

## Foreign ceramists in Japan: report of the 2014's field research

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### 1. Introduction: summary of 2013's field research

The goal of the 2013's field research was first to locate and then to interview foreigners who were studying or working with ceramics in Japan, in order to understand how Japanese traditional culture and aesthetics was represented through ceramics in their discourse. A total of nineteen ceramic artists and two students living in Japan were identified and nine of them were interviewed. The majority of the interviews took place in Mashiko (Tochigi prefecture) and two other interviews were conducted in Tokyo and in Minakami (Gunma prefecture).

In the interviews with the ceramists the intention was to focus on their life-story in order to comprehend their motivations to leave their homeland and practice ceramics in Japan. The goal was to recognize how Japanese styles, techniques and aesthetics influenced their ceramic work and their view about ceramics. In order to achieve that, I made qualitative interviews following the ethnological method of life-story (Daniel Bertaux, 1997).

From the interviews, I realized that: most of the foreign potters had learned the most about ceramics in Japan; almost all had Japanese spouses; the majority was American; many came in the beginning of the nineties (during the economic bubble); and most of them were men. Also, all of them shared a common image of Japanese ceramics, which focuses on the following aspects: acceptance of ceramics as art in Japan; importance given to function and use; value given to handmade products; use of local materials; relationship between food, season and pottery; proximity to Nature as part of the process; predominance of the concepts of simplicity and imperfection; strict and long learning process; and importance of the process as much as the result. Finally, many of them use high-temperature wood-fired kilns and ash glazing techniques and have nature as source of inspiration.

Because most foreign potters were concentrated in Mashiko (Tochigi prefecture) and Kasama (Ibaraki prefecture), this issue was also addressed. Although fairly close to Tokyo, largest purchase market of ceramic products in Japan, both areas are still in the countryside, allowing the ceramists to have direct access to the materials they need for their production and enabling them to build large wood fired kilns (Morais, 2014) . But the main reason for this concentration is related to the history of the two ceramic centers that have attracted potters from all over Japan and the world

for being open to different ceramic styles and traditions as well as to independent artists. Thus, I approached the history of the establishment of National Treasure Hamada Shoji's studio in Mashiko in 1930 and his relationship with British potter Bernard Leach, who greatly contributed to the internationalization of Japanese ceramics, encouraging foreigners to study in the region.

The preliminary conclusion was that the aesthetical and conceptual traits that usually define Japanese traditional ceramics, and which are reflected in the discourse of these foreign ceramists living in Japan, are not the result of a Japanese innate and fixed character, like it is supported by the *nihonjinron* (theories of Japanese uniqueness). It is the result of two main historical and cultural dialectic processes: the romantic orientalist discourse of the nineteenth century and the construction of Japanese national identity after the Meiji period. The formation of *mingei* (folk crafts) theory by Yanagi Soetsu in 1929 and its appropriation in the West through Bernard Leach's Tradition also had an important role in the construction of this specific image. Because of that, this year, I intended to understand the importance of the Bernard Leach, Hamada Shoji and the *mingei* movement, as well as the role of *chadô* and *zen* Buddhism for the construction of a specific image of Japanese ceramics.

## 2. Goals of the 2014's field research

As a continuation of the preliminary field research developed last year at the Center for Nonwritten Cultural Materials of Kanagawa University, this year's research focused on deepening my knowledge of the theme by developing more bibliographic research, visiting other ceramic museums, meeting with specialists and interviewing foreign women potters' who were working or have worked in Japan.

Last year, from nineteen identified ceramists, only four were female. This year, I focused on locating more foreign women who were working or had worked with ceramics in Japan and understand the difficulties of being a woman in the world of Japanese pottery.

I was also interested in the role of the *mingei* movement and of British potter Bernard Leach in the dissemination of a specific image of Japanese ceramics, which was documented last year during the interviews with several foreign potters. Furthermore, I wanted to focus on the importance of National Treasures Hamada Shoji and Tatsuzo Shimaoka for turning Mashiko into the most important folk ceramics' center in Japan and opening it to foreigners. Finally, I introduced the discussion of the distinction between arts and crafts in Japan and the use of traditional techniques in contemporary ceramic works.

Table 1 Foreign women potters who work or have worked in Japan

Name	Nationality	Age	Year of arrival in Japan	Reason to come to Japan	Current location	Interview
Regina Goto	Brazilian, <i>nissei</i>	Not informed	1991	Study ceramics	Mashiko	2nd interview, on <i>skype</i>
Agnes Husz	Hungarian	52	1993	Marriage	Nagano	<i>Skype</i> interview
Kristina Mar	Portuguese	49	1993	Study ceramics	Kyoto	E-mail interview
Darice Veri	American	56	1982	Study ceramics	Mashiko/USA	E-mail interview
Ruri	Japanese, American resident for 37 years	Not informed	1977	Study ceramics	Mashiko/USA	E-mail interview
Swanica	Dutch	59	1992/2006	Tourism/Live and work	Kamakura/Holland	E-mail interview
Geneviene Navarre-Halse	French	No information	No information	No information	Mashiko/Australia	Not interviewed
Doris Watanabe	American	No information	No information	No information	Mashiko	Not interviewed
Leila Denecke	American	No information	No information	No information	Mashiko/USA	Not interviewed
Ann Holmes	American	No information	No information	No information	Mashiko/USA	Not interviewed
Victoria Oyama	American	No information	No information	No information	Tokyo	Not interviewed

Table 2 List of visited museums and exhibitions

Museum	Location	Exhibition	Date of visit
Gotoh Museum	Setagaya, Tokyo	Tea utensils	02/22
Hatakeyama Memorial Museum of Fine Art	Shirokanedai, Tokyo	<i>Rikyū and His Lineage</i>	02/22
Folk Crafts Museum	Komaba, Tokyo	<i>Soetsu Yanagi and the Way of Tea</i>	02/22
Idemitsu Museum	Marunouchi, Tokyo	<i>The Dreams of Itaya Hazan</i>	02/23
Mitsui Memorial Museum	Nihonbashi, Tokyo	<i>Raku tea bowls celebrating the New Year</i>	02/23
The Crafts Gallery	Kitanomaru Koen, Tokyo	<i>From Crafts to Kōgei</i>	02/31
Nezu Museum	Aoyama, Tokyo	<i>Tea for a New Year</i>	02/28
Hakone Museum of Fine Arts	Hakone	Permanent collection with ceramics from Jōmon to Edo period	02/24

Table 3 Consulted libraries

Libraries	Consulted materials	Date of visit
Tokyo University Library	— Bernard Leach, "A Potter's Book", 1940 — "The Quiet Eye: Pottery of Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach", exhibition catalogue, 1991 — "Modern Pots: Hans Coper, Lucie Rie and their Contemporaries", 2000	02/30
Sohia University Library	— Bernard Leach, "A Potter in Japan: 1952-1954", 1960 — Bernard Leach, "Hamada: potter", 1975 — Susan Peterson, "Shoji Hamada: A Potter's Way and Work", 1974 — "Zen and the Art of Pottery", 1989 — "Isamu Noguchi and Modern Japanese Ceramics", 2003	02/30
The Crafts Gallery Library	— Tatsuzo Shimaoka, exhibition catalogue, 2001 — "Tatsuzo Shimaoka", exhibition catalogue, 1991 — Kaneko Kenji, "Studio Craft and Craftical Formation", 2002 — Kaneko Kenji, "Japanese Contemporary Claywork", 2000. — Kida Takuya, "Seven Sages of Ceramics: Modern Japanese Masters", 2013	02/31

### 3. Research Plan

During the preparation for this research before coming to Japan, I managed to identify seven more women potters who were working or have worked in Japan, making a total of eleven foreign women potters identified. I managed to interview five of them, besides Regina Goto from Mashiko, with whom I made a second interview by *skype*. For the first time interviewees, I used the same questionnaire created last year, adding questions about the experience of being a woman working with ceramics in the country. I also interviewed Japanese potter Shimizu Kazuko from Kita-Kamakura. Besides the women potters, I interviewed American potter Harvey Young from Mashiko, whom I wasn't able to meet last year.

Furthermore, I met two crafts and ceramics specialists; director and owner of Yufuku Gallery in Tokyo, Aoyama Wahei and Crafts Gallery curator Kida Takuya and visited six ceramic museums: Gotoh Museum, Hatakeyama Memorial Museum, Japan Folk Crafts Museum, Idemitsu Museum, Mitsui Memorial Museum, The Crafts Gallery, Nezu Museum, all in Tokyo, and the Hakone Museum of Art, in Hakone.

For the bibliographic research, I went to the Tokyo University of Arts, Sophia University and The Crafts Gallery libraries.

### 4. The question of women in Japanese ceramics

Since the beginnings of civilization, ceramics have been important objects of daily and ritual use. Japanese ceramics are considered one of the oldest in the world. The first ceramic objects appeared in the archipelago in the Jōmon period (13,000–300 B.C.) and Archaeological and ethnological testimonies suggest that they were manually produced by women in the domestic realm. With the introduction of the potter's wheel in the Kofun period (300–593), ceramic production was organized in workshops and became mainly a male activity. Besides, the strength necessary to work with the traditional wood-fired kilns *anagama* and *noborigama* also made it difficult for women to participate. However, the deprivation of women from creative activities happened not only in the field of Japanese Ceramics, but worldwide throughout history.

Thus, until Edo era, most professional artists were men, but there were some arts in which female participation was socially accepted because of their association with domestic duties. As Midori Yoshimoto (2006: 2) writes, Japanese society allowed few alternatives to the woman traditional role as *ryōsai kenbo* (good wives and wise mothers).

With the Meiji Restoration, Japan opened its doors to the western world and the governmental and social systems were altered in favor of women (McDowell, 1999: 17). But it was only after the Second World War that women received the right to vote in Japan and that they were able to enter universities. The proliferation of artistic education contributed to the development of contem-

porary ceramics, separated from the traditional hierarchical and patriarchal logic, allowing several women ceramists to stand out, especially after the 1960s.

In despite of that until today no woman ceramist was ever nominated as Living National Treasure (*ningen kokuhō*).

A turning point to the opening of the Ceramics world to women artists is related to the emergence of *avant-garde* groups after the Second World War, which introduced the concept of *objet d'art* and distances itself from tradition and, thus, the hierarchic patriarchal system. As a consequence, the first circle of Japanese women ceramic artists, *Jōryū Togeï*, founded in Kyoto in 1967, introduced the concept of feminism in Japanese ceramics. The association was founded in Kyoto by Tsuboi Asuba, who was one of the first women to vehemently.

Despite the evident growth of female presence in Japanese ceramics in the last 60 years, Japanese society is still far from allowing a total equality of rights, even in the field of arts.

In fact, during this year's research, the assumption of traditional Japanese ceramics as a male dominated world was obvious for most of the foreign female interviewees. We can suppose, then, that the patriarchal order in Japanese society in general and in the world of Japanese ceramics in particular, affects also the life and work of non-Japanese ceramic artists living in the country. Above are their comments about the subject:

Shimizu Kazuko, Japanese, Kita-Kamakura	<i>In the old days, women couldn't get inside the kiln, because they were considered to be impure</i>
Regina Goto, Nikkei- Brazilian, Mashiko	<i>There are not many women working with traditional Japanese ceramics because it's a dirty and heavy job</i>
Ruri, Japanese, American resident, Oregon (USA)	<i>Traditional Japanese ceramics are physically a very high demanding work. Even outside Japan most of the wood kilns are owned and operated by men. But more and more women have been participating and having their kilns especially in the past 10 or 15 years all over the place.</i>
Darice Veri, American, Mashiko/ USA	<i>A woman alone may have trouble finding ways to sell her work. There are very few well known women potters. Occasionally there might be a well known couple, but for the most part men want to deal with men</i>
Kristina Mar, Portuguese, Kyoto	<i>There are more men than women working on things that are not related to domestic activities throughout the world. But specifically in Japan, because it is a society based on the household. It is the woman that sustains this nucleus in Japan, so it's very hard to devote to a full-time profession.</i>

## 5. *Chadō, chawans, raku* and *zen*: a stereotyped image of Japan

Most of the ceramic museums visited this year presented exhibitions about *chadō* and *raku* tea bowls. In fact, the tea aesthetics, influenced by Zen Buddhism, have played an important role in the construction of an image of Japan as in the Momoyama period (1568-1600).

*Raku* style was born from the Zen aesthetics of the Momoyama period. According to tradition, it originated from the encounter between the famous tea master Sen no Rikyu, who was at that time developing a new style of ceremony known as *wabicha*, and a manufacturer of tiles of Korean descendent named Chojiro. The *raku* technique consists of firing the piece of pottery at low tem-

peratures and, while it is still incandescent, putting it in touch with cold water, sawdust or leaves. Currently, it is one of the Japanese techniques most commonly used outside Japan, especially in the United States, where it received an American version by Paul Soldner (1921–2011) in the 1950s.

In the 1920s and 1930s the Momoyama ceramics were the motive of an artistic ceramic movement known as 'Momoyama revival', spurred by the proliferation of archaeological excavations in traditional areas of ceramic production. This fact, coupled with the success of *The Book of Tea* by Okakura Kakuzo and expansion of the *mingei* movement, led to a resurgence of the ceramics used in the tea ceremony during the Momoyama period.

Back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the new aesthetics of the tea masters led to the appreciation of Korean ceramics, which suited the Zen Buddhist aesthetic ideals by being simpler and more rustic than the Chinese ones, used until then. Moreover, some ceramic techniques seen as traditional in Japan are in fact Chinese innovations brought from Korea at different times of the history of the country, such as the *anagama* and *noborigama* kilns and ash glazing techniques. Furthermore, the creator of the *mingei* movement, Yanagi Soetsu began to become interested in folk art after a visit to Korea, which inspired the development of his *mingei* theory. However, despite the Korean influence, these concepts and techniques are used to name a specifically Japanese aesthetics, which became a powerful symbol of Japanese traditional culture and was considered one of the highest points in Japan's past.

The concern for traditions that arose from the modernization triggered by the Meiji Restoration led to a revival of the tea ceremony amongst many old and famous aristocratic families, which had been more or less forgotten during the first decades of the modernization of Japan (Moeran, 1997: 14). Yanagi was also inspired by this new aesthetics created by Japanese masters of the tea ceremony in the Momoyama period through the influence of Zen Buddhist ideals, which praised simplicity, moderation, asymmetry, imperfection, rusticity and naturalness. His promoted *mingei* style represents the simple natural domestic beauty that is in the base of tea ceremony aesthetics related to the concepts of *wabi-sabi*. We will see more about the *mingei* theory in the next point.

As mentioned above, in the late 1920s and 1930s many potters became interested in the technical aspects of the tea ceremony utensils and began investigating some of the most famous ancient Japanese kilns. As a result, they began to devote themselves to the imitation of the techniques they had discovered in these pieces, creating an artistic movement known as 'Momoyama revival'. In addition, many regions currently considered as old centers of traditional ceramics, such as those that gave their names to Mino, Karatsu, Bizen and Mashiko styles, were discovered by potters Arakawa Toyozo, Nakazato Muan, Kaneshige Toyo and Shoji Hamada, respectively, in the 1930s (Moeran, 1997). Thus, encouraged by the nationalistic environment of the time many artists sought to establish continuity with the past through their artwork.

The 'Momoyama revival' focused on the creation of ceramic pieces inspired in the tradition of this period, focusing on the simplicity and natural beauty preached by *zen* aesthetics and had

Kaneshige Toyo and Arakawa Toyozu as its most representative artists. However, Crafts Gallery curator Kida Takuya (2013: 5) considers that “from this profound understanding of the past emerged a new creative, energetic, and independent art form”. In fact, he states that in the last 15 years many new ceramic ideas have come out of traditional techniques, with a growing appearance of artists recreating the concept of “Japaneseness” through their own self-expression. But I will address this issue further on.

Nonetheless, the tea ceremony ceramics produced in the Momoyama period became not only a powerful symbol of Japanese culture, but even this metonymy (Faulkner, 2003). This is because the *chanoyu* itself, thanks largely to the studies of Okakura Kakuzo, turned into a metaphor for the cultural identity of Japan, a paradigm of the “Japanese soul” or even an ideal representation of it (Rocha, 1996). Even today, the tea utensils are still the main market for ceramics in Japan. As anthropologist Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni (2005: 157) argues, the concept of Japanese culture promoted through the cultural ventures related to Japan abroad is “strongly influenced by the way Japanese culture is presented by Japanese both in Japan and in the framework of organized international contacts. What is put on exhibit as ‘Japanese culture’ is mostly an officially endorsed ‘traditional’ culture”. It is this essentialized representation of Japanese culture which emphasizes the hand-craft traditional knowledge that is widely consumed in Japan and abroad.

Moreover, in the contemporary globalized world, not only the culture of the “other” has become a highly saleable commodity (*ibid.*, 156) and an important symbolic capital, but the attraction for the exotic “other” in general, and for the East in particular, is also related to a search for radically different life experiences, which causes a sense of displacement and from which the construction of the self is made. As anthropologist John Cowart Dawsey has put it:

The mirror of the East becomes a sort of magic mirror. More than its ability to fix identities—including of those who search the image of themselves as symmetric inverse figure of the other—we need to emphasize its ability to change forms. The mirror of the East also presents itself as a “creative emptiness”, a whirlwind where even the images of Orientalism crumble (DAWSEY, 2012: 2, my translation)

However, for Yufuku Gallery owner and director Aoyama Wahei, “most foreigners who come to Japan are Japanophiles who are living in the past, doing tea bowls similar to those from Momoyama period”. He argues that their fascination for Japan extends the stereotyped image and the myths disseminated with European Japonism and the World Fairs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which sees the country as a mysterious, different and exotic land and exhibits its culture as a spectacle.

## 6. Hamada Shoji, Bernard Leach and the *mingei* movement

The *mingei* movement was created by Yanagi Soetsu in the transition from Taisho (1912–1926) to Showa (1926–1989) periods, in an attempt to preserve Japanese traditional arts as a reaction to the rapid industrialization and urbanization of Japan. It sought to value the beauty of ordinary objects made for everyday use by ordinary and anonymous craftsmen. The movement led to the creation of Nihon Mingeikan (Japanese Folk Crafts Museum), dedicated to the exhibition of everyday objects used by common people, besides other handmade objects created by individual artists, like potter Hamada Shoji (1890–1966).

Besides taking part in the *mingei* movement, Hamada was also a major figure in the establishment of studio pottery in Japan, along with Kawai Kanjiro, Tomimoto Kenkichi and British potter Bernard Leach. This type of work organization differs from traditional local production as it usually consists of just one artist (or a small group of artists) producing unique pieces in small quantities at their own studio or atelier. The studio pottery movement sought to give more emphasis to artistic individuality than technical reproducibility and tradition.

According to crafts' specialist and curator Kaneko Kenji (2007), the establishment of studio pottery in Japan followed a different path from the West, especially in England, where studio crafts initially emerged. The British potters, trained in the fine arts schools, adopted the manual materials of the industry, but did not establish a dialogue with the folk craftsmen, practically extinct. They developed their work in isolated regions of traditional craft production, such as Bernard Leach at St. Ives, Cornwall, where there was no history of traditional ceramic production. This situation is representative of what was happening across England, where the lack of traditional artisans made it difficult for the artists to learn the traditional techniques. Thus, Leach used as reference groups of Japanese artists and craftsmen brought to St. Ives, such as Hamada Shoji and Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke, from the 39th generation of the Uji potters' family in Asaki region.

Hamada Shoji, born in Tokyo in 1894, studied at the Tokyo Institute of Technology together with potter Kawai Kanjiro. He met Bernard Leach in 1919, after being impressed by an exhibition that the British potter was holding in the capital. The two soon became friends and, in 1920, when Leach decided to return to England, Hamada accompanied him in establishing his own pottery studio in St Ives, where they built a traditional Japanese wooden climbing kiln (*noborigama*), the first one in the West, as well a "small, round updraft kiln for earthenware and oxidized *raku*, introducing this technique to the West" (Cooper, 2004). After spending three years in St Ives, Hamada returned to Japan and established his studio in Mashiko, where he started using only local materials. In 1955, he was nominated Living National Treasure by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

Hamada died in 1978 after two decades of commitment to supporting young artists, such as Mashiko's second Living National Treasure Shimaoka Tatsuzo, and establishing Mashiko as a tour-

istic destination both for potters and other people interested in ceramics. It was mainly because of him that the village became a reference center for folk pottery, open to ceramists from all backgrounds and traditions, from newly graduated arts students to foreigners. Through Bernard Leach's publications, Hamada achieved international recognition, having traveled throughout Europe and the United States between 1952 and 1953, giving lectures and making demonstrations on Japanese ceramics. Seen as the father of British studio pottery, Leach promoted Hamada as the archetypal oriental potter and disseminated his *mingei* philosophy in the West. Through his internationally acclaimed "The Potter's Book", Leach taught and influenced a whole generation of potters until today.

Bernard Leach was born in Hong Kong in 1887 from a British family. He spent his first years in Japan, but was trained as an artist in London, where he studied etching. He returned to Japan in 1909 to teach and give lectures on etching and it was at that time that he met Yanagi Soetsu and other Shirakaba (a Japanese literary school) group members, with whom he lived and worked. In 1911, he began to study pottery under the instruction of Shigekichi Urano, the sixth generation of the Kenzan tradition. He also stayed one year in China, where he had the chance to deepen his knowledge on ceramics, in 1915. He went back to England in 1920, where he opened his pottery studio with the help of Hamada. He came back to Japan several times after and, in the postwar years, feeling he had a mission to introduce his ideas abroad, he traveled throughout Europe and the United States giving lectures. According to Emmanuel Cooper (2004), Bernard Leach "played a crucial pioneering role in creating an identity for artist potters in Britain and around the world".

His 'Leach Tradition', greatly influenced by Yanagi's *mingei* theory, focuses on a combination of Western and Eastern philosophies, which can be seen in the blend of traditional Japanese, Chinese and Korean ceramics with European traditional techniques in his personal work. In the introduction of Leach's famous "A Potter's Book" (1960), Yanagi Soetsu wrote that:

(...) above all, the outstanding character of his work is the union in it of East and West. All his ideas, life and endeavor seem to have been focused on this one point. An Englishman by blood, born in China, educated in London, who learned his art in Japan and now works in England, he feels this union to be the special task of his life. (Soetsu *apud* Leach, 1960: xx).

The *mingei* philosophy was strongly influenced by the ideas of William Morris, which were brought to Japan by two potters who would later become Yanagi's friends, Tomimoto Kenkichi and Bernard Leach. Brian Moeran (1997: 21) purposed that "the *mingei* philosophy is the sort of moral aesthetic that tends to arise in all industrializing societies that experience rapid urbanization and a shift from hand to mechanized methods of mass production".

According to author Michel Marra (1999: 2), the expression "Japanese aesthetics" refers to a process of negotiation between Japanese thinkers and western signification practices in the creation

and development of images of Japan. It was in fact in the process of hybridizing western and eastern ideas, especially the British arts and crafts movement, Zen Buddhist concepts and the tea ceremony, that Yanagi found a sense of eastern cultural identity (Kikuchi, 2004). Because of this, for Yufuku Gallery owner and director Aoyama Wahei, the *mingei* movement represents “the quintessence of Japan”.

In the 1930s, Yanagi travelled throughout countryside Japan in search of everyday objects made by unknown craftsmen in integration with nature, encouraging them to continue their work. As previously mentioned, this period also saw the rise of the folklore studies and the proliferation of archaeological excavations in regions of traditional ceramic production, which led to a revival of the tea ceremony ceramics used during the Momoyama period. It was also at this time that the Zen Buddhist philosophy started spreading in the West, especially due to Suzuki Daisetsu’s publications and lectures in Europe and The United States. This contributed to the growth of the stereotype of Japan as a Zen country, where intuition and connection to nature were opposed to the rational and scientific Western model.

By the 1960s, Yanagi’s ideas had already become known by almost all Japanese. This generated an enormous demand for folk crafts known as “*mingei* boom” and coincided with a period of avid Americanization and the nostalgia for Japanese tradition and the rural countryside (Moeran, 1997: 211). With all the publicity around folk art, new kilns opened everywhere and old pottery centers such as Koishiwara, Tamba and Mashiko expanded rapidly (*ibid.*: 27–28).

After the Second World War, the popularized *mingei* style was integrated in Japanese national design movements and spread worldwide as an exported product and a model of “good design” (Kikuchi, 2004: 197–198). On the other hand, Yanagi propagated his theory by organizing lectures all around Europe and the United States with Hamada and Leach. The *mingei* word became a more general label which represents simple design, not too technical and not too decorative, that is still omnipresent in the field of crafts (*ibid.*: 245). In his internationally acclaimed book, “A Potter in Japan” (1960), Bernard Leach stated that:

The Japanese Craft Movement was started and fostered by my old friend Soetsu Yanagi. I claim that it is the most vigorous, widespread and unified in the world today. With about 2,000 active and supporting members, one central and three provincial museums, some thirty groups of craftsmen and about half that number of craft shops, with an annual turnover of £100,000, it has more impact on society than any other movement of which I know (Leach, 1960: 29–30).

The *mingei* movement became so influential outside Japan that it gave name to the Mingei International Museum, created in 1978 in San Diego, California, U.S.A. According to the museum website, it was founded by Marta Longenecker, a professor of art at San Diego State University who studied ceramics in Japan: “as an artist craftsman, she became acquainted with and learned from the found-

ers and leaders of the Mingei Association of Japan, who inspired her to carry the vision of *mingei* to the U.S.A<sup>(1)</sup>”.

Moreover, the post-war period saw the establishment by Japanese authorities of several measures to protect traditional culture, such as the title best known as Living National Treasure (*nin-gen kokuhō*). Given to craftsmen who possess important traditional knowledge and techniques, it showed an institutional promotion of the values of traditional aesthetics (Befu, 2001).

The system of Living National Treasures is administered through the Japanese government's Agency for Cultural Affairs. Victoria and Albert's Museum curator Rupert Faulkner explains that it was established in the 1950s in order to preserve performing and craft traditions in danger of extinction. According to him:

This initial scope was soon extended to cover practices that were not necessarily in danger of being lost but were felt to be important for historical or artistic reasons. In the crafts it has been a useful means of giving recognition to makers who pursue artistic originality through the application of traditional skills. (Faulkner, 2001: 3).

With the same view as Befu Harumi, Faulkner also defends that, in fact, “an overt cultural agenda has informed the process of identification and institutionalization of preferred models. These have tended to be, like Momoyama period tea ceramics, products felt to be particularly Japanese in feeling.” (*idem*).

Hamada, one might hazard, was made a Living National Treasure because many of his pots drew inspiration from and bore resemblances to the historical models that he, Yanagi and other founders of the *mingei* movement idealized as the embodiment of a uniquely Asian mode of production (*ibid.*: 4)

Yufuku Gallery owner and director Aoyama Wahei has written a long critique of the Japan's Living National Treasure system, which has become a reference in Japanese ceramics' studies. In his 2004 article, Aoyama uncovers the political lobby behind the current selection of the Living National Treasure, the colloquial name by which important intangible cultural property holders are known.

The Cultural Property Preservation Act states that the Minister of Science and Education appoints LNTs [Living National Treasures]. The Minister makes his decision based on the proposals of the Committee for Cultural property Preservation, comprised of academics and members of the Agency of Cultural Affairs. It is this Committee which debates, discovers, and researches potential candidates for IICP [Important Intangible Cultural Properties] status. They gather their information from small regional committees throughout Japan. In fact, these

regional committees are similar to lobbyists that try to promote their respective prefectures by pushing a regional potter for LNT status. Receiving such a status will bring fame, prestige, and tourists to local kiln sites associated with the potter. Unfortunately, this process has become one reason for the politics and discontent behind LNTs (Aoyama, 2004).

Furthermore, instead of actually protecting intangible cultural properties in the brick of extinction (the original act, enacted in 1950, was specifically intended to “preserve such important Japanese heritage that, without government protection, will decline and fall to ruin”, as Aoyama points out), the Living National Treasure system officially promotes institutionally endorsed Japanese values. These political interests become very clear when Aoyama shows that from Bizen region alone five Living National Treasures have been designated. However, Bizen style is not in danger of extinction. It represents, nonetheless, what Faulkner called something “particularly Japanese in feeling”. Thus, it is the officially endorsed Japanese culture that is institutionally promoted inside Japan and exported through international contacts:

What is put on exhibit as ‘Japanese culture’ is mostly an officially endorsed ‘traditional’ culture (Guichard-Anguis, 2001). It is a culture purposively constructed to be displayed as exhibit, which in fact has little to do with contemporary Japanese urban society (Iwabuchi, 1999: 178–9).<sup>2</sup> This image of Japanese culture is closely related to the essentialized and idealized view of Japan that emerged in postwar Japan, as it is manifested, for example, in the *Nihonjinron* (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2005: 157)

Therefore, as Goldstein-Gidoni argues (2005: 174), “the cultural product labeled ‘Japanese culture’ is produced in Japan first and foremost for local consumption and then travels to the global arena”.

Yoshino (1999: 23) shows how in the case of business contacts with the world, a Japanese interest in improving intercultural understanding ironically ends up with cultural nationalism. This article shows how interested global cosmopolitans in contact with Japan willingly take part in consuming and then re-producing at home this same product known both in Japan and globally as ‘the Japanese culture’ (*idem*).

In addition, Faulkner (2003) shows how that image of Japan as “a ceramists’ Mecca, an enchanted land where anything and everything is possible, where potters enjoy the status of fine artists and are rewarded handsomely for their efforts”, is in fact the result of specific political and social circumstances.

Governmental institutionalization of the traditional crafts and other artistic practices during the

1950s was a response, it can be argued, to the turmoil that followed Japan's defeat in the Second World War. The Americanization of Japanese culture was a concern, just as there was a need to forge a sense of cultural unity to assist the process of national recovery. There were also worries about the decline of traditional craft production in the face of continuing industrialization and urbanization. The conditions were similar in nature, if more pressing and immediate, to those which Yanagi, Okakura, and their generation had previously responded to in their different ways. Thus, even though there was a conscious rejection of the prewar nationalist agenda and the excesses in which it had resulted, the underlying search for the essence of Japanese-ness remained very much the same. (Faulkner, 2003).

## 7. Shimaoka Tatsuzo and the opening of Mashiko to foreign potters

Shimaoka Tatsuzo was born in Tokyo in 1919 from a rope-maker father, fact which had a decisive influence in this work. In a visit to the Japanese Folk Crafts Museum in 1938, he came in contact with the *mingei* movement and decided to enroll in the pottery course at Tokyo Technical University. In 1940, he visited Hamada Shoji's studio in Mashiko and after spending the summer there he was accepted to be his apprentice after finishing his university course. However, in 1942, because of the war, Shimaoka was called to serve in Burma and was only able to start his apprenticeship with Hamada in 1946, which lasted for 3 years. In 1950, he joined the Tochigi Ken Yogyo Shidoshi (Tochigi Ceramic Research Centre) and he finally established his studio in Mashiko in 1953, next door to Hamada. There he built his own kiln, which he fired for the first time in March of the following year.

Starting in 1964, Shimaoka traveled to the U.S.A., Canada, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, giving lectures, teaching and holding exhibitions. In 1964, he made the first of a series of major one-man annual exhibitions at the Matsuya Department Store in Ginza. The same year, he was first invited to lecture and exhibit his works in Canada and the U.S.A. In 1968, he taught summer sessions at Long Beach State College and San Diego State College, California, and toured Europe. In 1972, he spent two months traveling and teaching in Australia at the invitation of the Australian government and in 1974 he taught in Toronto, Canada and held a one-man exhibit in Boston (Massachusetts), U.S.A. In 1977, he held his first exhibition in Europe at the Kunstgewerbe Museum, Hamburg, and in 1978 he came back to Canada to teach at the Banff Art Center, in British Columbia, for four weeks. In that year, he also participated in a show about Japanese Ceramics at Hetjens Museum, Düsseldorf, Germany. In 1982, he toured all of Canada and held five one man exhibitions at the request of the International Exchange Fund and, in 1983, he had a one-man exhibition at Gallery Fred Jahn, Munich, Germany. In 1986, he exhibited at Liberty Department Store, London, U.K., and, in 1987, he held one-man exhibition at City Art Museum, in Mannheim, Germany. In 1989, he held another one-man exhibition in Munich's City Art Museum, Germany, and was invited by the

Minister of Arts and Culture to tour all of New Zealand, holding exhibitions and workshops. In 1991, he held a one-man show at Gallery Besson, London, U.K., and, in 1992, he lectured at Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii, U.S.A. Finally, in 2001, at the age of 82, he held an exhibition at Washington D.C., sponsored by the Embassy of Japan in cooperation with the Japan-American Society of Washington D.C.

Shimaoka passed away in December 2007, at the age of 88. Because of his travels, he became a prominent cultural ambassador and his work was acquired by museums in Britain, the US, Canada, Germany, Israel and China (Whiting, 2008). According to curator Kida Takuya, Shimaoka was one of the most famous contemporary Japanese potters abroad and possibly was even more famous outside than inside Japan. “He had become a globetrotting celebrity as well as a hard-working craftsman, and one who was very conscious of the integral role of the visual arts in good east-west relations” (Whiting, 2008).

In 1996, Shimaoka was nominated Living National Treasure for his Jōmon rope decoration pattern known as *Jōmon zogan*. This technique consists on the application of a piece of twisted rope to the pot while the clay is still soft, to make an incised rope pattern (Cortazzi, 1991). According to David G. London (2001):

The technique is actually a combination of the Korean Yi Dynasty process of applying slip to decorative pottery indentations on the one hand, and the decorative rope impressions seen in ancient Jomon pottery on the other. A key element to Shimaoka’s vision was his late father—an accomplished silk cord artisan whom Shimaoka asked to create braided ropes for his new art. By rolling braided ropes with varying designs over the surface of the wet clay, Shimaoka has been able to create wonderful surface textures highlighted by the slip; in a way a spiritually collaborative effort with his parent (LONDON, 2001).

For David Whiting (2008) “Shimaoka drew on Japanese ceramic traditions in his work, but, through Hamada, he also had a debt to Chinese, Korean and English medieval pots”. Having started out as a product of the *mingei* movement, he finally broke his ties with it in 1991, withdrawing from the *Kokugakai* (Japan Art Association), one of the main organs of the official *mingei* machinery (Faulkner, 2001). According to the author, Shimaoka’s work consists in a mixture of references to traditions, real and invented.

Shimaoka’s ceramics are traditional for their multiple references to historical precedents. Many of his shapes draw on and expand the repertory established by Hamada, who in turn, like Bernard Leach in his country, looked to a variety of early Asian and English models for inspiration (*ibid.*: 4)

Whiting (2008) stated that “just as Shimaoka had learned his skills from Hamada, so he proved an influential teacher for others, ensuring the continuation of a vigorous Japanese tradition”. Besides the Japanese pupils, Shimaoka also taught a representative amount of foreign students and prospective potters, such as the Australian Euan Craig, which was interviewed in last years' research. Thus, following Hamada's connection with the West through Bernard Leach, Shimaoka was one of the responsables for opening Mashiko to foreign potters, by accepting several students of different nationalities to learn at his studio.

Through a quick search on the internet, I found eight ceramists who were taught in Mashiko by him: Ruri, Japanese-American, interviewed for this research, in 1977; Lee Love, Japanese-American, between 1999 and 2003; Gerd Knaper, German potter who worked in Kasama for several decades, between 1967 and 1970; Craig Miron, British, between 1974 and 1976; William Pluptre, British, in 1985; David McDonald, American, between 1977 and 1979; Tony Marsh, American, between 1979 and 1981; and Euan Craig, Australian working in Minakami (Gunma Prefecture), in 1991, who was interviewed last year.

## 8. Art versus Craft/Contemporaneity versus Tradition

Although certain styles of Japanese pottery, in particular those related to the tea ceremony, have been seen as “artistic” since feudal times, the acceptance of ceramics as art is a relatively recent phenomenon. As in early 19th century Europe, not only the distinction between art and craft was blurred in the first half of Meiji Japan, but it was also difficult to distinguish crafts (*kōgei*) from industry (*kōgyō*). It was only with the development of modern industry in Japan that a gradually autonomy between the two concepts has emerged.

According to anthropologist Brian Moeran (1997: 13) the distinction between art (*bijutsu*) and crafts (*kōgei*) in Japan essentially followed the European precedent. It was largely due to the participation in the international exhibitions that took place in Europe and the United States in the late 19th century that the word ‘art’ (*bijutsu*) originated in Japan as an independent concept of ‘craft’ (*kōgei*). The frequent success of Japanese potters in these exhibitions influenced the organization of the art world and the development of ceramics as an art form in Japan.

However, the newly created world of Japanese art did not embrace craft, whose international success led to its formation (Moeran, 1997: 14). As a result, Japanese craftsmen could not send their artistic contributions to the Ministry of Education (*Buten*) or to the Imperial Art Exhibition (*Teiten*) and were, for a long time, confined to the first crafts exhibitions organized by the Ministry of Commerce and Agriculture (*op. cit.*). Their exclusion from these exhibits was the result of an official denial of the “artistic” qualities of Japanese craftsmanship. According to Kaneko Kenji (2002: 30), “the crafts have suffered from the tendency in the West to equate individualist expression with Fine Art, and utility and mass production with industrial design”.

In order to challenge this notion by which potters were not seen as artists, Kyoto potter Yagi Isso (1895–1974), founded the group Sekidōkai in 1920 as an alternative to the rigid hierarchical system of the art salons. In its manifesto, the members wrote that the group’s goal was to express the eternal beauty of nature through the art of pottery (Winther-Tamaki, 1999: 127). Other examples of potters who have contributed to raising the level of ceramic art were the National Treasure Tomimoto Kenkichi (1886–1963) and Kusuke Yaichi (1897–1984), who created works combining traditional techniques with artistic individuality.

Even so, the manufacture of vessels still marked pottery production in Japan. It was only in the early years after the war that the emergence of a new artistic movement transformed the world of Japanese ceramics, introducing the concept of *objet d’art* and contributing to the admission of the non-functional ceramic object. This movement was known as Sōdeisha (Crawling through Mud Association) and it was created in 1948 by a Kyoto-based group of ceramic artists: Yagi Kazuo, Kumakura Junkichi and Suzuki Osamu. The Sōdeisha group was the first to openly challenge the concept of functionality in Japanese ceramics, which, ultimately, contributed to open this world to women artists because of their detachment from tradition and, therefore, the hierarchical patriarchal system. “The proposition that crafts were a vehicle for individualistic expression resulted in an inevitable clash with traditional concerns about utility and function” (Kaneko, 2002: 28).

Opposing with “one of the dominant models of Japanese ceramic tradition, the cultivated taste in the milieu of the tea ceremony for rustic ware such as Shino and Bizen” (Winther-Tamaki, 1999: 129), the work of Sōdeisha took the form of abstract sculptural ceramics. By stopping to work with models based on the history of Japanese ceramics and refusing to submit their works to the conservative art salons system, the group broke with the canons and institutions of the Japanese ceramics world and was free to explore something beyond (*op. cit.*).

Influenced by European modernists, Sōdeisha’s main founder Yagi Kazuo produced pieces that challenged the dominant utilitarian paradigm in ceramic production in Japan, while appropriating their materials to reach a new expression. Dismissing the container “that had hitherto been the *sine qua non* of the pottery world, his non-functional ceramic objects retained a significant residue of the vessel, namely its physical material, the fired clay, and the aesthetic qualities associated with this material” (Winther-Tamaki, 1999: 134). Crafts Gallery chief curator Kaneko Kenji states that:

Those ceramic artists had discovered a method for self expression that worked through the traditional processes in the ceramic arts: building on the potter’s wheel, drying, glazing, firing, and finishing. While their work is conventional ceramic art in the sense that they created it through the traditional processes, it is also pure art in the sense that is created as a means of self expression. Combining those two truths produces, however, a result that is neither traditional ceramics nor pure art. The Sōdeisha potters had discovered a new theory of formation that stands somewhere right between, That is what I have called “craftical formation”.

(Kaneko, 200-)

Kaneko has called this process which is imposed by the materials, "Craftical Formation". For him, "following the logic of the material to discover a means of self expression is a description broadly applicable to work in the crafts by individualist artists" (Kanejo, 200-).

To put it bluntly, there are two ways of forming something. On one hand, you have an image in your head, and to materialize that image, you choose a material to work with. On the other hand, you start with a material, and then begin to instill an image or concept within the material. The latter is craftesque formation, while the former is fine art. Many things fall under craftesque formation. Sculptural craft, avant-garde craft, traditional craft, etc, as long as the material comes first. In regards to ceramics, clay must come first (Kaneko *apud* Aoyama, 2005).

The Sōdeisha group opened a precedent for the affirmation of ceramics as a contemporary art form in Japan and, in 1970s, a new generation of ceramic artists emerged. According to Kaneko (200-), "their work was strongly stimulated by contemporary art in Japan, which had developed in response to the tide of American contemporary art reaching Japan after the war". Meanwhile, the 1980s Japan saw the appearance of the claywork movement, which basically consisted in the production of huge ceramic works and installations that were often based on concepts, but did not have any functionality.

The 1990s, thus, was the antithesis of this movement, or in other words, a return to the question of clay. (···) while the economic bubble was bursting, the ceramists of Japan were moving toward a return to clay and what it meant to make ceramic art. More explicitly, a return to clay means making works that can only be made through the use of clay, and not through any other material. Such were the 1990s (Kaneko, 2005).

According to Kaneko, contemporary ceramics today are a large genre, which features many kinds of work. Furthermore, for Aoyama Wahei, "today's Japanese ceramics is receiving great praise the world over. The international interest in Japanese pottery is probably at its highest ever, and this interest is leaning towards contemporary pottery, without differentiating the functional from the nonfunctional. Avant-garde or traditional<sup>(2)</sup>".

Undoubtedly, the expansion of boundaries between art and craft and between contemporaneity and tradition has not only contributed to the opening of the Japanese ceramic world to women artists, but also to foreigners who were interested in working with Japanese concepts and techniques. During our interview, Aoyama Wahei pointed out the emergence of contemporary Japanese artists who are contributing for the search for a new paradigm in ceramics in Japan, far from the *mingei*

and the Momoyama tradition. Two of them are Mihara Ken (1958–) and Yabe Shunichi (1968–), the grandson of Bizen's third Living National Treasure.

Furthermore, many non-Japanese contemporary artists have shown a major influence of Japanese traditional techniques and concepts in their work. Some of them are the Japanese-American artist and landscape architect Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988), Austrian-born British studio potter Lucie Rie (1902–1995), German-born British studio potter Hans Coper (1920–1981), British ceramic artist Edmund De Waal (1964–) and American ceramic artists Tim Rowan (1967–). In fact, one of the interviewed female ceramic artists, Agnes Husz from Nagano, stated that her work is based on sculptural ideas put into contemporary everyday objects with Japanese inspiration.

## Conclusions

There are many questions that arise from the theme “Foreign ceramists in Japan”. Because of the short research time, more questions than answers were raised and that is why I intend to deepen this research in a future PhD. In short, I purposed that the image of Japanese ceramics and Japanese potters, in Japan and abroad, are still strongly influenced by the construction of Japanese-ness after the Meiji Restoration, made in dialogue with the romantic orientalist discourse promoted through 19th century World Fairs and the European Japonism. In this context, the tea aesthetics of the Momoyama period resulting from Zen Buddhist ideals were recovered as a symbol of Japanese identity, associating Japanese traditional culture to ideas of refinement and strong naturalism. In a second moment, the period of Americanization and Westernization of Japan led to the return to Japanese traditional values, which can be seen in the popularization of the *mingei* after the Second World war and its dissemination in the West through ‘Leach’s Tradition’. This, together with the officially endorsed aesthetic values and traditional techniques promoted through the Living National Treasure system, has contributed to the construction of a specific representation of Japanese traditional culture, which has populated the imagery of foreigners who search in Japan for an artistic reference until today.

Hence, according to craft history specialists Brian Moeran (1997) and Yuko Kikuchi (2004), in a first moment, the West created an image of Japan as a projection of its own image, which resulted in an orientalist vision of the East. In a second stage, Japan appropriated that same image and transformed it in its own mirror reflection, in a process that Moeran (1997) calls self-Orientalism and Kikuchi (2004) calls Oriental Orientalism. In a third moment, the West absorbed this self-Orientalist representation of Japan in a process that Kikuchi (2004) calls Reverse Orientalism. This shows how Orientalism, as culture itself, is not static. On the contrary, “it is always on the move, always in a process of change”. (Moeran, 1997: 225). However, “no cultural tradition can ever be pristine, ever be pure (···). Total aesthetic independence is, in long run, virtually impossible” (*ibid.*: 226). Thus, it is in this process of constant translation, actualization and reinterpretation that cul-

ture and traditions cease to be an invention and a construct and become something original and unique.

## Notes

- (1) <http://www.mingei.org/about/history-of-mingei/>  
 (2) <http://www.e-yakimono.net/html/jcn-9.html>

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