dynamic curvy forms which were organic and in his view often nonchalantly made. He also remarked that they were typically of the type ‘only Chinese people can make’ as in the example of the large mixing bowls,¹⁶ or a ‘a [western] frying pan has no place if you see a [Chinese] iron wok which has a beautiful round shape while the ladle also has a beautiful shape given the lovely grip at the handle.’¹⁷

Echoing Yoshida’s tone, Yanagi also stressed that ‘Chineseness’ suggested ‘strong, sharp, big, sturdy’ characteristics which are the reflection of that nation’s ‘dynamic and severe natural climate’ and ‘vastly long history.’¹⁸ Among the favourites of Yoshida and the Mingei collectors, we can find a persimmon brown glazed Tangshan’s (唐山) water jar, Xinglongshan’s (興隆山) small rough bowl with cobalt drawing used by street food vendors selling to coolies, *Yinhuaban* (印花板) or indigo dyed cotton textiles or cotton clothes and fabric accessories with cotton embroideries. Yoshida had a strong preference for indigo and cobalt blue



Fig. 1 *Yinhuaban* on the cover of *Gekkan Mingei* 4-5 (1942)

14 ‘Hokushi no mingei’ (1938), in Shōya Yoshida and Tottori Mingei Kyōkai, *Yoshida Shōya: Mingei no prodyūsā*, 130–131.

15 *Ibid.*, 96–97.

16 *Ibid.*, 97.

17 *Ibid.*, 101.

18 Sōetsu Yanagi, ‘Hokushi no mingei’ (1941), in *Yanagi Sōetsu zenshū*, 15, 569–574.



Fig. 2 A tea cup and saucer manufactured in Jingxing pottery, *Gekkan Mingei* 1-1 (1942): 24

on white base and natural subdued colours such as red, brown, yellow and green created by natural vegetable dye, alongside a strong dislike of gold and silver, or the contemporary gory bright Chinese colours both in respect of overglaze in pottery, or in embroidery. He liked *Yinhuaban* textiles and the stencils that have bold and simple patterns with sturdiness.¹⁹ Embroideries are another strong area of his collection. He was quite pleased with his nickname Xiuhua Daren (綉花大人 Sir Embroidery) given by the locals after regularly seeing him buying embroidered textile crafts at antique and second hand markets. He strongly prefers the effect of ‘friendly bulkiness’ of cotton thread embroidered on cotton clothes as seen in peasants’ pillows and shoes that categorically differ from ‘disgusting Europeanised’ contemporary embroidery products. He conjectures that western commercialism and science made Chinese people colourblind in modern times, whereas their sense of colours were sophisticated in the premodern period when there were nine categories of indigo blue variations.²⁰ Yoshida’s basic argument is that the ‘Chineseness’ of Chinese tradition was polluted and destroyed by Euroamerican imperialism, and Japan’s role was to restore it.

This Oriental saviour approach is also evident in his mission for creating new Manchurian crafts in the name of *kōmin kōgei* (厚民工芸 welfare crafts), a philanthropic idea of charity, but also a colonial program to further self-sufficiency in Manchuria.²¹ Yoshida initiated a number of projects to support craft-trade in the villages by reviving traditional crafts with Japanese help through ‘acquisition of foreign money to make the Chinese people wealthy.’²² The establishment of the ‘Kahoku Kōsei Sangyō Shidōsho’ (華北厚生産業指導所 North China Welfare Industrial Institute) enabled the first project –setting up a women’s embroidery centre in the Shimen (石門) region. A group of women were taught by local women under the direction of Yoshida to embroider handkerchiefs, table cloths, bed covers and handbags by using traditional embroidery stencils, handwoven cotton cloth and vegetable dyed thread that were provided. Women were paid for this work according to the size of the objects produced and the individual skills of the women.²³ Other projects include production of new tableware (bowls, coffee and tea cups, milk pitcher, tobacco set) with simple designs consisting of flower and grass iron glazed decoration at Jingxing (井陘) pottery (Fig 2.), and the production of cotton textiles and carpets with traditional vegetable dyed wool involving young

19 Yoshida Shōya and Tottori Mingei Kyōkai, “Hokushi no atarashiki ifuku” (1941), in *Yoshida Shōya: Mingei no prodyūsā*, Tottori: Tottori Mingei Kyōkai, 1998, 112.

20 Ibid., 106.

21 Ibid., 121–122.

22 Ibid., 115.

23 Five sen for small works, twenty sen for middle size works, and thirty sen for large size works were paid. For further information, see Ryūzaburō Shikiba, ‘Sentō chiku no kōgei undō’.

members of the Mingei movement, such as Yanagi's nephew Yanagi Yoshitaka and Okamura Kichiemon 岡村吉右衛門. These products were sold at the 'Kahoku Seikatsu Kōgei Ten' (華北生活工芸店 North China Household Crafts Shop) in cooperation with Peking Bunka Kyōkai (北京文化協會 the Beijing Cultural Association) and exhibited in China and Japan.²⁴ The projects were carried out in close collaboration with the Japanese colonial policy in the North China/Manchuria and required the involvement of the Japanese army, industrialists and colonial officials.

2b. Taiwan

Yanagi Sōetsu and His Views on Taiwanese Folkcrafts

The view which defines Taiwanese crafts primarily in aesthetic terms was promoted by Yanagi Sōetsu, a leader of the Japanese folkcrafts (Mingei) movement.

Yanagi travelled to Taiwan in 1943 and 'discovered' Taiwanese folkcrafts, which included both aboriginal crafts and Han Taiwanese crafts. Yanagi observed the 'primitive' and 'Oriental' beauty in Taiwanese folkcrafts, and highly prized 'savage textiles' (蕃布[sic] *bampu*), which he collected for his Japan Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo. He wrote that, unlike civilized Japanese, the High Mountain People who 'have not yet lost the primitive nature of making beautiful things'²⁵ in their lives given that 'there is no historical development,'²⁶ could still produce very beautiful textiles. He said that the beauty of these textiles could not be found elsewhere in the world and they should be called *meibutsu gire* 名物裂²⁷ rather than 'primitive' or 'savage' textiles.²⁸ Among Han Taiwanese crafts, Yanagi discussed bamboo crafts with a particular emphasis on their 'healthy'²⁹ beauty. Claiming that 'bamboo only exists in the Orient,'³⁰ Yanagi used metaphors and poetic descriptions such as 'soft,' 'magnificent,' 'straight,' 'pure,' 'faithful,' and 'moralistic' as if to imply that these were the virtues of Oriental people.³¹ The 'enormous power' and 'strength'³² of the bamboo steamers (籃蒸 *lan zheng*), the 'stunning' bamboo houses and bamboo chairs and furniture with the 'sturdiness' and 'natural beauty of bamboo,'³³ were among the bamboo crafts which greatly impressed Yanagi. He gave spe-

24 They were exhibited at the 1st and 2nd 'Pekin shinsaku mingei ten' (Beijing Newly Produced Folkcrafts Exhibition) in 1940 and 1942. They are followed by 'Gendai Kahoku minyō Ten' (Contemporary North-east Folk Pottery Exhibition) in 1942 and 'Kahoku no ryūki ten' (Willow Crafts of the North-east) in 1943.

25 Yanagi Sōetsu, 'Taiwan no mingei ni tsuite' (On Taiwanese Folkcrafts), in Yanagi 1981, vol. 15, 613.

26 Yanagi Sōetsu, 'Taiwan Takasagozoku no orimono' (The Textiles of the Taiwanese Takasago Tribes), in Yanagi 1981, vol. 15, 563.

27 Luxurious fabrics which were imported to Japan from China, India, and other South-eastern countries during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. These were used for covers and bags for the special tea ceremony utensils and for the mounting of scrolls.

28 Yanagi Sōetsu, 'Taiwan Takasagozoku no orimono' (The Textiles of the Taiwanese Takasago Tribes), in Yanagi 1981, vol. 15, 563–64.

29 Yanagi Sōetsu, 'Take no shigoto' (Bamboo Works), in Yanagi 1981, vol. 11, 443.

30 Ibid., 441. In fact, bamboo also exists in Africa and South America.

31 Ibid.

32 Yanagi Sōetsu, 'Taiwan no mingei ni tsuite' (On Taiwanese Folkcrafts). In Yanagi 1981, vol. 15, 602.

33 Ibid., 606–7.

cial significance to bamboo crafts because of their symbolic ‘Orientalness.’ He also referred to the originality of the techniques used for making bamboo crafts, which he believed could not be found ‘anywhere else in the world.’³⁴ The Guanmiao 關廟 village in Tainan, the center for the bamboo crafts, was described by Yanagi as ‘the best and almost ideal craft village in the world,’³⁵ and as ‘utopia in reality’.

Yan Shuilong 顏水龍, a Taiwanese painter/designer and leading figure of the Taiwanese folkcrafts movement, followed Yanagi and adopted similar views with an insider’s empathy towards local matters, and an emphasis on ‘local colour’. When IARI published a special issue focused on Taiwan in 1943,³⁶ Yan was the only Taiwanese writer. He was writing this article as one of the trustees of Taiwan Seikatsu Bunka Shinkōkai (台湾生活文化振興会 Taiwan Household Culture Promotion Council) which was founded in 1943 with the backing of the colonial government.³⁷ The trustees included Kanaseki Takeo 金関丈夫 and Yan Shuilong who were the activists of the Mingei movement in Taiwan. Its aim was described as the ‘elevation and improvement of folk art’ through ‘daily household products’ (日常生活用品 Nichijō Seikatsu Yōhin) to ‘provide strength and enrich the daily life with the East Asian original, healthy, and tastefulness for the people of the nation’ and ‘to protect and develop excellent local folk crafts.’³⁸ This points to how Yan was part of colonial policy. Among Taiwanese crafts, he pointed out that two areas—bamboo crafts and rush and lotus stalk grass crafts—were most promising as they were already successfully developed while they also had Taiwanese ‘local colour’. This is evident in the bamboo crafts industry systematically developed in Guanmiao, as well as the grass production cooperative developed in the Tainan region with a centre in Beimun jun xue jia zhuang 北門郡学甲庄, the annual production of which amounted to 300,000 yen in 1943. He exhibited his design of Dajia grass woven bags at the 1st Exhibition of Household Products for the Nation (国民生活用品展覧会 Kokumin Seikatsu Yōhin Tenrankai) organised by IARI in Tokyo. He also had a big expectation for lacquerware production in Hsinchu and Taichung, both of which benefited from Japanese investment which will be discussed later. Yan concluded that ‘it is a matter of urgency to create national daily products and military products’ by utilising ‘local colour’ as a region of Japan, on account of the local ‘abundant natural resources’, ‘gifted skills’ and ‘available labour.’³⁹

The ‘Japaneseness’ is Intrinsic to ‘Japanese eyes’

In contrast with the emphasis on the lost ‘tradition’ in Chinese/Manchurian crafts, ‘local colour’ was the key term for Taiwanese crafts. As argued in my edited book *Refracted Modernity*,⁴⁰ the notion of ‘local

34 Ibid., 608.

35 *Taiwan nichinichi shinpō* (16 April 1943); Yanagi Sōetsu, ‘Taiwan no mingei ni tsuite’ (On Taiwanese Folkcrafts), in Yanagi 1981, vol. 15, 611.

36 *Kōgei nyūsu*, 12–5 (1943), special issue on Taiwan.

37 The director of this organisation is the colonial government chief of culture and education Nishimura Kōkei and this council’s office is also located in the Colonial-government building.

38 ‘Taiwan no zōkei bunka undō’, *Kōgei nyūsu*, 12–5 (1943): 184–185.

39 Yan Shuilong, ‘Taiwan no kōgei sangyō ni tsuite.’

40 Yuko Kikuchi, *Refracted Modernity: Visual Culture and Identity in Colonial Taiwan*.

colour' was the key issue in the colonial formation of Taiwanese visual culture. The 'local colour' was the politicised colonial cultural discourse which was largely newly invented during the Japanese colonial period. Furthermore, to perceive and construct the lost 'tradition' of China and the 'local colour' of Taiwan, the Mingei supporters often argued it would need what they called 'Japanese eyes', a perspective intrinsic to the Japanese people. Only these 'Japanese eyes' could select objects for preservation and create new healthy and 'correct' daily household products (*生活用品 seikatsu yōhin*) found in the Orient. Yanagi states,

[On the beauty of cobalt glazed plate] The maker is a Chinese person who does not appreciate sophisticated beauty... It is made by none other than a rather uncouth Chinese person... But the Japanese recognise its beauty. They need the eyes of the Japanese to appreciate its beauty.⁴¹

It is the Japanese rather than Chinese people who can recognise the value of Chinese crafts... [and it is] Japanese duty and an act of friendship to promote Chinese innate beauty...and thereby we can develop the innate beauty of the Orient.⁴²

Similarly, for Taiwanese,

They [Taiwanese] create marvellous things without knowing it. That people create things without realising it demands our respect.⁴³

Certainly they [Taiwanese] cannot differentiate good and bad things. The Japanese are the people who discover beauty. Therefore the Japanese have to raise their [Taiwanese] aesthetic sense by displaying beautiful things. It is the responsibility of the Japanese.⁴⁴

Yanagi's racialised and essentialised arguments on the 'Chineseness' and 'Taiwanese' are clearly expressed here. The 'Japaneseness' of the 'Japanese eyes' has a privileged and unique quality that was able to evaluate beauty, but at the same time, what constitutes 'Japanese eyes' is not clear, as it is only able to be understood in terms of the particular objects that they selected and promoted.

3. Designers' Views (IARI and Other)

IARI sent the chief designer Nishikawa Tomotake to Manchuria in 1939, and design critic Koike to

41 Yanagi Sōetsu, 'Sometsuke no kozara' (A Small Cobalt Glazed Plate), in Yanagi 1981, vol. 12: 169–170.

42 Yanagi Sōetsu, 'Hokushi no mingei' (1941), in Yanagi 1981, vol. 15: 574.

43 Yanagi Sōetsu, 'Taiwan no mingei ni tsuite', in Yanagi 1981, vol. 15: 608.

44 Ibid., 602.



Fig. 3a Koike Shinji's collection of a straw fan from Suzhou. Source: Koike Shinji, "Chūgoku Ryokō Nisshi" (1942) in *Hanbi Keikaku* (1943).

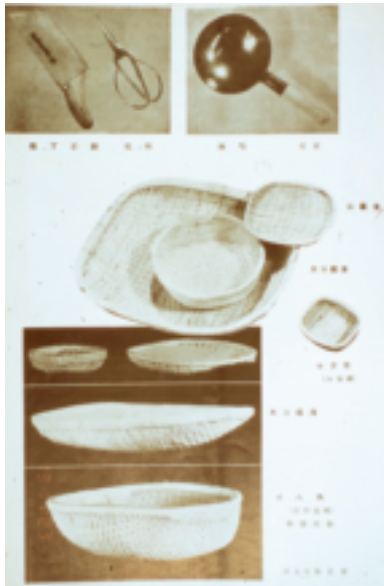


Fig. 3b Koike Shinji's collection, *Kōgei Nyūsu* 11-5 (1942).

other parts of China in 1942, while the designers Toyoguchi Kappei and Terasaka Tsuyoshi were sent to Taiwan in 1943.

3a. North China/Manchuria

Nishikawa Tomotake 西川友武, a senior designer who was sent by the IARI to Manchuria in 1939 viewed Manchurian crafts as very inspiring. His views are much less political than those of the Mingei specialists, and his fascination for 'Chineseness' is articulated in design terms. He identifies the 'Chineseness' of Chinese design as 'sturdiness', 'universality', 'long sightedness' that can be learned in order to overcome Japanese weak design. However, he was also slightly convinced by the general Japanese views pointing to the inferior Manchurian, while distinguishing Beijing, not strictly Manchukuo, as different from other primitive parts of Manchuria – 'Beijing is an exposition of China'. He sees the importance of the development of export design as well as the creation of 'East Asian Design': Japanese had to feel Japan connected to historical roots in Beijing, and the recent years of neglect of China needed to be corrected, a strategy also underpinning the export craft design development.⁴⁵ His colleague Koike Shinji 小池新二, a design critic, who was also sent by the IARI to other parts of China in 1942 also views the 'Chineseness', which is recognised as 'sturdy and healthiness', as important design elements that deserve attention, though at first it looks loose and nonchalant. He adds that the great thing about the standard of Chinese design is that it focuses on the functionality of *nichiyō zakkī* (daily utilitarian objects 日用雑器).⁴⁶ (Fig. 3ab) This interestingly implies that his thoughts are in line with the European Modernist ideal whereby 'form follows function'.⁴⁷

Sugiyama Toyokichi (Professor Tokyo Higher School of Industrial Arts) who was sent to Manchuria by the Trade Bureau in 1939 has a slightly different perspective from the Mingei

45 Nishikawa Tomotake, 'Manshi kōgei shisatsu yoroku, Part 6.'

46 Koike Shinji, 'Shina kōgei bunka no genjō'.

47 This is a famous phrase by the American architect Louis Sullivan in the 1930s which set the Modernist design discourse in the West.

specialists or IARI designers. While sharing the Mingei taste for Tangshan rough bowls with simple cobalt drawing or for indigo dyed cotton clothes about which he objectively says these types please the Japanese taste, he also pays equal attention to Euroamerican large-scale craft industries that had invested in China such as hairnet and lace in Zhili 芝罘, carpets in Tianjin 天津, and embroideries and carvings in Beijing. Interestingly, both the Mingei specialists and IARI designers dismissed them as bad taste or without 'Chinese innate beauty.'⁴⁸ In particular, he saw the carpet industry as the central model for craft export in the North East, as is evident in the 300 factories in Tianjin, 200 in Beijing and five in Qingdao all of which were supported by Euroamerican investment. He encouraged Japanese designers to study and select appropriate 'original design and colours' for these carpets and for the patterns of embroidery which would have 'typical Chinese colours, but avoided auspicious patterns that would not have been understood by Euroamericans, thus would look western,'⁴⁹ because these form the 'king of the taste for the Oriental and Chinese.'⁵⁰ Sugiyama clearly urges Japan to follow the Anglicised Chinese design which Euroamerican designers had created, and the Euroamerican business models which fully exploited both natural resources, cheap labour and skills of Chinese women and girls, as suggested by the substantial production of hairnets and lace.⁵¹ Sugiyama's idea suggests 'Japaneseness' should be addressed as part of these Oriental-Chinese designs that have been imbued with Euroamerican taste. This notion of 'Japaneseness' as a reflection of Euroamerican taste is based on their idea for 'Orientalness' and is also common to other designers, such as Mizumachi Wasaburō (Designer of ceramics at National Ceramic Research Institute), who was sent to North and South America in 1940 by the Trade Bureau to observe the trends and taste for marketing Japanese crafts. Mizumachi observed the US has two tastes: classic European styles and Modern American. He also observed that the Japanese products he could see in the States were only classic luxury or cheap western copies, but the future direction and marketable opportunity should move in line with Modern American style, suggesting that the modern American trend 'has the characteristic of simplicity and plainness, and therefore the Oriental taste is in demand as they share these qualities.' He continues 'this new trend at the ultimate aesthetic of simplicity where the highly advanced cultures reach...to the sophisticated aesthetic of the tea room, and there the East and West shake hands.'⁵² Designers like Sugiyama and Mizumachi propose 'Japaneseness' be defined through Euroamerican eyes, and this 'Japaneseness' is a part of a vague 'Orientalness' to which Euroamerican consumers were attracted around 1940.

3b. Taiwan

As for Taiwan, Terasaki Tsuyoshi 寺坂毅, chief of the research department of IARI who had been sent to Taiwan in 1943, described Taiwan as 'treasure trove of wood' ranging from tropical to boreal woods,

48 Sōetsu Yanagi, 'Hokushi no mingei' (1941), in Yanagi 1981, vol. 15: 573.

49 Toyokichi Sugiyama, *Yushutsu shiryō toshitenō Hokushi kōgei*, 37–38.

50 Ibid., 16.

51 Ibid.

52 Mizumachi Wasaburō, *Nanboku Amerika no kōgei gaikan*, 173.



Fig. 4 *Kōgei Nyūsu* 12-5 (1943), special issue on Taiwan.

emphasising the limitless natural resources for a potential new craft industry.⁵³ The Taiwanese hinoki (Japanese cypress) which is regarded as ‘the king of wood’ was much superior to the Japanese species in terms of durability, colour, scent, and wood grain as well as being armed with natural creosote to deter white ants.⁵⁴ His colleague Toyoguchi Kappei 豊口克平, chief designer of furniture for IARI who was also sent to Taiwan in 1943, praised the aboriginal peoples’ textiles, saying that the textiles by the Atayal tribe had ‘the sophisticated taste in simple stripe patterns unlike gory Chinese-style taste’ and would make the collector of getemono (lower folkcrafts) drool. He also admired bamboo furniture as representative of Taiwanese crafts while remembering the designer Charlotte Perriand who selected Taiwanese bamboo furniture for her exhibition in Japan, thus positioning it within the Modernist design context.⁵⁵ The Mingei specialists were interested in these two types of crafts and they shared the views as ‘Taiwaneseness’ and ‘local colour’, but Toyoguchi’s interest was informed by Modernist aesthetic rather than Mingei connoisseurship. Toyoguchi was also fascinated by the new crafts produced by Japanese-led craft industries, ranging from hats, bags, wood crafts to lacquer products (in which Yan Shuilong was also interested). (Fig. 4ab) Through the creation of these new crafts, the ‘Japaneseness’ is revealed in the ability to develop daily household products (seikatsu yōhin) and create primitive modern crafts with a Japanese aesthetic and modern scientific knowledge in accordance with Modernist principles. IARI’s director Kunii discussed the unique Japanese ability to lead

53 Terasaka Tsuyoshi, ‘Taiwan no mokuzai shigen’.

54 Ibid.

55 Toyoguchi Kappei, ‘Taiwan kōgei zatsuroku’, 192–194.

craft development as 'a leader of East Asia' under the New Order, and also noting that crafts in Asia have a long tradition, pointing out their exquisite and technical excellence and beauty. However, in discussing the makers he observes these 'indigenous people' lack 'brain, and simply exercise their dexterity and technical excellence without artistic spiritual depth, nor do they find scientific improvement or cultural advancement'. Therefore, Japan had a mission to demonstrate model products that would not only replace objects imported from Euroamerica, but would also construct East Asian culture and its products – a true demonstration of Japan's power and the high level of culture it had attained. It would, moreover, increase Asian trust and reliance on Japan through the 'profound aesthetic ability and excellent modern scientific knowledge' Japan could offer.⁵⁶ He also states that to be a leader it requires setting first the national standard for daily household products (*seikatsu yōhin*) with 'function and beauty' as an urgent national domestic agenda – in Kunii's words 'Jitsuyōhin no Bika' (実用品の美化 Beautification of daily products), which is the Modernist designers' creed.⁵⁷

The 'Japaneseness' is a Digest of the 'Orient'

Lastly, the 'Japaneseness' is a digest of the Orient. In the round table discussion at IARI, Takamura Toyochika (Professor of Tokyo School of Fine Arts) states that Japanese crafts evolved by mixing the Northern culture which came from Central Asia to Han China to Korea and to Japan, with the Southern Sea culture from Malay. Japan's uniqueness was to adapt these cultures into Japanese things 'with a vigorous digesting power within a short time'. Therefore, Japan itself contained the Orient.⁵⁸ Sugiyama Toyokichi also emphasised the importance of 'Chinese Design', saying 'from now on our export crafts design has an aim of having sophistication of international design as well as what we can call the Greater Oriental design, that is the Japanese digestion of Chinese design' because historically it is undeniable that Chinese taste is more prevalent than Japanese taste in Euroamerica and people generally think Chinese design equals Oriental design...therefore we need to deal with Chinese taste and gradually lead it into Japanese taste, so that we eventually can let these people understand true Japanese design.'⁵⁹ The peculiarly interesting part of Sugiyama's statement is the relative quality of 'Japanese taste'. There is no absolute 'Japanese taste' at the centre, but it is rather determined by Chinese and Euroamerican taste. Japanese input is its appropriation and hybridisation, in his word 'digestion' (消化 *shōka*). These hybrid ideas can be developed from the classification and analysis of 'Chinese design'.

Despite the often aggressive and confident tones of the 'Japaneseness' argument in relation to 'Orientalness', 'Chineseness' and 'Taiwaneseness', the logic of this is confusing and the very nature of 'Japaneseness' is elusive and muddled, because it cannot be presented as a concrete substance. Since the modern taste for 'simplicity' and scientific knowledge are determined by Euroamericans, the Japanese aesthetic for simple

56 Kunii Kitarō, 'Tōa no shidōsha taru honpō kōgei no shimei.'

57 Kunii Kitarō, 'Jitsuyōhin no bika.'

58 'Nihon kōgei no daitōa teki seikaku.'

59 Sugiyama Toyokichi, *Yushutsu shiryō toshiteno Hokushi kōgei*, 5–6.

and functional daily products are relative to Euroamerican values. At the same time, 'Japaneseness' is only measured by the notion of 'advancement' and 'primitiveness', again in relation to western positivism. Therefore, the question of 'Japaneseness' is trapped in theory, yet this elusive discourse was interpreted into actual design ideas and examples of peculiar hybrid design with multiple Orientalnesses and the Occidentalness.

VI. Modern Hybrid of the Multiple Orients as well as the Occident

So, how did this elusive discursive notion of 'Japaneseness' play a role in design, and how did it shape actual design in terms colour, form, function and concept in general? I will examine design solutions that can be extracted from statements by the people related to the Mingei and IARI, while also noting some hybrid design outcomes and its relation to modernity.

1. Dynamic and Organic Forms and Patterns

The 'Chineseness' in Chinese design is identified by many as 'nonchalant-ness' or the continental 'unmoved transcendental quality.' This is best described in Sugiyama Toyokichi's observation: 'square boxes are not exactly square, patterns are not accurately organised, and lines are confidently free-spirited...and details are not evenly treated', but nevertheless these create a 'great and unspeakable aesthetic.'⁶⁰ This dynamic and organic effect is proposed as something that the Japanese can adopt.

2. 'Japanese Spirit' + Scientific Knowledge

The 'Japanese spirit' is the key term for the ingredient. What actually constitutes 'Japanese spirit' is not clear, but the director of IARI Kunii Kitarō argues that 'Japaneseness' should neither be superficial adoption of traditional motifs such as 'Mt Fuji,' 'Cherry blossoms,' 'pine, bamboo, plum,' 'crane and tortoise,' nor a traditional aesthetic style which needs acquired taste. Rather, it should be modern design created with 'true Japanese spirit' characterised by its special ability to absorb and digest the best of the world. This spirit will inevitably create modern things with 'Japaneseness' while at the same time 'worldliness.'⁶¹ Kunii also states that new products will be interwoven with this 'Japanese spirit' and 'scientific knowledge' learned from the Occident that has the superior quality that will replace Anglo-American products.⁶²

3. Colour: Creation of 'New Oriental Colour'

Kunii Kitarō also suggests the creation of 'New Oriental Colour' that is the synthesis of the distinctive colours of Korea, Manchuria, Taiwan and mainland China to impress 'the stimulating strong effect common in the Orient that contrasts with Euroamerican colours.'⁶³ Except for the Mingei specialists, the bright

60 Ibid., 45.

61 Kunii Kitarō, 'Nihonteki soku sekaiteki.'

62 Kunii Kitarō, 'Jissen to junbi.'

63 Kunii Kitarō, 'Hantō no kōgei', 4.

primary colours—in particular red—provided a great inspiration for most designers to adopt Japanese design in part at least. Nishikawa Tomotake observed that 'Manchurian and Chinese people have a unique colour sense which contrasts with the Japanese, who like light colours. Even though the bright colours were all over, looking from a far distance, they match with the nature and they don't look gory... We can learn from their colour sense and the ability to distinguish different grades of red.'⁶⁴ For example, we can immediately visualise this idea in the recurring image of the propaganda 'harmony of five races' (五族協和) in Manchukuo that appeared in posters and postage stamp design, in which Mongolian, Korean, Japanese, Manchurian and Han Chinese races are colour coded.⁶⁵

4. Sturdy Durable Design—Design Improvement Solution for Weak Japanese Design

Almost all the people in the Mingei movement and the designers of the IARI pointed to qualities such as 'sturdiness', 'universality', 'long sightedness' 'healthiness', as characteristic of Chinese and Taiwanese design, and some (like Nishikawa Tomotake) suggested that these can be learned in order to improve the weakness of Japanese design. These qualities overlap with the wartime slogan for the simple, healthy and correct lifestyle, as well as the Modernist principle of 'functional beauty'. Kawai Kanjirō's 河井寛次郎 experiment with bamboo furniture is an example realising this idea. Kawai was one of the most important potters and orators of the Mingei movement. He found in a Taiwanese bamboo stool and in the cupboard owned by Yanagi, a 'strong' and 'healthy' character and developed the idea of reinforcing the weakness of Japanese bamboo craft in which he had noted a neglect of the intrinsic nature of bamboo and an overmanipulation of material.⁶⁶ Kawai found a company called the 'Japanese Bamboo Bed Manufacturing Company' (日本竹製寝台製作所 Nihon Takesei Shindai Seisakujo) in Saga, Kyoto, owned by Ōyagi Harukazu 大八木治一, where bamboo beds were made of local Saga bamboo by Taiwanese craftsmen. In partnership with this company, various pieces of furniture were designed by Kawai and handmade by three skilful Taiwanese craftsmen. Kawai happily described the work as having both 'the skills coming out of the bodies of the Taiwanese craftsmen' and 'vernacularity' which also has 'a distinct flavour of mainland Japan.'⁶⁷

5. 'Oriental/Greater-Asian/Japanese' Chair

The creation of 'Oriental', 'Greater-Asian' or 'Japanese' chairs form another example of the hybrid design. Chairs represent western modernisation and how to integrate western culture and lifestyle centered on chairs became the focal point of the social and design movement in Japan in the 1910s. The first solution

64 Nishikawa Tomotake, 'Manshi Kōgei Shisatsu Yoroku: Part 2', 234–235.

65 A typical example is Okada Saburōsuke's mural painting 'Raicial Harmony' (Minzoku kyōwa zu) painted in 1936 and was placed in the Manchukuo Home Office. It shows Okada's constructed image of Manchukuo where he has never been. See further, Kishi Toshihiko, *Manshūkoku no bijuaru media* (Manchuria's Graphic Media Empire [sic.]), Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2010, 194–5.

66 Kawai Kanjirō, 'Take' no shimei'; Kawai Kanjirō, Yanagi Sōetsu and Shikiba Ryūzaburō, 'Take no kōgei o kataru'.

67 Kawai Kanjirō, Yanagi Sōetsu and Shikiba Ryūzaburō, 'Take no kōgei o kataru,' 15.

is a mixture of use of chairs with floor sitting, while a second solution saw the production of Oriental-style chairs following the model of Chinese chairs. The third solution was to produce low height chairs which could be used on the tatami mat. The first solution was initiated by the furniture designers group and IARI from the early 1910s, and as the furniture designer Kogure Joichi's 木檜怨一 example shows, chairs were introduced in the context of improvement of lifestyle and housing.⁶⁸ Western-style chairs and the new family oriented lifestyle were introduced into the living space where the Japanese traditionally sit on the tatami floor mat. The second solution can be seen as early as late 1920s exemplified by Saitō Kazō's 齊藤佳三 chair and becomes more common from the 1930s, when Japan had become increasingly interested in China and the Oriental culture due to the political climate. Unlike Japan or Korea, China has a tradition of chairs within the Orient. While at IARI in the industrial craft context, Kenmochi Isamu 剣持勇, Taur's disciple at IARI in the 1930s and the inventor of the term 'Japanese Modern' in the 1950s, also created an influential design idea. The bamboo chair created in collaboration with Isamu Noguchi, and his cane chair exhibiting a curvy sculptural form, achieved through the innovative use of traditional weaving technique, are typical examples of the 'Japanese Modern' design. Kenmochi was long concerned with the cultural difference between the Orient and the Occident in respect to chairs from the 1930s to the 1960s. Interestingly, he classified western chairs as *kairaku gata* 快樂型 (pleasure-type) which, because of their flexible back design, create comfort and offer pleasure in seating that ultimately makes people lazy, while Oriental chairs (i.e. Chinese chairs) were classified as *kugyōgata* 苦行型 (ascetic-type) and designed 'to restrict comfortable pleasure seating to the point of just one step before pain'—he calls such chairs *shibui* 渋い design.⁶⁹ During the war Kenmochi proposed the creation of Oriental chairs in the 'original Greater Eastern Asian Style' (大東亜の独自の形 *Daitōa no dokuji no katachi*) inspired by Chinese and Taiwanese bamboo chairs. The third solution was developed as experiments during the war period and matured into the 'Japanese chair' in the 1950s–60s. Characteristically they are of extremely low height with either flat or sledge-like legs. Sakakura Junzō 坂倉順三, a leading Modernist architect, ex-colleague of Perriand at Le Corbusier's Studio, developed 'bamboo basket furniture' (竹かご座 *takekagoza*) by applying the bamboo basket weaving technique to the seat cushion which is fixed on the low height wooden frame that was thought to be suitable for Japanese people.⁷⁰ Sakakura's disciple Chō Daisaku 長大作 absorbed this idea into his series of 'reiza chairs' (低座椅子 low height seating chairs). These three phases of evolution of chairs in Japan remind us of the fact that chairs have often been used as an important media through which one can demarcate cultural differences in a colonial context. In her book *Imperial Bodies* (2001), E. M. Collingham presents a fascinating study on the embodiment of the coloniser and the colonised through chairs in British colonial India. Chairs associated with the ruler's 'civilised' culture were exclusively used by the British for maintenance

68 Sara Teaseley, 'Architecture and Furniture Design in Modern Japan: The Case of Kogure Joichi'; For the context of modernity and chairs in Japan, see Junko Mori, 'Modern Seating, Modern Sitting: Japanese Women and the Use of the Chair.'

69 Kenmochi Isamu, 'Isu no Bunmeiron' (1969) and 'Higashi to nishi no chigai' (1959), in *Kenmochi Isamu no sekai*, 118–121.

70 'Miho Kenchiku Kōgei no take kagu'; Daisaku Chō, 'Sakakura Junzō to kagu dezaian', in *Sakakura Junzō no shigoto*, 22.

of 'Britishness' for political reasons. They were used to set a boundary and indeed hierarchical distinction between the British and the Indians whose 'posture of repose, reclining on cushions, sitting on squatting on the floor' was regarded 'barbaric' by the British.⁷¹ In comparison with this clear-cut West vs. East colonial embodiment by way of chairs, the Japanese claim for 'Japaneseness' through chairs in the Japanese colonial context has a far more complex rhetoric. Initially, Japanese decided for themselves to adopt chairs to embody western modernity and civilization, and for that reason, Japanese could not force its own empire to adopt the traditional Japanese-style of sitting on tatami mats. However, merely adopting European-style chairs in the Japanese empire wouldn't allow Japanese to claim 'Japaneseness', therefore, the Japanese adopted the chairs of their colonial subject, the Chinese, and modified these in Japanese ways to create hybrid chairs. That was the only way that Japan as a coloniser could claim to be leading civilization as well as leading the Asian tradition in the Japanese empire. This reveals a struggling discursive manipulation of 'Japaneseness' in chairs.



Fig. 5 *Kōafuku* for ladies, designed by Yanagi Yoshitaka under the direction of Yoshida Shōya. *Gekkan Mingei* 1-1 (1942).

6. Greater Asian Clothes

Yoshida Shōya created a new Mingei-style *kōafuku* 興亜服 (Prosperity Asian clothes) in Manchuria. It was designed for the people in Manchuria including the Japanese residents who, according to Yoshida, should integrate local things into their life. He invited textile experts Okamura Kichimon and Yanagi Sōetsu's nephew Yanagi Yoshitaka to create new textile samples by using the local cotton to make rough flat and woven cotton cloth, and to dye the cloth with tie dye and stencil dye to which he added a simple embroidered pattern. They created textiles for women and men. The design concept is that the textiles should not have 'decadent and weak beauty, but beauty which urges the ambition to construct the new order, and which realises the healthy and vibrant beauty that looks for tomorrow.' This design would be created by efforts to 'preserve Chinese tradition, and use Chinese resources in combination with Japanese arts and science.'⁷² The examples of the women's dress design include an indigo dyed Chinese-style top with simplified Chinese-style flower buttons which have some colourful embroidery, and a very modern looking qipao with indigo blue and white stripe patterns. (Fig. 5)

7. Hōrainuri

The new Taiwanese lacquerware, often called *hōrainuri* 蓬莱塗 (Formosan lacquer) (Fig. 6), was suc-

⁷¹ Collingham, *Imperial Body*, 57.

⁷² Yoshida Shōya and Tottori Mingei Kyōkai, 'Hokushi no atarashiki ifuku' (1941), in *Yoshida Shōya: Mingei no produsā*, 125–128.



Fig. 6 'Hōrainuri' (penglaitu) jars with a pattern of aboriginal people in an orchard painted in polychrome lacquer, 16.5x4.5 (Large), 13.2x7 (Small) cm, private collection.

ware products of 'Okinawan style with added Taiwanese taste'.⁷³ Their products of functional tableware were developed with Japanese lacquer techniques that adopted modern science. Some of them are 'Okinawan style with added Taiwanese taste' as described by Yan Shuilong. Taichung's decorative ware is depicted with exotic 'local colour' including happy, dancing aboriginal people and exotic fruits such as pineapples, bananas and tropical flowers. These designs articulated modern Japaneseness and the modern primitive Taiwanese-ness combined with science and contemporary Euroamerican taste.

8. Taiwan/Oriental Panama Hats and Hōrainuri

The 'Taiwan Hat' often called 'Tanshui [Danshui] hat' (淡水帽 *tansuibō*) or 'Taiwan/Oriental Panama' (台湾/東洋パナマ帽 *Taiwan/Tōyō panamabō*), was made from either local materials, such as Taikō [Dajia] rush (大甲 *Scirpus triquetter*) or Rintou (林投 *Pandanus/Pandanus tectorius sol*) or from twisted paper strings. Since Japan adopted western fashion in the late 19th century, Panama hats also came into modern Japanese gentlemen's fashion. The Japanese brought hat-making into the Yuanli and Dajia areas where a grass weaving cottage industry already existed. It developed rapidly into the most successful local Taiwanese craft industry supported by Japanese investment, and exported products to Japan as well as to western countries. The Taiwanese panama hat seemed to be more fashionable and better value for money than Japanese ones as illustrated by the writer Natsume Sōseki, who tells of his regret on his late discovery of this fact after spending the big money (15 yen) earned from his work 'I am a Cat' on buying an expensive Japanese (probably Okinawan) made panama hat.⁷⁴ As was the case with chairs, hats were icons of modern western fashion, but hats in this context came to not only symbolise young and modern Taiwan, but also the young and modern Japanese empire. A variety of propaganda posters emerged making symbolic use of the progressive image of a hat: one shows a Taiwan hat (the Oriental panama) with a Japanese battleship and another

73 Shuilong Yan, 'Taiwan no kōgei sangyō ni tsuite', 175.

74 Higuchi Satoru, *Nihonjin no bōshi*, 146.

showed the Asian cultures and races endorsed by multiculturalism within the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere—all protected by the hat. (Fig. 7ab)

Conclusion

In the 1930s to 1945, Japanese professionals of craft and craft design encountered the new world of wider Asia—their Orient. Their accounts are full of excitement and vivid descriptions that marked a Japanese modernity through the ‘discovery’ of differences

between Japan and the neighbouring countries. During the process, Japanese identity was questioned and a repositioning of itself within the Orient and the Japanese empire became inevitable. The early 20th discourse of ‘Japaneseness’ set against the Occident was complicated by the introduction of the ‘Chineseness’ and the ‘Taiwanese’ which were also clearly distinguished. What is immediately noticeable is the slight reservation and overwhelming sense⁷⁵ in the Japanese statement in respect of ‘leading East Asia’, in particular the cases which talk about Shanghai and Beijing. This reservation also manifests itself in their focus on dealing with folkcrafts and daily household products, rather than with historical fine crafts that have been the models of sophistication to which Japan had long aspired. This contrasts with the relaxed freedom in discussing Taiwan. This seems to relate to different ways in which knowledge was accumulated on China and Taiwan up to the 1930s. Studies on crafts in China have historically been related to connoisseurship of high art and literati taste or modern archaeological studies. Chinese crafts are regarded as art crafts and in particular, porcelain has been sought after for its technical advancement and refined sophistication for a long time. From the contemporary viewpoint, China as a whole was seen as having a wealth of natural materials, exquisite craftsmanship and cheap labour and was after all respected as the ‘original source of the Oriental crafts’ (東洋工芸淵源 *Tōyō kōgei engen*) even though contemporary China was perceived as degenerated and powerless.⁷⁶ The shadow of old China which used to be Japan’s model for sophistication and advancement lingered through the colonial context. This seems to have affected Japan’s notion of ‘Greater Asia’ or the ‘Co-prosperity Sphere’ that has Central and North China at the centre but ironically does not often include Taiwan. Thus, the united five ethnic groups image show the tendency for Taiwan to be discussed in the context of ‘South Seas’.

In Taiwan, since the beginning of colonisation in the late 19th century, the dominant framework of



Fig. 7ab Posters of “Oriental Panama/Taiwan Hat”. Source: *Shisei 40 shūnen Kinen Taiwan Hakurankai Shi*, Taipei: Taiwan Hakurankai, 1939.

75 For example, in Koike Shinji, ‘Shina kōgei bunka no genjō’, 268.

76 Sugiyama Toyokichi, *Yushutsu shiryō toshitenō Hokushi kōgei*, 8, 13.

studies on Taiwan is anthropological studies on primitive aboriginal people and culture by scholars trained in European science.⁷⁷ Therefore, crafts in Taiwan are mainly associated with primitive crafts. This difference is also obvious when looking at the official colonial exhibitions: The Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition (台湾美術展覧会—台展 Taiwan Bijutsu Tenrankai or Taiten, 1927–36) and the Taiwan Government-General Fine Arts Exhibition (台湾総督府美術展覧会—府展 Taiwan Sōtokufu Bijutsu Tenrankai or Futen 1938–43) do not have crafts sections, while the Manchukuo Art Exhibition (満州国美術展覧会 Manshūkoku Bijutsu Tanrankai, 1938–1943) had an ‘art craft’ section. This contrast between ‘fine art’ in China and ‘primitive art’ in Taiwan also seems to have influenced the views of the people involved in craft development in the 1930s through to the War. When the idea of craft design for a self-sufficient economy and export trade became the predominant national agenda, we can see a smooth transition from anthropological interest to industrial interest in crafts. Unlike China, Taiwan was regarded as a ‘virgin’ land,⁷⁸ and did not have traditional skills for making exquisite art crafts. Rather than learning from Taiwan, the Japanese found some existing primitive crafts in order to extract ‘local colour’ from them to construct a brand new Taiwanese craft design. After all, Taiwan would have greater opportunities because of its incomparable abundance of natural resources when compared with the North China/Manchuria. In the creation of new craft design in Taiwan, Japanese designers could freely experiment with Modernist design ideals—something they had just learned from Euroamerica. This Modernist perspective and the experimental ground for functional utilitarian daily household products set the main discourse of ‘Taiwaneseness’ to be distinct from ‘Chineseness’.

The discourse of ‘Japaneseness’ was argued relative to ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Taiwaneseness’. The ‘Japaneseness’ itself was defined as the Japanese leadership quality which equipped its holder with special skills that enabled him to select and preserve traditional indigenous crafts within the Greater East Asian Coprosperity Sphere, as well as to create new craft design products by extracting ‘local colours’. Through this process the ‘Japanese spirit’ and modern scientific knowledge also play a role. ‘Japaneseness’ would also be defined as the best collective essence of the Orient that allowed designers to explore their design experiment on the hybrid Oriental design. So ‘Japaneseness’ turns out to be an elusive and indefinable entity; nevertheless, it gave inspiration for the craft and craft design professionals of the time. In the context of design history in Japan, Japan’s shrewd choice to explore the field of daily utilitarian crafts/craft-design for export within the Japanese Empire enabled Japan to advance a European Modernist agenda in design in its own way through experimenting with modern ideas to create a hybrid Oriental design. Moreover, the transition of this modern design project is discernible in the journey from this hybrid Oriental design towards the Japanese Modern design in the 1950s promoted by the same designers. The 1950s idea of Japanese Modern ‘good design’ championing simple, natural, healthy, functional beauty expressed through local materials would not have materialised without this prewar experimental modern design.

77 For example, Mori Ushinosuke, Torii Ryūzō and Inō Kanori.

78 Kunii Kitarō, ‘Hantō no kōgei.’

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