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Insights into Understanding Japanese Crafts

&

Related Policies

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Part 1

1 Introduction

1.1 Context Setting

Conventionally, cultural economics focus more on the arts than crafts. However, while art is acknowledged as a driver of innovation, crafts play an integral role in keeping traditions alive. While machinery and automation can provide convenience and better margins, handicrafts and their impact are often overlooked. Handicrafts connect us to the past, where hand-operated tools made everything. While we no longer need handcrafted products in the modern technological world, there is something about these imperfectly made products that make them aesthetically valuable to niche segments of the population. Making the products by hand required skills and training that took long years, and most of these skills are learnt under the guidance of master craftspeople than in a formal educational institution. Japan has been one of the nations that placed handmade objects high in value and therefore developed policy frameworks to ensure that Japanese handicrafts find a market and can remain economically viable for their producers. The objective of this study is to run through some of these unique policies that have helped handicrafts thrive and stay relevant even in today's day and age.

The study is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will be discussing the history of the craft policies. In the second part, I will be discussing the handloom sector in Kyoto with a specific focus on the Nishijin area. In the final part, I will be highlighting the interactions with entrepreneurs, weavers and store owners, which I had in Kyoto and Tokyo.

1.2 History of the Crafts

Until the country opened up via the Meiji restoration, art and craft was one identity. It was only after 1868 that western influences forced Japan to distinguish between art and craft. Consequently, crafts were separated into artistic crafts and industrial crafts.[1] Crafts were an important export product in the early periods of the Meiji era and were promoted extensively in international circles. Initially, they were admired by larger audiences at the Vienna World's Fair in 1873, but by 1878 these handicrafts were heavily criticized for being more industrial product than fine art.[2] The influence of western culture meant crafts bifurcated into artistic crafts on the one end and economic crafts on the other. Artistic crafts being aesthetic in appeal contrast, economic crafts had a functional purpose. It is worth noting that later on, the mingei movement by Yanagi Soetsu was centred around the beauty of the economic craft. While their primary objective was functionality, the beauty of these items lay in how they were created from an unselfish purpose by an artisan not working for their ego since these products did not go out with nametags. Daily use did make them more beautiful.[3] The mingei movement was crucial in establishing an early predecessor to a policy framework for handicrafts by documenting, promoting and preserving folk crafts.[4] A frequent rationalization against giving out subsidies for artisans is that the economic expenditure on culture does not give back enough returns. However, research conducted by Hiroyuki Yamada, Masuyo Arai and Hideho Yasuda found that in the Tokyo area, investment in art and culture had a more significant impact than construction or infrastructure.[5]

One of the first cultural policies regarding craftworks was established in 1897 - The Cultural Preservation Law for Temples and Shrines, seeking to protect paintings and crafts found in religious places as tangible cultural heritages. Internationally exhibiting Japanese handicrafts did not stop even after early criticism at the global stage since the handicrafts evolved to include western sensibilities, perennial exhibitions like Bunten were held to large audiences starting as early as 1907. To further create a solid foundation for ensuring craftworks survive through time, schools specializing in craft traditions were also established, such as the Kanazawa College of Arts and the Tokyo High School of Arts. In 1950, the Comprehensive Law for Cultural Heritage Preservation was established - this was probably the first time the concept of intangible cultural heritage had been recognized, notably, even before UNESCO had done so. Intangible heritage may be defined as the skills of traditional performing arts and traditional crafts. By 1974, a more concrete policy dedicated to promoting craftworks was established as the Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries and entrusted to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). As this law evolved through the years, the national government began to take on a more holistic approach towards creating a market for handicraft goods by establishing sound measures for passing down traditional know-how within the Japanese citizenry and branding strategies (Cool Japan) for appreciation across the globe.

[1] Cite
[2] Mori 2009
[3] Cite Kikuchi, Reedy
[4] See Reedy, p131
[5] The Information Bulletin of the National Economic Associations in Japan, pg 23, 2014, available at https://www.ibi-japan.co.jp/gakkairengo/htdocs/nenpou/pdf/no_34.pdf

2 Ministerial and Non-Ministerial Agencies responsible for Craft Policy

It must be understood that there is a mix of cultural and economic policymaking in the handling of the handicraft industry. Both these lines of policy fall under different agencies within the government's cabinet – the Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA) deals with cultural policy while the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry deals with economic policy.[6] The ACA treats important craftwork as a tangible cultural heritage policy while the techniques of making various craftworks are classified as intangible cultural heritage. While 'Living National Treasure' is not an official term, those individuals whose skills are classified as Intangible Cultural Heritage are referred to as Living National Treasures.[7] They are responsible for carrying forward the traditions of the past to the future.

The METI, on the other hand, deals exclusively with the economic policy ensuring that there is a sizable market for all handicrafts and making it readily available to large audiences.[8] The Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries lays out a framework for a bottom-up approach whereby Production Areas or Manufacturers of handicrafts in conjunction with each other and retailers layout Promotion Plans and Revitalization Plans[9], subject to which funding is given once recognized by the METI. The METI works with DENSAN (the Association for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries), who help in promoting designated traditional craft industries.

[6] Cite Goto
[7] Cite
[8] Cite METI website
[9] *Article 71*, Cultural Properties Act

3 Craft Policies

3.1 Living National Treasure

Article 2(II) of the Cultural Properties Act includes crafts as intangible cultural properties, and Article 71 of the Cultural Properties Act states that the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology may designate important intangible cultural properties as important intangible cultural properties.

While there is no direct mention of the term "Living National Treasure" in the Cultural Properties Act, it is an informal term that applies to the keepers of intangible cultural properties. While individuals or groups may get the status of National Treasure or Important Intangible Cultural Property, the phrase Living National Treasure is usually reserved for the individuals who have been certified.[10]

The holders of this title are granted 2 million yen for training and spreading knowledge on the skills required for the designated craft. The government also gives subsidies and tax incentives in furtherance of the same.[11] As the award comes with financial support to ensure the continuation of the tradition and complete documentation of the craft and exhibitions to publicize it[12], it works as a definitive incentive for craftspersons to achieve this status. Moreover, those handicrafts made by living national treasures are high-value goods in the market because of their exclusivity and endorsement by the national government.

3.2 DENSAN Certification

The Association for the promotion of traditional craft industries (DENSAN)[13], along with METI, local governments and regional craft unions, certifies traditional craftspersons.[14] Certification requires at least twelve years of work experience in a district specializing in a specific craft industry and the passing of an examination. DENSAN also plays a central role in the promotion of designated traditional craft industries by providing vital services such as Human Resources, demand development, trade exhibitions, research and information and the operation of Aoyama Square - a shop in Tokyo where one can purchase traditional craft products from various areas throughout Japan.[15]

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[10] *Article 71*, Cultural Properties Act
[11] Miwako Sato, Japanese Artists: The Way it Was and Still is, Departures, https://www.departures.com/art-culture/art-design/japanese-artisans-and-living-national-treasures; See K Goto, pg 119
[12] Making Traditional Pottery Sustainable Today: Three Case Studies in Akita Prefecture, Japan, Cara L. Reedy and Chandra L. Reedy, pg 131, available at http://www.archaeopress.com/Public/download.asp?id={B13FD0AF-E302-43DA-88EC-60971AB2FD43}
[13] "The Traditional Craft Industry Promotion Association is a national, local public organization, production center association and organization as a core organization for promoting the traditional craft industry based on the Act on Promotion of the Traditional Craft Industry", DENSAN website
[14] See K Goto, Crafts Policies in Japan, pg 121
[15] Yasushi Ueki and Yuki Kamiesu, Opportunities and Challenges of Developing Contemporary Relationships between Traditional Crafts and Industries in Japan..., Research Report IDE-JETRO, pg 68,69, 2019, https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Download/Ec/pdf/201903_02_ch05.pdf

3.3 Designation of Traditional Crafts

To be considered a traditional craft, the following conditions need to be met[16]

1. The craftwork ought to be used in daily life.
2. The primary production process should be performed by hand.
3. The tradition should be more than 100 years old.
4. The primary materials used to make the product must be more than a hundred years old.
5. The crafts industry should be concentrated in a specific regional district [the production area should be more than ten firms or greater than 30 employees[17]].

A bottom-up approach is followed wherein manufacturers of traditional crafts can submit a joint promotion plan through the prefectural governor. The promotion plan must relate to the following[18]:

1. Securing and fostering successors and training employees.
2. Generational Transfer or improvement of craftsmanship, techniques and quality.
3. Securing or research of raw materials.
4. Development of demand.
5. Improving the work environment.
6. Joint purchase/selling and other endeavours pertaining to joint business.
7. Quality labelling and provision of adequate information to consumers.
8. Employee welfare.

While the promotion plan is prima facie to be funded on the cooperative's finances, there are numerous subsidies and advantages that the Association and the govt bestow[19]:

1. Subsidy for successor training projects.
2. Assistance in collecting materials on traditional craft techniques and making recording films and documents.
3. To secure stable raw materials used for the production of traditional crafts, they will conduct a fact-finding survey, conduct a field survey to see if it is available in Japan and overseas, and research to develop alternative raw materials.
4. Assistance for developing new products using traditional techniques, developing new demand, and holding exhibitions to grasp trends.
5. Assistance for design development of traditional crafts, evaluation meetings for new designs, and study groups on the results of the evaluation meetings.

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[16] *Article 2* of the 'Act' [The Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries], The decision is made by the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry on counsel of the Industrial Structure Council; Defining Japan's Traditional Crafts, Tsunagu Japan, available at https://www.tsunagujapan.com/traditional-japanese-crafts-defined/

[17] What are Traditional Crafts?, DENSAN website, https://kyokai.kougeihin.jp/traditional-crafts/

[18] Article 6 of the 'Act'

[19] Subsidy for expenses in implementing the promotion plan, DENSAN website, available at https://kyokai.kougeihin.jp/law/

Thus, officially designated traditional crafts are eligible for labelling their products as "designated as traditional crafts" and also financial assistance as under the act. The local cooperative business association in the production area has to develop promotion plans/revitalization plans and submit them to METI via the prefectural government to receive such assistance. Labelling allows the products to have a certain status and recognition as the government endorses it. The designation as traditional crafts is also the first step to coming within the fold of the government's policies. These are also the crafts that DENSAN helps reach a global market.

4 Cultural Fairs and Exhibitions

In the post-war period, one of the crucial developments in the realm of crafts was the setting up of the Japan Craft Association (Nihon Kogei Kai) and the opening of the Japan Traditional Crafts Exhibition in 1955 - around this time is when the government also began awarding the titles of Living National Treasure and Important Intangible Cultural Property. National efforts to support traditional crafts included the establishment in the 1950s of an annual Japan Fine Arts Exhibition (Nitten) and the first Japan Traditional Handicrafts Exhibition held in 1954 at the Cultural Properties Protection Committee (now Agency for Cultural Affairs). Since then, various exhibitions have been held within the country to highlight the various craftworks and present them to the larger populace. In the 1950s, the Japan Fine Arts Exhibition (Nitten) was held as well as the first Japan Traditional Handicrafts Exhibition. One of the most popular exhibitions to showcase traditional crafts is the annually held Japan Traditional Crafts Week, held despite the coronavirus pandemic.[20] Moreover, the Japan Craft Design Association regularly exhibits work by members at the annual "New Craft Exhibition" at Matsuya Department Store in Tokyo. Craft Centre Japan also hosts permanent exhibits at the Maruzen Bookshop in Tokyo.[21]

Crafts Exhibitions are vital in exposing the product to different segments of the population. A common problem faced by craftspersons is their inability to cater to larger audiences outside their local region or the availability of cheaper imports in these regions. Showcasing these crafts and giving them visibility is possibly among the primary steps to creating demand and ensuring the market is sustainable.

[20] Coronavirus cannot hold back these traditional craft events, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2020/09/20/style/japanese-traditional-craft-events/

[21] An Economic Essay on Traditional Handicraft Industries by taking Mingei and Traditional Crafts as a Base of Reappraisal, Tadashi Sanaka, pg 42

5 Craftwork Education

Art education was introduced in primary and secondary schools in Japan at the end of the nineteenth century, emphasizing manual drawing.[22] In the late 19th century, the Japanese government established both the Department of Industrial Craft at Imperial University and the Imperial Technical Craft Scheme to protect some of Japan's unique craft traditions.[23] In 1921, the Tokyo High School of Crafts was established to develop education in crafts - this later became part of the Chiba National University. The Kanazawa College of Arts was one of the earliest to rely on supplying crafts persons for the region back in 1946. Another famous institute that still finds relevance is The Kyoto Institute of Technology, established in 1948 to teach crafts.[24]

The transmission of skills has seen a considerable drop among crafts persons with fewer young people taking to the same. However, as mentioned by Reedy, there are some pockets of spaces where crafts persons are learning these skills from universities even if not directly taught as per the conventional 'apprenticeship' method. An active system of higher education in craftworks, set up early, has helped sustain the transmission of certain traditional craft techniques and methods.

[22] Christian Morgner, Governance and Policy Development of creative and cultural industries in Japan from: Routledge Handbook of Cultural and Creative Industries in Asia, pg 44, 18 Dec 2018.
[23] See Reedy
[24] See K Goto, Crafts Policies in Japan, pg 120

6 Funding and Subsidies

Officially designated Traditional craft products can be eligible for financial assistance implemented under the act. To receive financial aid from the METI and other public entities to promote a selected traditional craft product, the local cooperative business association in the production area, which consists of traditional craft producers, needs to develop three-to five-year plans for industrial promotion and vitalization and submit them to the METI through the local prefectural government.[25] Such a bottom-up approach ensures that artisans are involved in the process. Their concerns are mirrored by the government who then alleviates the same by choosing to fund or subsidize what the artisan wants instead of the standard method of allocating funds towards specific industries.

Article 19 of the Act [Act on the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries] also says that the national and local government must ensure appropriate tax measures for the smooth implementation of the accredited promotion plan. This implies that local governments must give tax breaks to support the production areas where crafts are being manufactured.

The biggest challenge faced by traditional craftspersons is the valuation of their goods and how to create these traditional craft goods economically viable. By offering funds, subsidies, and a bottom-up approach to expenditure, the policy ensures that economic concerns can be addressed.

[25] SeeYasushi Ueki and Yuki Kamiesu, pg 68

7 Cool Japan – Creating Overseas Demand

The Cool Japan Association was established in 2010 with the strategy aims to build Japan as a brand and consequently increase tourism and exports. It promotes various creative goods - it also tries to encourage innovation with traditional crafts by having young craftspersons and designers work together.[26] It is a cross-ministerial national strategy under the coordination of the Cabinet Office, and it also has several public-private partnerships backing it.[27] Notably, the Cool Japan Strategy allows traditional craft industries to be exposed to a broader audience and collaboration between local traditional craft industries and Japanese and foreign experts from different industries with diverse expertise.[28] An example of this at work is that DENSAN has opened a permanent showroom in Paris called ESPACE DENSAN[29], wherein traditional crafts manufactured in Japan are showcased in Paris.

The Cool Japan Strategy is instrumental in widening the demand for traditional craft goods. By promoting these craftworks overseas, there is the dual benefit of attracting tourists and returns on the sale of such products.

[26] See K Goto, pg 125-26
[27] See Christian Morgner, pg 48
[28] Cool Japan Strategy 2012, https://www.meti.go.jp/english/policy/mono_info_service/creative_industries/pdf/120116_01a.pdf
[29] See Yasushi Ueki and Yuki Kamiesu, pg 78-79

8 Conclusion

Even though there is a robust policy framework in place in Japan, there are a fair number of problems plaguing the traditional crafts industry. The advent of technology allows for production at scale, hurting the conventional artisan whose process often takes more time and involves higher costs. The decline of rural areas has also contributed to a decrease in the availability of traditional resources (raw materials), which relied heavily on the agricultural industry. Urbanization has again led to depletion in forest cover, so raw material like bamboo is not as abundant as earlier. Further compression of urban spaces means kilns contribute to smoke damage, and thus their operation is severely limited. The change in lifestyle is also notable as handicrafts were always touted as items of utility that would last for a very long time, disposable plastic utensils and the like have instead taken their space in the home.[30] While such problems exist, the Japanese government has evolved their policymaking to account for the same – programs like Cool Japan are intended to lure more tourism and create demand overseas, which has seen a significant rise in numbers. Subsequently, Japanese handicrafts are viewed as speciality items, and this market formation abroad has contributed to economic sustainability. It should be noted that Cool Japan works in tandem with all the conventional policies that have been put in place as they help sustain the domestic market.

[30] Current Status, DENSAN website, https://kyokai.kougeihin.jp/current-situation/

Part 2

1 Kyoto Handloom History

There is a temple in Kyoto wherein a shrine dedicated to the god of silkworms is present. Located in Uzumasa, in the Ukyo ward in Kyoto, the temple is a striking example of how silk has played an important role in Japan's history of textile. Although several records cite the return of weavers after the Onin War as the genesis of Kyoto's tryst with weaving, there was a sericulture practice from the 5th century. The Hata people from the Southern part of the Korean peninsula had made their way to an area west of Kyoto. Bringing with them several advanced technologies for the time, they also brought unused / under-utilized land under cultivation. The immigrants were thus able to curry favour with the ruling classes and nobility. The Uzumasa weavers were, therefore, already the undisputed centre of weaving in Japan.[31]

[31] Nishijin Silk Weaving, Okpyo Moon, pg 3

2 History of Nishijin (15th Century)

The Onin wars lasted a decade (1467-1477), and they ravaged large swathes of Kyoto, war-torn and seeking refuge, a group of weavers took to reside in Sakai, a merchant city near Osaka. After the war, they returned to a former military camp outside the western walls of the city and lived there, setting up a community of weavers. The era of Nishijin had thus laid the foundation in Kyoto, and the name is a derivative of "Western Camp". This community of weavers had clientele from the upper echelons of Japanese society, from the emperor to the feudal lords.[32] What followed was the Edo Period (1603-1868), a relatively peaceful and prosperous time in Japanese history. Nishijin textiles flourished because of various factors - they had a ready market of affluent nobility who could afford high-quality textiles and held a monopoly on silk thread imported from China.[33] Such was the fancy that even though the Shogunate had barred samurai warriors from wearing ostentatious garments, samurais (now more bureaucrats than warriors) continued to adorn various kinds of glamorous Nishijin textiles.[34] The urban middle class had an expendable income and would partake in the arts freely. Consequently, the Edo period saw a flourishing culture of literature and various forms of entertainment such as Kabuki theatre. It is them who also became ready adopters of high-quality silk garments.[35]

Towards the end of the Edo period, however, multiple events offset this early success as a series of crop failures resulted in a decrease in demand for high-quality textile. Moreover, the Shogunate supported a variety of weaving districts all across Japan, and Nishijin suffered from this competition.[36] However, in response, Nishijin had set up a series of guilds to ensure quality control and ensure product improvement. Further, the Meiji emperor had shifted the capital from Kyoto to Tokyo, which also served as a big blow to the industry. The western dress also became prominent around this time, serving as a double punch since the demand for these clothes increased over traditional attire.[37] This crisis period served as an essential turning point for Nishijin textiles as the then Kyoto prefectural governor took steps to revitalize the industry by upping the ante on innovation. In 1872, he sent three textile experts from Kyoto to Lyon in France to understand and acquire the jacquard loom, power looms and other dyes. The Hall of weaving was also established in Kyoto in 1887, which acted as a centre for disseminating new technology.[38] Nishijin also had the advantage of being surrounded by culturally relevant businesses and sites such as tea ceremony houses, classical theatres, painter's studios, shrines and temples. This patronage of high-quality textile continues to date.[39] It should be noted that superior technique was also built through centuries of passing down weaving traditions among families in the Nishijin community. Thus the quality of textiles was undoubtedly superior to comparable weaving communities in the rest of the country.

[32] Hareven, pg 26
[33] Supra Moon, pg 4-5
[34] Hareven, pg 28
[35] See Reischauer 1989, from Hareven
[36] See Naramoto 1969, pp 223-224, from Moon
[37] Hareven pg 28, Moon pg 4
[38] See Morris-Suzuki 1994, from Hareven
[39] See Taniguchi, 1993, pg 14, from Moon

3 Family Tradition and Innovation

Familial tradition plays an essential role in Nishijin textile history, and the formation of infrastructure within which the industry resides is a result of the same. The current village structure is reminiscent of ancient cities wherein horizontal blocks were concentrated and joined by narrow roads. Notably, such construction proved conducive to tightly knit exclusive weaving communities that did not favour the ready acceptance of outsiders.[40] Narrow streets also ensured that large scale transportation would not feature in this area. Together these factors resulted in Nishijin not translating to the modern manufacturing industry but more of a household production system during the Meiji period, which oversaw the Industrial Revolution.[41] The distribution system in Nishijin also had a crucial role to play in this regard as unlike in other parts of the country where family-based weaving communities resided, in Kyoto, there existed a unique system of intermediary merchants and wholesalers who had nationwide information about the market and would assure sales of the product.[42] Although such hierarchies provide fertile ground for exploitation by the wholesalers, they also absorb economic shocks so that the manufacturer is not exposed directly to the market fluctuations.[43]

The industry saw several ups and downs through the Meiji Period, but its biggest blow was dealt later on during the Second World War as production of Nishijin was halted almost entirely since it was considered a luxury good, only a few weavers were allowed to continue production, on so that the tradition does not die out.[44] Although the industry was re-established after the war, the Korean war came soon after and recruiting new workers became a hassle with increasing urbanization and westernization of apparel.[45].

[40] A study on the Regional Innovation in an Industrial Cluster: Focusing on a Traditional Textile Industry of Nishijin Area. Tai Hun Lee and Soon Goo Hong, IJUNESST Vol 9 No. 4, pg 10 (2016)
[41] See Tai Hun Lee and Hareven
[42] See Heritization as a double-edged sword: the dilemma of Nishijin silk weaving in Kyoto, Japan, Okpyo Moon, pg 123 in Fashionable Traditions: Asian Handmade Textiles in Motion, Ayami Nakatani (2020)
[43] Ibid Moon, pg 123
[44] Harveen pg 29
[45] Moon pg 5

The proliferation of western clothing had a disruptive impact on the traditional textile industry as it came to be seen as a symbol of social dignity and progress.[46] Moreover, during the second world war, the people started to explore less ostentatious wear, and western clothes became the go-to for Japanese women. Even though spun silk kimono (meisen kimono) became popular in the post-war boom, soon cheaper wool kimonos began to take their place as it was warmer, more comfortable and easier to maintain than silk in everyday wear. This was then substituted by western wear because mass production of synthetic fabrics and ready-to-wear dress dominated the market. Preference for western wear was not the only reason for the decline in Nishijin textiles. Several other factors also played a key role, such as the high tariffs imposed on Chinese imported silk that was cheaper than Japanese native silk, the oil shock of the 1970's impacted companies that had overproduced[47] in the preceding boom, and Muromachi wholesalers increased the prices on kimonos and obis. The lack of direct contact between weaver and consumer meant that the weaver could not adapt to changing tastes, and thus demand eventually dipped as well.[48] Moon believes that the decline of Nishijin was not due to industrialization but due to other economic and social factors. Because had it been industrialization, the effect would have been irreversible.[49] Nishijin weavers used modern technology only to produce traditional goods. As such, the value of these textiles resides in the history of the craft and the complexity of the product. In an evolving society increasingly adopting western wear and losing touch with tradition, resilient Nishijin weavers still innovated.

[46] See Slade p 53 (2009) in Hashino
[47] See also Vanishing Kyoto Textiles - Effect of The Kimono Business on Kyoto Textiles From 1949 to 2000, Keiko Okatomo, pg 153, Hareven pg 46
[48] See Hareven, pg 46
[49] Moon, pg 7

4 Return to High Market Goods

According to the Prime Minister's Office, kimono fabric retail sale saw a 183% rise (in terms of the fabric), and silk kimono fabric saw a 230% rise between 1956 and 1966.[50] Since wool kimonos were substituted quickly by western dress, Nishijin weavers stopped producing a mass audience using synthetic textile. They reverted to producing high-quality silk products to cater to the luxury goods market. Nishijin producers also changed their strategy from making kimonos to making obis, especially high-priced silk obi.[51] By the end of the 1970s, Nishijin had trounced other districts competing in the same market and were responsible for almost 74.2% of all obi production and 25.9% of all kimono production.[52] The production increase of silk obi indicates that weavers changed their primary offering from popular goods to luxury goods for survival. High-quality fabrics which are woven by hand could not be replicated by machines regardless of the developments in automation and precise manufacturing technologies.[53]

In 1981, the market scale of kimono was at its peak of 1800 billion yen[54]. Since then, it has seen a sharp decline to 271 billion yen as of 2018[55]. Data from the National Textile Industry Association corroborates the same - the total sales of Nishijin textile decreased to 16% of what it was in 1975.[56] There was an increase in demand from 2005 onwards due to what some call the "Third Kimono Boom". External production in areas such as China could not guarantee quality. Therefore consumers were willing to pay premiums for quality and, domestic demand for high-quality textile picked up. Importantly, collaborative relationships with other industries such as fabric for automobiles and luxury stores or hotels resulted in increased demand.[57] However, this trend is still overshadowed by an ageing population of weavers who do not wish to have their children participate in the same industry and an overall decrease in weavers and textile manufacturing companies annually.

Current policy around traditional crafts are inhibitive of innovation critics argue since the term traditional itself indicates limitations for the scope of innovation within the sector. Evidently, the need of the hour is adapting to contemporary markets, especially international markets.[58] Nishijin Ori was designated as a traditional craft by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in 1976, and thus manufacturers may avail benefits of funding and subsidy as under the Act for Promotion of Traditional Craft and Industry. However, rigid definitions support the traditional techniques and processes but limit innovation since new products or collaborative products may not come within the fold of such policy even though these new products would be the economic lifeline for the producers. The lack of economies of scale means that the hedonic and symbolic value of these goods indeed outweighs the utilitarian benefits, argues Johns.[59] The Kyoto Prefecture has enacted specific measures to combat the dwindling of demand by introducing the kimono passport program, festivals, fashion shows[60], collections, exhibitions, auctions, catalogue sales, and traditional craft measures other measures to boost the relevance of traditional craft.[61]

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[50] Vanishing Kyoto Textiles - Effect of The Kimono Business on Kyoto Textiles From 1949 to 2000, Keiko Okatomo, pg 141
[51] See Hashino, pg 13
[52] See Maekawa 1982, pg 120
[53] Tai Hun Lee, pg 11
[54] See Meti-Kansai Bureau of Economy, Trade and Industry, pg 3, 2009 in Hashino, T. (2017). *The Survival Strategy of the Japanese Kimono Industry. Global Luxury, 257–274*
[55] Kimono Market in Japan: Key Research Findings 2018, Yano Research Institute Ltd
[56] NTIA 2016
[57] Id. pg 12-13
[58] Tradition or Innovation? Creativity and Internationalization in Kyoto's Craft Industries, Adam Johns pg 163, in N Otzmagin and E Ben Ari, Creative Context, Creative Economy, Springer 2020
[59] See Johns, pg 167
[60] Kimono Fashion Show, https://sharing-kyoto.com/see_Nishijin_Textile_Center/story
[61] Supra 12, Moon 124-125

5 Conclusion

The rich history shared by the Nishijin weavers, their resilience to economic shocks and subsequent preserving age-old traditions with innovations in the process has ensured that they form an essential part of cultural heritage. The reliance on handlooms since the 15th century means that a vast array of knowledge has been passed down through the years in the Nishijin community, and for the weavers that live in this part of Kyoto, Nishijin is a way of life, an identity.[62] Modern-day challenges pose a grave threat to preserving the tradition, and there is an urgent need for solving the crisis of lack of young weavers entering the fray of Nishijin Ori. Policy measures that allow for sustainable practice must be ensured through collaborative partnerships, diversifying demand to a non-Japanese market and incentivizing youth to partake in the weaving business.

[62] See Hareven, pg 25-26

Part 3

1 Interactions with Weavers, Entrepreneurs and Store Owners

1.1 Mori Saeko (Handloom Weaver)

Picture 1 – Mori Saeko on the Tsuzure Ori Loom

Mori Saeko on the tsuzure ori loom (Author)

On September 8, 2019, I visited Mori Saeko, a Kyoto weaver who lives and works in a Machiya (old wooden townhouse). She is one of the few who can weave fabric using the craft of tsumekaki tsuzure ori. (nail weaving). This kind of weaving is said to be over a thousand years old and is used to create tapestries. Here the nail is sharpened into a saw-toothed shape to scrape the weft and create relief patterns to create variations in colours and gradations. This kind of weaving is found only in Kyoto.

Picture 2 – Kimono Project

Source: https://kimono.piow.jp/nation/006.html

Mori Saeko was working on a project named Imagine One World Kimono Project for Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics 2020. The idea of the One World Kimono project is to develop different designs of kimonos, with each representing one nation. For this project, many weavers from across Japan participated and created 213 kimonos to commemorate participating nations. She was presently working on a kimono inspired by St. Kitts and Nevis and India. Carefully chosen patterns from that country's climate, culture, natural beauty. India's kimono has elephants, peacocks, lotus blooms and the Taj Mahal.

Picture 3 – Front of the Machiya, with Latticed Windows on Both Floors

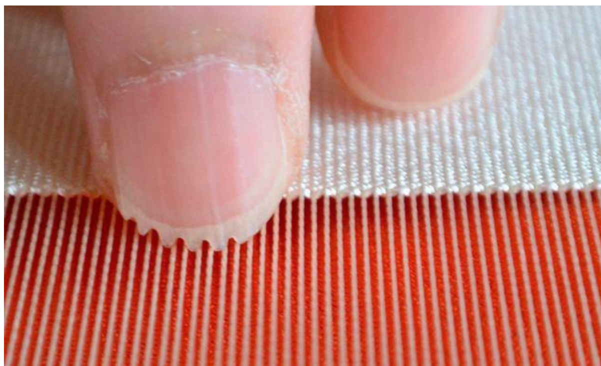
Front of the machiya, with latticed windows on both floors

Picture 4 – Enclosed Inner Courtyard

The residential part of the home is on the first floor

Oriya-date, Machiya and Nagaya are traditional houses consisting of workspaces and living spaces of weaving artisans in Nishijin. The counterparts of Machiya is Noka (farmhouse). Both these types of categories of folk dwellings originate in premodern Japan. Machiya houses were mainly used by merchants and artisans, more popularly known in Japan as Chonin (townspeople). Most machiya dwellings combine to form a block, creating a community of craftsmen within a similar trade. They are narrow but are long with multiple courtyards. The one for merchants has a shop in the front but a residence at the back. Those for weavers have a workspace on the ground floor and residence on the second floor. They have latticed windows to let in light and breeze, but passers-by cannot see what is going on inside.

Picture 5 – Technique of Tsumekaki Tsuzure Ori



The technique of Tsumekaki Tsuzure Ori or 'nail-scratch tapestry weaving' require nails to be a part of the weaving process. Serrations are made on the nails and are used as a tool to push and tighten the weft yarns. Additionally, combs are also used to push and tighten the weft yarns, and by the time the weave becomes finer and more precise, the comb is discarded, and only nails are used. There are about 50 weavers in Kyoto who practise this technique of tsumekaki tsuzure ori. Young people are trying to learn it, but as it requires a lot of skill and practice and the pay is less, they do not continue.

Picture 6 – Using the Serrated Nail

Using the serrated nail

Picture 7 – Passing the Weft Yarn

Passing the weft yarn

In the past, cotton and linen were used for this weave, but later on, this tapestry weave became finer after the weavers started to use silk. This tsuzure technique reached from China to Japan during the Muromachi period in the late 15th or 16th century, with the difference being the weavers used combs and not nails.

Currently, weavers learned this tsuzure technique by working at a company and learn on the job. There are no courses at colleges specializing in this technique.

According to Mori Saeko, the old marketing and business model of the textile industry of Japan where a company or manufacturer or *toniyasan* who have craftsmen like her and give orders and designs to these craftsmen to weave for them and the middlemen who manage the retail and wholesale business needs to change. This old model does not support and help the craftsmen financially, which is why many artisans are shifting to other industries, and the number of craftsmen is diminishing. The new model she suggests should allow the weavers to get direct orders, and they should have some creative liberty to design the textiles. She further indicates as fewer people are wearing kimonos, she wants to weave other products or accessories.

For this Imagine One World Kimono Project for Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics 2020, she got the order directly where middlemen were not involved, and therefore had the creative freedom to propose the designs and colours.

1.2 Masuya Takao

As a part of field research, the venture of Masuya Takao was visited on September 8, 2019, and the following information was collected through an interview.

Picture 8 – Masuya Takao's Venture

Masuya Takao and her assistant in the product viewing room

Picture 9 – Masuya Takao Factory

Masuya Takao Factory having both powerloom and handlooms

Masuya Takao is an *'Orimoto'* or a manufacturer or final assembler of fabrics. Making fabric in Nishijin, a six-step process is followed, and entrepreneurs like Masuya Takao weave the final product in their factories. These entrepreneurs are coordinators who outsource each set to a specialized contractor who completes the task to detailed instructions they receive from respective *Orimoto*s. These contractors are family factories in the neighbourhood that specialize in the six-step process. The task of the *Orimoto* is to be responsible and orchestrate all the processes to make sure each of these contractors and operators completes their work.

First, they fix the kind of fabric they are going to weave, and then the original designs for the patterns are made in-house sometimes, and at times they also buy designs from designers. A USB is used to feed design terns into the looms for the weaving of the fabric. Two types of the shuttle are used in the looms to weave the designs, one is used to weave the plain part, and the other is used to weave the patterns.

Picture 10 – Computer Generated Graph of a Design

Computer generated graph of a design

Masuya Takao specialises in making obi or kimono sash. The fabric of these sashes feels hard to touch. The name of the manufacturing unit, the copyrighted name of the fabric and pattern, and the company's trademark is present on the products that ascertain the authenticity of the products. One of the obi that was shown costs 425,000 yen at retailer price. The designs and products made by Masuya Takao are made on order as the prices of these products is very high. It is generally wealthy people with a high expendable income who order and buy and wear them on special occasions. If the customer comes directly to Masuya Takao, they get the products at a 50% discounted price from the retail price.

Picture 11 – Fabrics Developed at Masuya Takao

Fabrics developed at Masuya Takao

Yarn or material procurement and preparation is an important task for fabric manufacturers. They choose colours and thickness of yarns which would suit the targeted designs for the products. Masuya Takao do not purchase off the shelf silk threads which many fabric manufacturers do but they choose threads by themselves and twist them together and make the yarns for weaving themselves.

Picture 12 – Yarns developed at Masuya Takao

Yarns developed at Masuya Takao

Picture 13 – Yarns used by Masuya Takao to weave Fabrics

Yarns used by Masuya Takao to weave fabrics – silk and Nenki- Shi yarns

The main strength of the company is the type of yarn they use. They have developed a copyrighted process to make special gold or silver twisted yarns or 'Nenkin-Shi', along with silk and Urushi yarns. The dyeing process for making these special yarns is also crucial. An old photograph at Masuya Takao shows that these special yarns used to be spun by hand in Nishijin about 40 years ago, but now it is spun on machines.

Tokugawa Museum in Nagoya requested Masuya Takao to reproduce 'silk wiping cloth woven with gold twisted yarns. There was no information available from the Edo period of how the yarn was supposed to be developed, so they had to create it themselves from scratch using trial and error. With many attempts, they were successful in developing the said 'Nenkin-Shi'.

Picture 14 – Fabric woven out of Nenkin–Shi Yarns

Fabric woven out of Nenkin-shi yarns

To make Nenkin-Shi, they spin floss silk to create threads and twist gold foil over the threads by hand. Currently, the yarns are handspun, but foil- twisting is done by machine. Twisting foils over uneven threads is a state-of-the-art technique even though the process is mechanized. The mechanized process is as time consuming as hand-twisting since it requires careful monitoring.

The thickness of the thread is uneven as a hand-operated thread twister twists them. Slim segments of the thread are twisted completely with gold foil, but at thick segments, the base thread gets exposed partly between the gaps of twisted gold foil. This characteristic enables the threads to diffuse reflections of light.

Picture 15 – Nenkin–Shi Fabric

Nenkin-Shi fabric

They develop kimono fabrics and obi sashes on power-looms and the patterns on these fabrics are designed in house. Some of these special Nenkin-Shi yarn's surface is damaged for making a product so they are separated by hand, so such manual work is necessary in setting these warp yarns on the loom. Weft yarns and are woven through automated machines if they are not Nenkin-Shi yarns. Due to unique nature of these foil-twisted yarns their thickness is uneven and hand-operated weaving machines are required instead of automated machines. It takes time to complete fabrics with hand-operated machines, but insertion of each weft yarn by hand makes brilliance of fabrics stand out. The fabrics made from these special yarns have a hard hand feel.

Two weaving machines are intended for making fabrics interwoven with Nenkin-Shi. A semi-automated weaving machine can weave fabrics as wide as 150 centimetres. A hand operated weaving machine can weave fabrics as wide as 70 centimetres. It produces Robe Decolletee for Empress Emertia Michiko.

The weavers here learned to weave from a professional weaving master present in the manufacturing unit and then start working here. The weaving master learned to weave while working in a factory.

1.3 Moroni Store

Moroni is a retail store in Tokyo, Japan dealing in kimonos, obis and other kimono accessories. Kimono stores in Japan do not display kimonos on shelves but rather bring out kimonos that they feel would suit the customer and can at times procure kimono fabric, especially for their clients.

Picture 16 – Moroni Store

Moroni Store

Upon visiting the store as a part of field research for this paper on December 7, 2019, the following information was gathered about Kimono textiles.

In Japan, silkworms are developed so that they have only male offsprings. Male silkworms are considered superior to female silkworms as they do not spend their time and energy on laying eggs, and so the silk derived from them is finer and shinier. Male silkworm is smaller than the female silkworms, and their mouth is tinier and therefore can make more delicate silk. Earlier, China and Russia tried to produce this kind of silk from male cocoons, but they were unsuccessful. Only Japan succeeded in developing silkworms that only have male offsprings, and it is only present in Japan.

Moroni specializes in producing and selling kimono products out of this unique silk since 2007 since they were allowed to use the patent, which was an outcome of a national project. Moroni also sells stencil printed Edo Komon, which is a classic style. The standard kimono fabric is 13 metres long and 40 centimetres wide for female kimono, and for men, the fabric is wider. To create a delicate pattern, the stencil needs to be used over 100 times. However, the print cannot appear to be broken, but it needs to appear in a continuous flow. This style originated in the Edo period when people were not allowed to wear flashy patterns. Edo Komon looks like a solid colour from far away. You can see the prints from close, so it is considered very elegant and worn as formal wear for cultural events like a traditional tea ceremony.

The stencil makers are all in the Mie Prefecture, where the dyers or printers buy the stencils for printing. The stencil printer or dyer gives the alignment of the print to the stencil maker for making the stencil. The stencils are made by hand, and a lot of dexterity is required to make them, but the population of stencil makers is getting smaller, and all of them are very old. If the skill to make katagami stencil used to make Edo Komon comes to an end, it will not be possible to make Edo Komon fabrics and kimonos.

Every pattern and print of the kimono and obi is unique, and this one of a kind design adds to the value of these pieces. On the other hand, kimonos from Amami Oshima are made in lots of twelve and therefore are not unique. The prints, patterns and colours of the kimono and obi hold specific meanings hence the kimono fabrics are matched with a suitable obi fabric to complete the look suiting the event or season or for a harmonious colour combination. For example, pine trees represent celebration and are worn on occasions celebrating something or New Year's. The colours of obi, kimonos and linings are matched from booklets that show fabric samples and colour numbers.

Picture 17 – Kimono Fabric being matched with Sample Colours of Obi Fabric

Kimono fabric being matched with sample colours of obi fabric

Picture 18 – Obi Fabric Colour Samples and Codes

Obi fabric colour samples and codes.

People in different regions like wearing different kinds of kimonos. In Kyoto, people prefer colourful kimonos, and in Tokyo, people prefer subdued colours. The customers, while buying kimonos, state the occasion, season and budget while buying kimonos from the stores. They buy the fabric for the kimono, the obi, obi accessories like obi-jime and obi-age and the robes, and the stores later stitch the kimono custom to their specific measurements. The price of one kimono, including stitching, is 698,000 yen, but as there are so many production steps in making these kimonos, they can barely make a living wage. Kimonos made by hand are not mass-produced, and it is very time-consuming to make them. Some kimono fabrics are produced by power-looms but the prints are made by hand.

Moroni store also deals in Yamagichi fabrics produced by Mr Yamagichi, who lives in the mountains of Yamagata. He comes from a weaving family and is a celebrity in the kimono business. His fabrics look traditional, but they are his form of art. His family used to produce fabrics via power-looms, but he wanted to go back to the basics and to make the fabrics by hand. He dyes the silk in the winter by washing it in the freezing river water to get the best colour. Customers and visitors watch him and help him wash the silk in the icy water and plucking safflowers and leaves for the natural dyes. The natural silk from natural silkworms is greenish. People who are looking for authentic and handmade kimonos buy his kimonos. These kimonos are also very comfortable and softer than the machine-made fabric as they are handmade. These kimonos are worn by its customers casually.

Moroni store also sells Yuzen fabrics and kimonos. Yuzen is a resist dyeing method to dye kimono fabrics. Yuzen-kimonos are also used for weddings. Some gold is necessary for wedding kimonos, so either a golden obi or golden embroidery is used. The lining of the kimonos is also decorated so that when walking and the fabric flaps, the embroidery or the print shows. Much attention to detail is taken into account in the making and finishing in Japan so that the end product is perfect. The fabric is dyed and stitched separately, but they are designed and planned and dyed by the dyer. The fabric gets matched while stitching so that the patterns are continuous and not broken and perfect when sewn together as it is one picture.

Picture 19 – Yuzen Fabric

Yuzen fabric

The distribution system is very complicated. The question of who proposes the pattern is a central issue in the business, and how the customers get the information is a big deal. The wholesalers or toniyasan are always between the makers and the shops. So, the shops like Moroni get their kimono fabrics from the wholesalers directly or sometimes the shop personnel directly meet the artists and get the fabrics made. The local producers like kimono makers or dyers do noy sell their products and fabrics directly. Many are present in smaller areas like Okinawa and Yamagata and all over Japan. It hard to visit all of them; therefore, wholesalers handle everything and bring their products to the market. This system of distribution started hundreds of years ago, based on which the Japanese departmental store Mitsukoshi began. In many ways, it was one of the world's most sophisticated distribution system, and these stores can also double up as departmental stores by carrying various kinds of products. For example, the Kyoto wholesalers, for instance, will not only sell products from Kyoto but from all of Japan, and they will have everything related to kimonos. The kimono stores, in turn, buy from these wholesalers. Each wholesaler or toniyasan specializes in a specific region of the country, but they will also have products from the other areas.

Kimono makers or the dyeing units in Kyoto design and plan sometimes make what they want to make, and other times the customers of the kimono order to make a design. The stores sometimes tell the wholesalers about a specific design that they want. Then the wholesalers inform them where to get it done since he has several manufacturers, dyers, weavers, stencil makers from different regions working under him.

As there are very few kimono makers and dyers left now, and most of them are very old as the younger generation is moving away from the family business of producing kimonos, it is hard to order something quickly due to the laborious process involved. Chiso is a wholesaler founded in 1555 and therefore has a long history. They make the designs, manufacture and sell.

Moroni also deals in Amami and Kumeijima ikat kimono fabrics. Amami is known for its single and double ikat textiles and kimonos. In Amami Prefecture, some companies or producers design the patterns and coordinate with the craftsmen. In the past, they got their designs from the wholesalers. Kumejima, located in Okinawa Prefecture, also produces traditional ikat woven fabrics.

Picture 20 – Amami Ikat Textile

Amami ikat textile

Kimono magazines are used for advertising kimonos, obis and other kimono accessories by kimono producers. There are articles on how to put on a kimono, tie an obi, and also on how to match them. These magazines also provide information about different kimono types and where to find them. It is efficient to advertise in these magazines as the kimono producers are few. Also, kimono customers are not many, but Japanese like to look at various designs, therefore making these magazines very popular.

Second-hand kimonos have little value. It is possible to purchase excellent second-hand kimonos and obis for a few thousand yen at various flea markets.

People value authenticity and take it seriously; therefore, Japanese textiles are marked with authentication marks stating the location or Prefecture of origin along with stamps of inspection by the local textile associations. Furthermore, the name of the factory or producer will be mentioned, along with the description of the dyes and material used.

Picture 21 – Labels and Markings of Authentication

Labels and markings of authentication

Picture 22 – Labels and Markings of Authentication

Labels and markings of authentication

1.4 Yuzen Dyeing Unit

The person who was interviewed was the son-in-law of the president of the dyeing unit. He manages the entire company. He is originally from the Fukushima district and has studied computer science and does not have a prior degree or experience in the textile industry. He has been in this business for ten years and likes being a part of the kimono business. The president has a son but, he has another kimono business.

Picture 23 – Manager of the Unit

Manager of the unit

Picture 24 – Yuzen Dyeing Unit

Picture 25 – Yuzen Dyeing Unit

Yuzen Dyeing Unit

The designs of the patterns are purchased from a designer. They have twenty workers working in the unit, six people are involved in dyeing, and fourteen people are involved in marketing, sales, IT, online kimono selling business, rental kimono service. Tourists rent kimonos, and some Japanese people rent for some ceremony; one kimono is rented out for 5000 yen per day. They have a separate shop in Kyoto for rental kimonos where there are ten employees.

This dyeing unit makes inkjet digital printed kimonos and yuzen dyed kimonos. With an increase in digitally printed kimonos, the production ratio has reached 1:3; yuzen dyed kimonos: digitally printed kimonos. So only 30% of the kimonos produced are yuzen dyed kimonos.

Picture 26 – Kimono Print Pattern - Handmade

Kimono print pattern- handmade

Picture 27 – Kimono Print Pattern – Digitally Made

Kimono print pattern - digitally made

A small pattern using a stencil is prepared first and then enlarged onto the kimono fabric according to the placement of the design. Three hundred stencils are developed for making one pattern on a kimono fabric. The patterns are used to produce kimonos in different colours.

Picture 28 – Yuzen Dyeing Process

Picture 29 – Yuzen Dyeing Process

Yuzen dyeing process

Picture 30 – Yuzen Dyed Kimono Fabric

Yuzen Dyed Kimono fabric

Then the agent made of rice is prepared for dyeing. The stencil is put on the fabric, the part of the pattern where the colour needs to be placed precisely with the pattern marked on the cloth and the dye is then put on the stencil to dye the fabric. A 14-metre fabric is printed with this process which can be used to make a long sleeve, furisode kimono and a 10-metre fabric is printed for a short sleeve, kosode kimono.

They have two kinds of stencils which are handmade. They have about fifty thousand stencils in the unit and the warehouse.

Picture 31 – Stencils used for Dyeing

Picture 32 – Stencils used for Dyeing

Picture 33 – Stencils used for Dyeing

Stencils used for dyeing

The dyed colour on the fabric and the dye looks different in colour; the dye looks darker. The dyes are marked with colour numbers. A rice agent is added with the active dye while dyeing the fabric. This agent is used for the uniformity of the colour all over the printed fabric so that no area is dyed darker or lighter.

Picture 34 – Dyes

Dyes

Picture 35 – Difference between Dye and the Colour of the Dye on the Fabric

Difference between the dye and the colour of the dye on the fabric

Picture 36 – Dyed Fabric Swatches

Dyed fabric swatches with dye colour numbers

The patterns like sakura and colours like the colour red represent good fortune or are auspicious in Japanese culture and are used on furisode kimonos for young ladies for some traditional or special occasion or wedding ceremonies or coming of age ceremony which is when they turn twenty years of age. The bride wears a kimono called uchikake, which is embroidered, for her wedding ceremony. The length of the kimono is 15-16 metres, the extra length touches the ground, and it is draped in a special way. The lining of this kimono is white.

Picture 37 – Furisode Kimono

Furisode kimono

Picture 38 – Embroidered Kimono Fabric

Picture 39 – Embroidered Kimono Fabric

Embroidered kimono fabric

The kimonos manufactured here are exported to China and America. The kimonos exported to America are for Americans. These kimonos are cheaper, and the fabric is cotton or polyester and not silk.

They get business on commission from toniyasans, so they are paid for pattern development and dyeing. They present a catalogue of patterns to toniyasans to select and place an order on commission. They print 3000 metres on average for a commission received by a toniyasan for one year, where five patterns are used with five to ten colourways.

Conclusions

There are many similarities between the handloom industry in Japan and India. Most of the weaving done in these two countries is for traditional wear for women - sari and kimono. Although there are products such as dhoti and kimono for Indian and Japanese men, these traditional fabrics are worn infrequent and only for occasions. Japanese women may wear a kimono more often than men but still much less than earlier. Much of this change happened after WW 2. Indian women, on the other hand, continue to wear saris both for daily and events such as festivals, weddings and other formal occasions. Furthermore, many Indian managers and CEOs wear sari for work as well. In Japan and India, powerloom production has eroded the handloom markets since the production costs are much lower.

The price of saris ranges from few hundreds of rupees to few thousands of rupees. Sometimes the wedding sarees could cost a few lakhs of rupees. On the other hand, it would cost anywhere between 2,50,000 yen to 700,000 yen. During conversations with the Japanese, it was not surprising to hear that many youngsters do not own a kimono, and for occasions when they need to wear one, they borrow from their family. However, all of them wished that they would have a kimono of their own one day. The fabric that is woven in Japan is entirely different from the fabric that is woven in India. Indian sarees are mostly made out of cotton or silk. Sarees are soft and comfortable and are very appropriate for the warm climate that India has.

On the other hand, the Japanese fabric is extremely thick. More often than not, the yarn is interlaced with metal thread, making the fabric very stiff. Given that Japan can get very cold, kimonos made out of such fabric will keep the person warm. In summer, since it gets hot, kimonos need to be airy and comfortable. The material is used for summer kimonos is completely different. There are multiple styles of kimono across Japan.

Weaving techniques that are available in both these countries is quite immense. While some formal training institutes in both these countries are learning how to weave, most weavers learn by doing. Like in India, Japan has weaving techniques that are localized to regions. Japan, much more than India, has extensive documentation for all the different types of weaves.

The structure of the handloom market is quite similar. Customers purchasing these traditional fabrics do so by visiting stores located in urban areas. The products to the stores are supplied by intermediaries who ho outsource the production to weavers scattered across the country. In many cases, these market intermediaries provide the raw material as well as the designs as well.

While sari and kimono are both worn by women, there are many differences in these two pieces of the garment. A sari is draped while kimono is stitched and has multiple parts to it. A kimono is made from one piece of fabric of 38 feet in length and 14-inch wide for women; for men, 41 feet long and 17-inch-wide fabric is required. The front side of the kimono has different components from the rear side of a kimono. Kimonos can be extremely casual or extremely formal and can be identified by patterns, decoration, fabric and colour for women. For men, the formality of a kimono is determined by fabric choice and coordination elements.

During the fieldwork, it would be noticed that the issues Japanese handloom industries face are similar to those in India. The producers of the garments do not have access to market information because the product goes to the customers through multiple sets of intermediaries. Because the wages they receive for making these products are a fraction of the cost final consumers pay. Also, there are very few youngsters who are choosing to be in these crafts. This issue is more severe in Japan, where the average age of the craftsperson is much higher and the market for these products our shrinking rapidly. From our field research, we found out that the Japanese government is taking up multiple activities at the national and local levels to increase the awareness of these products both for internal and external consumers. So the level of training and intensity of assistance is quite commendable in Japan, but the cost of the products is relatively high to be attractive to casual consumers.

In all, handloom in both countries will not survive if new markets or consumers are not created. In India, sari stores are using social media to develop new markets among youngsters. Social media-heavy initiatives like the 100-sari pact[63] are making many women wear a sari to work. Japan will have to create unique occasions for youngsters to wear kimonos.

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See Hareven, pg 25-26

http://100sareepact.com/

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