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Amateur Practice of Traditional Crafts in Japan: Okeiko and Stencil Dyeing

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the amateur practice of Japanese traditional folk crafts, in particular stencil dyeing using resist-paste made of rice, or *katazome*. The amateur practice of traditional crafts or *okeiko*, requires a serious commitment to the practice and to the philosophy and tradition of the craft. *Okeiko* implies training in an atelier within a group for a considerable period of time. Of more than 80% of the population reportedly involved in some type of leisure activity, the amateur practice of traditional crafts represents less than 3%. The breakdown of this percentage into various traditional crafts, such as traditional folk textile dyeing is not available. This study is the first attempt to investigate such practice through the insider views of the members of an amateur group in Japan. The study uses 19 semi-structured interviews, four oral histories, a survey of 37 amateur dyers, participatory observation, and documentary analysis to collect and generate data, which are analyzed using a framework built from the fieldwork. The amateur dyers started their practice out of their admiration for the works of Serizawa Keisuke. Joining an amateur group contributed to their self-realization, through the acquisition of new skills and the creation of what they considered to be beautiful things. *Okeiko* led to social interactions and camaraderie relationships permeated by femininity. The dyeing work produced related to cultural heritage, and to the notion of national identity. Further studies would consolidate knowledge about the impact of these amateur groups on the continuity of traditional crafts in Japan.

Keywords: Stencil dyeing; traditional crafts; Japan; amateur practice; cultural heritage.
JEL classification codes: Other Consumer Nondurables (Textiles): L670, Economic Sociology: Social Capital and Social Networks Z130, Cultural Economics: Economics of the Arts and Literature (Crafts) Z110, Cultural Economics: Other Z190.

1. Introduction

The focus of this paper is the amateur practice of Japanese traditional folk crafts, in particular stencil dyeing or *katazome*. *Katazome* is one type of traditional folk textile dyeing in Japan and refers to pattern dyeing using resist-paste made of rice or nori. There are several types of *katazome*, such as the

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traditional dyeing from Okinawa, called *bingata*, or the small pattern dyeing typical of the Kantō area, called *komon*. While acknowledging for a longer history of stencil dyeing in Japan, the progressive democratization of the society and urbanization in Japan during the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926) periods translated into a wide use of *katazome*, although it remained traditionally associated to bed clothing, garments, banners or door curtains (Mellott 1993). It is from the mid Taishō period and with the development of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Japan or *Mingei* movement that the *katazome* as products change dramatically, giving way to their transformation and massive promotion by the hand of Serizawa Keisuke. Transmitting the katazome culture was important to Serizawa, who established various groups of amateur practice (Konohanakai 1982, Kusuda 1957).

Amateur practice in Japan has a long tradition and is still popular nowadays. However, amateur practice of traditional crafts is marginal and represents less than 3% of all leisure activities in Japan (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2017). There are several terms in Japanese to define leisure activities. One of these terms, *okeiko* suru refers to the amateur practice of traditional crafts and arts. It is generally used for women joining a group. It requires a considerable commitment from the learners and the teacher and an internalization of the tradition of the discipline.

Several authors have analyzed the amateur practice and the various benefits for those engaging in it (Arts Council England 2008, Knott 2011, Kokko & Dillon 2011), comparing these experiences in different countries and periods (Iwasaki 2007, Wang & Wong 2014, Bryan-Wilson 2019) and proposing methodologies to standardize this analysis (Kono et al. 2020). An analysis focusing on the history of women's education since the Edo period (1603-1867) has shed light to the role of amateur practice of crafts and its contribution to the continuity of cultural heritage in Japan (Tanimura 2015). The practice of traditional crafts in modern Japan has received attention (Pontsioen 2012) including from an insider view (Moeran 2013). The documentation on the amateur practice in Japan is limited to data from the surveys run by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2017) every five years and some analytical reports on the evolution of leisure activities in Japan (Japan Productivity Center 2017, Nishina 2020). However, the granularity of these data is insufficient and does not allow any analysis of the amateur practice of the different traditional crafts. There are several reports on leisure music (Sugiyama et al. 2018) or on pottery (J-Net21) However, the current research has identified only two documents on the amateur practice of *katazome* (Kusuda 1957, Konohanakai 1982) and one brief account of the experience of an amateur practitioner visiting the atelier of Serizawa Keisuke in the 1970s (Chambers 1971). The present study constitutes an effort to analyze and document the experiences of the members of a group of amateur traditional folk stencil dyeing textile in Japan belonging to the Serizawa lineage from an insider perspective. While so doing, the present study also adds to the evidence provided by other ethnographic studies about traditions in Japan (Moeran 1998, Yano 2003).

This study uses data generated from December 2017 to February 2022. The approach of data generation includes 19 semi-structured interviews, four oral history interviews, a survey to the members of an amateur group of dyers, participatory observation, and an artist-in residence stage. The analysis of documents and graphic constitutes another approach for data generation.

This paper presents the various aspects relevant to the amateur practice of *katazome*, including the motivation and the role of the atelier in joining such practice. The definition of amateur versus professional practice that follows serves as a preamble to the history of amateur practice in Japan. Furthermore, some notes outline the role of Serizawa Keisuke in the amateur practice of *katazome* tradition, and of the amateur practice in society. The research profile presents the approach, the materials and methods used to collect and generate data, their analysis strategy, and the limitations of this study. The results are presented following the three main themes of the framework constructed from the fieldwork, namely the amateur practitioner (*seito*), the atelier (*kōbō*), and the products (*katazome*). A discussion of the relevant issues of the study precedes the concluding remarks and the policy implications sections.

2. Motivations for amateur practice

Many amateur practitioners of stencil dyeing, a form of traditional folk textile dyeing in Japan, start practicing it after coming into contact with the works of Serizawa Keisuke in selling exhibitions in department stores, in expositions in museums, or in publications. The biggest attraction of Serizawa's

work lies in the combination of traditional techniques of folk textile stencil dyeing with his personal creativity in design and painting, all permeated with a touch of oriental exoticism (Shiratori 2016). Figure 1 illustrates the *Iroha* panel, a composition by Serizawa that contains several layers of meaning related not only to the colours, design, or the texture of the fabric, but also to the significance of the characters that represent a complete Japanese syllabary used only once, composing the *Iroha uta*[2], a poem of the eleventh century (Abe 1999):

> *"i-ro-ha-ni-ho-he-to/ chi-ri-nu-ru-wo/ wa-ka-yo-ta-re-so/ tsu-ne-na-ra-mu/ u-mi-no-o-ku-ya-ma/ ke-fu-ko-e-te/ a-sa-ki-yu-me-mi-shi/ e-hi-mo-se-su"* ("Even the blossoming flower/will eventually scatter/Who in our world/is unchanging?/The deep mountains of karma/we cross them today/And we shall not have superficial dreams/nor be deluded").

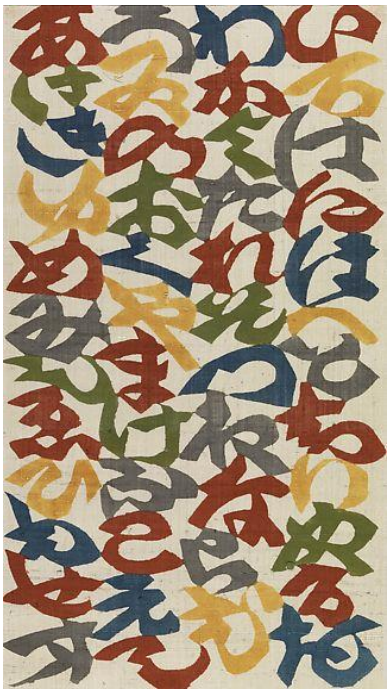

Figure 1. Serizawa Keisuke, Iroha panel. Source: Japanese syllables, stencil-dyed crepe silk, Serizawa Master of Japanese Textile Design, National Museums of Scotland, 2001, p60.

2.1 The *kōbō* and amateur practice

The term atelier or *kōbō* refers to both the place where amateurs learn and practice crafts and the place where professionals work. Each *kōbō* develops its profile depending on the type of work it does. The *kōbō* where most of the data mentioned in this paper come from is located in Ibaraki prefecture, Japan. It belongs to the lineage of Serizawa and uses the traditional technique of folk textile dyeing of Okinawa called *bingata* with natural colours. Its members produce exclusively stencil dyeing that fits into the Japanese tradition on fabric and on Japanese paper (*washi*), such as Japanese curtains (*noren*), kimono, kimono bands (*obi*), wrapping cloths (*furoshiki*), or fans (*uchiwa*). The two professional dyers, husband and wife, leading the *kōbō* started their professional careers at the *kōbō* of Serizawa after finishing their secondary school in the 1960s. In 1980 the wife set up an amateur group for *katazome*, called *Moe* group.

The amateur group included a total of 37 members over a period of about 30 years. Each member stayed within the amateur group for a variable number of years, with some joining for less than one year, to others staying for several decades. All members of the group were females. None of the members of the group became professional dyers. Although the *Moe* group was never formally disbanded, it does not exist anymore. Currently only a professional dyer and an amateur dyer produce *katazome* in the *kōbō*.

2.2 Amateur practice versus professional practice

In his proposal to understand the practice of crafts, Larry Shiner grouped them into five categories. Three are professional and include i) studio/atelier practice, which later developed into the art-crafts; ii) trade crafts, which relate to manufacture, buildings, and repairs; and iii) ethnic crafts by specific population groups. The two other categories include iv) amateur/ semi-professional practice, guided by a master in a designated space; and v) DIY/hobbyist practice, led by guidelines and how-to-do manuals in printed or in electronic media (Shiner 2012). The Policy Studies Institute in its publication "The Amateur Arts and Crafts" (1991) proposes a continuum between amateur versus professional practice of crafts. Table 1 illustrates this continuum, which is the composite result of eight attributes including income, training, artistic aspiration, time allocated to the practice, status of art form, experience, content and style, and general approach to crafts practice. The Policy Studies Institute groups amateur practice in the same category as Shiner`s DIY/hobbyist. Amateur practice of crafts is associated with the utilization of leisure time and is often associated with enjoyment rather than with producing a quality-end product (Wang & Wong 2014).

2 The Iroha uta contains each of the 47 characters of the Japanese syllabary only once, in the seven-five pattern of Japanese poetry. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/648267?exhibitionId=%7B93F2A73E-D2AE-46A2-823B-A47219E55980%7D&oid=648267&pkgids=263&pg=6&rpp=20&pos=107&ft=*

Table 1.
Profiling of amateur and professional practice of crafts.

Amateur	Attribute	Professional
No income from crafts	Income	All income from crats employment
Self-taught	Training	Fully professionally trained
Unimportant	Artistic aspirations	High
Spare time/ hobby	Time allocated	Full-time
Not taken seriously	Status of art form	Considered professional occupation
Limited	Experience	Considerable
Imitative and derivative	Content and style	Original
Recreational	General approach	Creative/ business like

Source: Policy Studies Institute (1991). The Amateur Arts and Crafts". Cultural Trends 3(12), 31-51.

2.3 Amateur practice in Japan

The terms "amateur practice", "hobby", or "leisure" have multiple correspondences in Japanese. These include *shumi, yogi, okeiko suru, hobi-, or amachyua*. The term *shumi* is the most generic one and includes not only the various activities that people do in their free time, but also those that they like carrying out in life, without any filter about the type of activity or the periodicity of engagement. Examples of *shumi* range from collecting stamps to riding a car, practicing sports or crafts, or the family life. The term yogi is used for *shumi* which need some technicality, such as playing *shamisen*, or practicing amateur traditional crafts.

The term *okeiko* suru is probably the most culturally-bound to Japan among all the translations of hobby or amateur practice in Japanese. The term has feminine connotations and is used mostly only for those women engaging in amateur practice. *Okeiko* means not only commitment to practice, but also having passion about the discipline, and living in accordance with the essence of the practice. Teaching *okeiko* requires a license or diploma. *Okeiko* relates to those disciplines considered useful for life in Japanese culture and retains the idea of a license from the one who teaches. Examples of okeiko include flower arrangement (*kadō*) or ikebana, tea ceremony (*sadō*), or kendo (*kendō*). The concepts of the person who learns (*seito*), the disciple or assistant (*deshi*) and the teacher or master (*sensei*) are inherent to *okeiko*. Nowadays people refer to *okeiko* for things that are not traditional, such as cooking or baking. However, practicing foreign-origin sports, such as football or tennis is not referred to as *okeiko*.

Learning things considered to be useful for life has a long tradition in Japan. From ancient times and especially in the Edo period (1603-1868), wealthy merchant homes were avid consumers of traditional culture for their enjoyment and also as a status symbol. In these families, while the boys accessed formal education to take up the family businesses or work outside the home, the daughters learnt various disciplines considered to be useful for their lives. There were many textbooks for women as of the second half of the 17th century covering "practical matters". The recommended pastimes included shell games (*kai awase*), *shamisen* play, or tea ceremony. These books promoted amateur practice of various disciplines and social progress among women, while cultivating their Japaneseness (Tanimura 2015).

With the democratization of the Japanese society in the Meiji period (1868-1912), education became widespread among all levels of society. Women not only became increasingly literate, but also came to appreciate the traditional culture to which they had not had access in earlier periods. As a result, learning traditional disciplines and culture, which was a realm of upper society layers, became available to society as a whole. The Taishō period (1912-1926), also referred to as Taishō democracy, coincided with other movements enhancing a national identity and cultural medievalism which had started at the end of the 19th century, and with the launching of the *Mingei* movement (Gordon 2003, Wilson 2007, Young 2013). It was also in this period that the modern idea of craft hobby was fully developed in Japan. The democratization of the society ran in parallel with the building of the ideal citizen and included the movements of "household crafts" for women. There were multiple initiatives to teach different disciplines, including ikebana, kimono wearing, cooking or tea ceremony to women under the guidance of a teacher or *sensei*. Women`s magazines played an important role in the definition of the modernity and in shaping the consumers' appreciation of goods; as well as the

department stores through their selling exhibitions which influenced the consumption of traditional crafts (Young 1999).

The Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan conducts a basic survey on social life every five years on the distribution of time in the life of people, and on the use of their leisure time. The leisure time includes a wide range of activities, such as training, study, volunteering, sports, travel, or hobbies and amusements. However, the disaggregation of data is limited and does not provide details on the engagement in such practice (Harada 2005). In the last survey of 2016 about 78000 households participated, representing more than 179000 people. Of these, 87% replied positively to practicing a hobby or amusement. The activities that were most frequently mentioned as personal hobbies and amusements were watching movies and listening to music. Among the activities which would fall in *okeiko*, a 20% of participants in the survey -mostly women- referred to cooking and making cakes, and knitting and embroidery. Only about 3% of the sample reported practising crafts, including pottery and ceramics, textiles, glasswork, or metal and woodwork. Other traditional culture activities, such as the tea ceremony, or Japanese traditional dance, were reported by less than 5% of the sample (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2017).

2.4 Amateur practice of katazome: Serizawa Keisuke

Serizawa Keisuke (1895-1984) started teaching textiles to a group of women in Shizuoka in 1922, probably influenced by the movements of "household crafts", popular in urban settings. In 1948 he moved to Tokyo and in 1951 he established the *Konohanakai*, a group for amateur practice of traditional folk textile dyeing where the majority of the members were housewives married to well-off men (Kusuda 1957). The *Konohanakai* organized annual exhibitions in the department store of Takashimaya in Nihonbashi, Tokyo and other cities in Japan from 1959 to 1981 (Konohanakai 1982).

Serizawa established another group, the Katsurakai, for those members who had belonged to the *Konohanakai* for more than 20 years, and for other well-experienced amateur dyers who had joined the Serizawa atelier as graduates from art schools for training, prior to establishing their own ateliers. This group consisted mainly of men. In an interview with Hamada Shukuko, long time curator of the collection of Serizawa at the Fukushi University of Sendai, she explained how out of more than a hundred members of the *Konohanakai* during the nearly 40 years of existence, only two or three had become professional dyers, as opposed to the *Katsurakai* where many had become professional dyers[3].

2.5 Role of amateur practice in society

Amateur practice plays an important role in societies nowadays, and the bibliography consulted noted the beneficial effects of the amateur practice or hobby when practiced regularly. These benefits relate to the acquisition of social capital by the amateur practitioners when sharing experiences, learning from others, or participating in the life of the group. For Stephen Knott, amateur craft practice leads to "experiences of joy, play, autonomy and sociability that take place regardless of the thing being made" (Knott 2011). In a study using cross-sectional data from surveys in 33 countries, Wang and Wong note the self-fulfilment and social interaction as benefits in practicing leisure activities regularly. Among the leisure opportunities which provided more happiness were those related to learning a skill and those which strengthened contact with others (Wang & Wong 2014). Iwasaki analysed data from 37 countries and noted the positive emotions and well-being, and the positive identities and self-esteem that those practicing hobbies develop. He noted the social and cultural connections and the learning through life that are facilitated through the regular practice of hobbies (Iwasaki 2007). Although the results of these reports are consistent, the absence of standardized definitions of hobbies, pastimes, leisure time, and amateur practice makes the validity of these data questionable. Kono et al. (2020) used standardized tools to explore the benefits of serious leisure and found that its practice was associated with a positive feeling of wellbeing and meaning in life in the Japanese sample that he studied.

[3] Interview with Hamada Shukuko, Sendai, 15 October 2019.

3. Research approach

This study assumes that traditional folk textile stencil dyeing or *katazome* is part of the culture in Japan, and that culture is a social construction resulting in explicit social products. These products include works of art, rituals, or ideological movements that evolve through time (Wuthnow & Witten 1988). The meaning of tradition as a culture depends upon the context and time and the appreciation of *katazome* in the 1950s, when the *Mingei* movement was thriving and middle class booming in Japan is different from that in the 2020s, when traditional wear has become just ceremonial and mass production has pushed craftsmanship into a relative shadow.

4. Materials and methods

The ontology guiding this study considers that amateur practice is a social construction of the individuals involved, because they experience the amateur practice differently, based on their background, occupation, socioeconomic status, gender, age, culture understanding, or idea about national identity. The experience of the amateur practice depends on the context in which it takes place, and the period when it happens. The epistemological position, while acknowledging that interviews are complex social interactions, validates them as appropriate options for generating data because of the need to listen to individuals' accounts, accepting that their knowledge and evidence are contextual (Edwards & Holland 2013).

This study draws on data collected and generated from December 2017 to February 2022. The data were collected and generated using a mixed approach of ethnographic methods, which included six semi-structured interviews with professional dyers, ten with amateur dyers, and three with staff at institutions promoting traditional textile dyeing in Japan. It also includes two oral history interviews among professional craftspeople and two among amateur dyers. Other strategies to collect and generate data comprise a survey targeting the 37 members of an amateur group of dyers carried out in February 2021, which yielded 20 responses, of which eight with a follow-up interview; as well as the continuous participatory observation by the researcher at the atelier, and an artist-in residence stage (Tokushima, Kamiita City, 6-28 October 2018). Documentary analysis includes the log book and graphic material of the *kōbō* in Ibaraki prefecture, Japan, and as well as graphic material related to the amateur practice. Videos of a professional dyer explaining the various phases of stencil dyeing to amateur practitioners constitute other approaches for data generation.

This study uses a mixed method of purposive or judgement sampling "to identify and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilization of available resources" (Etikan et al. 2016). This initial phase continues with a snowballing process, whereby "contact is made with participants appropriate for the research through whatever available access route, and through these first participants the researcher is introduced to others of relevant characteristics for the research" (Edwards & Holland 2013).

5. Data analysis

The study uses a general inductive approach to analyze the data generated through the fieldwork to "condensate raw textual data into a brief, summary format, establish links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data, and develop a framework where the raw data find a best fit" (Thomas 2006). Table 2 illustrates the coding categories and node hierarchies. The first level of hierarchy or parent node includes the amateur practitioner (*seito*), the atelier (*kōbō*), and the crafts as products (*katazome*). The second level or child node includes the three broad categories that Kokko and Dillon use in their study on the meaning of crafts among a group of amateur practitioners as expressions of self-expressiveness; culturality; and social nature of the crafts (Kokko and Dillon 2011). The grandchild node level comprises categories used by several authors (Mason 2005, Ruismäki & Juvonen 2006, Kokko and Dillon 2011, Kouhia 2012), in addition to those nodes marked as "Own" based on the results of the present fieldwork.

Figure 2 illustrates the framework constructed, which includes the nodes best fitted to build an argument. The framework excludes those nodes mentioned by other authors in Table 2 which have not come out as relevant in the fieldwork. Omitted nodes include family tradition, and home economy and potential from the motivation node; and worthwhile activity from the self-expressiveness node.

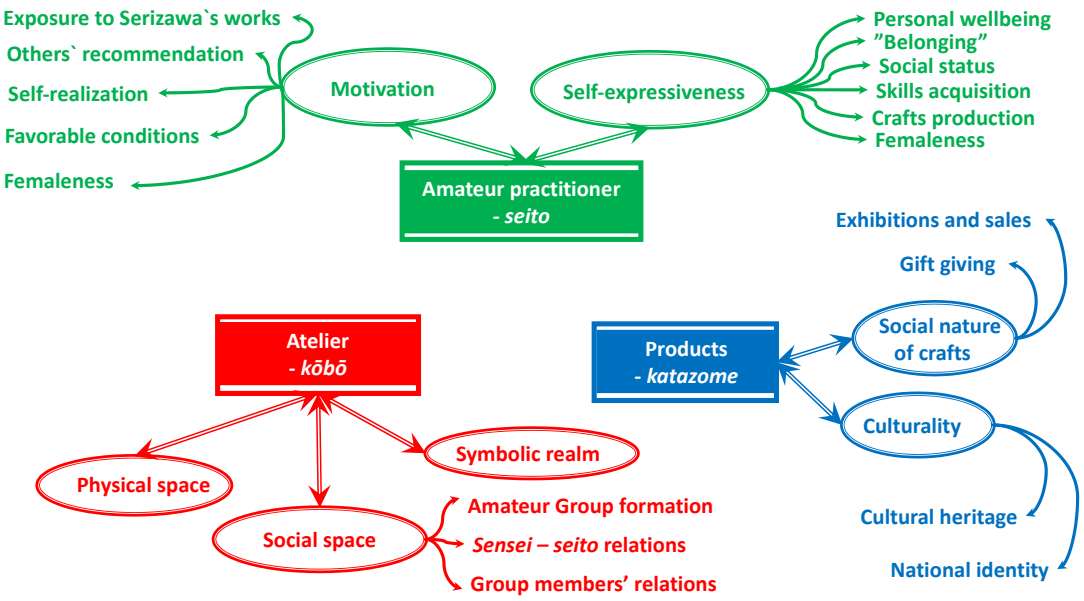

Figure 2. Relationship among selected core themes.

Table 2.
Coding categories and node hierarchies.

Parent	Child	Comments (sources)	Grand-child	Comments (sources)
Amateur practitioner - *seito*	Motivation	Own	Serizawa works exposure	Own
			Others` recommendation	Own
			Self-realization	Own
			Favorable conditions	Own
			Femaleness	Own
			Family tradition	Mason (2005)
			Home economy, potential	Mason (2005), Kokko & Dillon (2010)
	Self-expressiveness	Kokko & Dillon (2010)	Personal wellbeing	Mason (2005), Juvonen (2006)
			"Belonging"	Own
			Social status	Own
			Skill acquisition	Mason (2005), Kokko & Dillon (2010)
			Worthwhile activity	Mason (2005)
			Crafts production	Mason (2005), Kouhia (2012), Juvonen (2006)
			Femaleness	Own
Atelier – *kōbō*	Physical space	Own	Physical space	Own
	Social space	Own	Amateur Group formation	Own
			Sensei-seito relation	Own
			Nakama relations	Kouhia (2012), Juvonen (2006), Kokko &Dillon (2010)
	Symbolic realm	Own	Symbolic realm	Own

Crafts as products - *somemono*	Culturality	Kokko & Dillon (2010)	Cultural heritage National identity	Kouhia (2012) Kouhia (2012)
	Social nature of crafts	Kokko & Dillon (2010)	Gift giving Exhibitions & sales	Masson (2005) Own

"Own": Added as a node in the context of the present study.

6. Limitations

The qualitative methodologies used note the awareness of the non-replicability of results and possible gaps of understanding between the interviewees and the interviewer (Edwards & Holland 2013). The purposive sampling method is subjective and therefore entails an inherent researcher bias (Etikan et al. 2016). The interviews took place between December 2017 and February 2022. However, the recall period of the interviews in some cases spanned several decades, opening the possibility of gaps popping up between the retrospective reporting and contemporary memory.

7. Results

The results are presented under the three core themes outlined in the framework (Figure 2) and include the amateur practitioner or *seito*, the atelier or *kōbō* where the amateur practice takes place, and the products or *katazome*. Each of these three themes contains auxiliary nodes to further explore the various aspects related to them. The division of these themes or nodes is not absolute and needs to be understood as one of the options selected to organize the content of the fieldwork and facilitate its analysis. There are some nodes that have multiple connections and were considered as a cloud. For example, "Femaleness" was linked to the motivation to start *katazome*, as well as to self-expressiveness, and to the establishment of group relations at the *kōbō*.

7.1 Amateur practitioner - seito

This core theme refers to the *seito* or disciple of a *sensei*, who attends a *kōbō* regularly. The amateur practitioners contributing to this phase of the study were all adult women from 62 to 94 years old at the time of the fieldwork who had practiced *katazome* between five and twelve years on average.

7.1.1 Motivation

Most of the practitioners of *katazome* interviewed stated that they began their practice because they admired and were impressed by the works by Serizawa Keisuke in expositions or publications. When they produced their answers, it became clear that while the appreciation of Serizawa`s work was the trigger, there were other reasons that contributed to their becoming amateur practitioners of *katazome*. One of such reasons include self-realization, in the sense of wanting to do beautiful things; and wanting to do things with their own hands. In other cases, the reasons included the following of recommendations from teachers or friends who already practised crafts either professionally or as amateurs. In the case of some interviewees, their decision to become amateur dyers was triggered by their desire to give meaning to a sudden opening of free time, for example, after retirement or once the children had grown up. Others became amateur dyers when they realised that there was a *kōbō* nearby.

The lack of favourable conditions was mentioned by two interviewees as the reason why they had stopped *katazome*, as they had had to prioritize other occupations in their lives, such as family or studies in another location. Some interviewees cited their relocation due to the husband`s transfer to other regions as a factor which had prevented them from continuing their practice. In some cases, incidents in family life had taken away their motivation.

Femaleness was a theme that came through the interviews expressed in various ways;

"When seeing what my friend had dyed, I thought that it was wonderful. When my husband came home, I told him I wanted to learn katazome. After a long silence, he said that it was not a good idea, since on Saturdays he was at home. He asked why I wanted to go out when he would be in. I kept repeating him that I wanted to learn katazome. Until one time, after one year, he replied to

me `If you really want to do it, just do it!! He then said `I will go to have lunch to places I want. Please leave money on the table so that I can go`. When I came back from the kōbō I always asked him what he had done during my absence, and he explained in detail. However, he never complained about my joining the kōbō" (Interviewee 32)

"In my work (as researcher), colleagues were all men, and women professionals were an exception. So, I could not relate to women in my work. For me, it was the first time that I saw a group of mature women doing something which seemed to be interesting in a nice environment" (Interviewee 34)

Sometimes the interviewees' comments illustrated the roles, duties, and position of women within the family or the working sphere. Other times, femaleness was the expression of "sisterhood" complicity among women and the possibility of speaking to them informally despite age differences. Femaleness issues came in relation to self-expressiveness as well.

7.1.2 Self-expressiveness

Several interviewees mentioned the sense of wellbeing associated with practicing *katazome* in three ways. Firstly, amateur practice was enjoyable at home while preparing for the *katazome* session at the *kōbō*. Secondly, the time spent in the *kōbō* with other members of the group was fun and relaxing. Finally, katazome practice allowed the amateur practitioners *to be themselves* and relate to local social structures and to what they defined as *their own roots*.

Being an amateur practitioner meant "belonging" to the *kōbō* and to the *katazome* group. This belonging meant more than doing *katazome*. The group organized events such as visits to other ateliers (Figure 3 and Figure 4), going to exhibitions of textiles in other localities, or celebrating events in the lives of its members. Several interviewees noted that acquiring the skill for producing *katazome* allowed them to better appreciate this tradition and to be more conscious about the importance of safeguarding it for future generations. The idea of social status came across through the interviews, highlighting the need for money and time for engaging in amateur practice. Another meaning attached to the *seito* was the production of crafts, which they associated with personal achievements.

Figure 3. Indigo dyeing atelier of the Kitajima family, Toride city, Ibaraki prefecture. Mr Kitajima teaches the technique of fabric dyeing to a member of the Moe group. Each member practices all phases of indigo dyeing with her own work. March 1993. © Maria San

Figure 4. Indigo dyeing, bridge over the Tone river at the Kitajima atelier, Toride City, Ibaraki prefecture. After experimenting the dyeing of the fabrics with indigo, the Moe group members wash them in the river. While waiting for the katazome to dry in the sun, they take a break to lunch. March 1993. © Maria Santamaria

7.2 Atelier - kōbō

The replies to questions "What did the *kōbō* mean to you?" or "What can you tell me about the *kōbō* where you practised *katazome*?" defined the atelier as the physical and social spaces. In addition, the replies from interviewees alluded to the kōbō as the symbolic realm where tradition and heritage took shape.

Physical space. Interviewees referred to the *kōbō* as the location conveniently located or not too far from their homes that provided a unique space for experimenting while learning katazome. They explained that, without the atelier, none of them would have done *katazome* because they did not have space at home, or because they could not afford to buy themselves all the materials and tools available in the *kōbō*.

Social space. Interviewees referred to the *kōbō* as a social space where things happened at various levels. Firstly, the *kōbō* enabled the establishment of the amateur dyeing group. Interviewees referred to themselves as members of the amateur group, rather than as pupils in the kōbō. Secondly, the *kōbō* was the social space where sensei and seito related with each other. The sensei develops herself through the interaction with pupils. The pupils grow with the advice from the *sensei*, and through the contact with other members of the group. Belonging to the group was considered to be quite intense and therefore called for a strong commitment from its members. Thirdly, the *kōbō* was the social space where women interacted freely while practising *katazome*. The diversity of the members provided ground for their growth and opening of ideas, and the interviewees commented on how the *kōbō* fostered cultural integration of the members in the group.

Symbolic realm. Interviewees noted how important to them it was to belong to the *kōbō* which allowed them to feel the (Japanese) traditional culture and be part of their cultural heritage through the *katazome* they produced.

7.3 Products – katazome

This core theme includes comments of the members of the amateur group about their works in relation to the cultural symbolism of *katazome* and about their significance as objects for consumption or trade.

7.3.1 Culturality

The interviewees commented on two aspects related to the culturality attached to the *katazome* they produced. The first aspect puts tradition in perspective and addresses cultural heritage. The interviewees positioned themselves in a central point, looking back to their heritage, and forward to the future and the continuity of the *katazome* tradition. In relation to the cultural heritage, they explained that, because *katazome* was a traditional craft bound to the Japanese culture, practicing it was important to them. Other interviewees conveyed the notion of practising something they knew because they had lived with these traditional crafts since their childhood. The interviewees also expressed their belief that the amateur practice of *katazome* contributed to the continuity of this tradition. They stressed the importance of practising *katazome* to be able to appreciate this tradition, and the usefulness of public events as a means of attracting interested people to the *kōbō*. They also commented on how the exhibitions offered an opportunity not only to present and explain katazome, but also to provide information about the *kōbō* and foster amateur practice.

The second aspect that came out through the interviews was the notion of a national identity and the amateur practice of katazome. One interviewee mentioned that practising *katazome* was important because, as a Japanese, she thought it was a must to be aware of her own traditions. Another interviewee emphasized the interest of foreigners in this tradition, while some Japanese were more interested in modern things, which might not be necessarily authentic.

7.3.2 Social nature of crafts

Through the feedback from interviewees, it became clear that the *katazome* they produced was something personal, not as a means of earning money. They commented on how they made *katazome* for themselves and as a way of interacting with others. One interviewee noted that she had stopped doing *katazome* since she had already produced enough works for her family and friends, and did not want to continue producing works *just to put them in the cupboard*.

The amateur dyers had mixed views about the selling exhibitions organized by the group. They explained how, on the one hand, these events represented an exciting activity involving visiting interesting places and presenting their own *katazome* to new people. They also mentioned how, on the other hand, these events represented a challenge because of the tight schedules for preparing their

crafts, and because they felt that, while preparing for these exhibitions, they left behind their home duties.

The interviewees commented on how what bothered them most was the need to attach a price to the pieces presented with the possibility of purchase by interested people. One interviewee spoke about her frustration when the gallery organising the exhibition had accepted orders from three interested customers, obliging her to replicate her *katazome* work after the exhibition had closed.

8. Discussion

8.1 Accuracy of terms as a reflection of cultural differences

Finding a precise equivalence between some Japanese and English terms proved troublesome. For example, in Japanese, the terms *decchi* (丁稚), *deshi*(弟子), or *seito* (生徒) mean "the one who learns", but have different connotations that are difficult to convey in English. In other cases, the translation from Japanese into English is misleading because the words do not have the same meaning in the two languages. For example, the Japanese term *okeiko* is translated as amateur practice in English. However, this study suggests that *okeiko* represents a more serious engagement in the practice than what the Policy Studies Institute defines as amateur practice (Table 3). Probably amateur in the sense of *okeiko* is near to the English term "serious leisure" because of the commitment it implies; or "community of practice", representing a group of people who share a craft or profession, although they do not pursue any economic gain through their practice. These differences in terms reflect not only language differences, but also cultural differences when approaching the practice of crafts in general. The idea of blurred borders between work (professional practice) and leisure (amateur practice) relates to the various definitions of work, productivity, aesthetics, play and labour (Knott 2011).

Table 3.

Attributes associated with amateur, okeiko, and professional craft practice.

Amateur	*Okeiko**	Attribute	Professional
No income from crafts	No income from crafts	Income	All income from crats employment
Self-taught	Trained with *sensei* in *kōbō*	Training	Fully professionally trained
Unimportant	Certain artistic aspirations	Artistic aspirations	High
Spare time/ hobby	Regular allocated time	Time allocated	Full-time
Not taken seriously	Serious engagement	Status of art form	Considered professional occupation
Limited	Relative experience	Experience	Considerable
Imitative & derivative	Reproductions and original	Content and style	Original
Recreational	Recreational	General approach	Creative/ business like

Source: Policy Studies Institute (1991). The Amateur Arts and Crafts". Cultural Trends 3(12), 31-51, and (*) personal.

8.2 Amateur practice of crafts in Japan

The 2016 survey on leisure activities in Japan reported that the amateur practice of crafts in Japan is less than 3% among the general population (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2017). This low number may come as a surprise to some, and maybe it is due to the structure of the survey, which counts all types of activities that people do in their free time on a non-professional basis. There seem to be no more specific data available on the scale of amateur practice of crafts -*seito*- in Japan, despite the importance attached to tradition and cultural heritage in Japan.

8.3 Amateur practice of *katazome* and femaleness

Femaleness came through as an important factor in the amateur practice of *katazome*. In terms of numbers, all members of the amateur group established at the *kōbō* in the present fieldwork were women. In terms of profile, there was a division as well. The women of the amateur group were involved in all phases of *katazome* dyeing and learned from the woman sensei from stencil carving to colour and indigo dyeing. There were two men visiting the *kōbō* occasionally, although they did not belong to the amateur group of dyers. They learned stencil carving and indigo dyeing exclusively from the male sensei. Both these tasks tend to be more associated with masculinity in the *katazome* universe.

In terms of life positioning, becoming an amateur practitioner of *katazome* provided the chance of finding a place in a feminine world for those who had a profession which could be associated with those corresponding to a "male" profile, such as engineers, researchers or medical doctors. Belonging to the same group enabled its members to establish a camaraderie between the members of the group, allowing them to speak freely about their things in a safe setting. Femaleness was represented by the importance they attached to relate to other women, whom they thought had *experience in life* and whose diversity of backgrounds and ages allowed them to refer to them as they would have wished to refer to their mothers or to elders.

8.4 Reasons and triggers associated with amateur practice of *katazome*.

The emotion felt when admiring works of Serizawa constituted the most overwhelming reason for starting amateur practice of *katazome*. This primary emotion is consonant with the Mingei approach to culture appreciation, with the aesthetic value guiding the appropriation of the craft product (Kunik 2009). The respect and trust in friends or teachers also influenced the decision to practice of *katazome*. This practice depended nevertheless, in the opportunities at a moment in their lives, either because they had time available once the children were raised, or because they found a *kōbō* in a convenient location where they could attend.

Some reasons mentioned by other authors such as the family history in crafts production (Mason 2005), or the possibility of raising the home economy through crafts (Mason 2005, Kokko & Dillon 2011) did not come out as relevant in the present research.

8.5 Effects associated with the amateur practice of *katazome*

Practising *katazome* resulted in a sense of wellbeing to the seito. This wellbeing was the expression of enjoying their time at the *kōbō* in a pleasant and relaxing way. The sense of wellbeing also resulted from the sense of belonging to the *kōbō* as a social structure, and to a social group. This belonging was constructed through the time spent together, and the sharing of experiences beyond the *katazome*. These included visiting other *kōbō* and discovering indigo; visiting expositions and museums and appreciating the work of other dyers; or organizing and managing exhibitions. Several members of the amateur group continued socializing even after they stopped practicing *katazome*, often recalling their time as amateur practitioners as a rewarding and memorable experience in their lives. Although the interviewees did not affirm openly that practising *katazome* related to social status, they noted that without having economic means, time, and a certain taste for tradition and art, it would be impossible to do okeiko.

All the above fits well into what Bourdieu considers to be the social capital, by which, the members of the *seito* (in the current case) would find "benefits as individuals and as a group by sharing expertise, learning from others, and participating in the life of the group", which would be one of the benefits of amateur practice of crafts (Portes 1998). The sense of wellbeing referred to by the interviewees concurs with a positive relationship between the level of involvement in serious leisure activities, and life satisfaction and health noted by other authors. This sense of wellbeing is notable regardless of the craft produced (Ruismäki & Juvonen 2006, Knot 2011, Heo et al 2013); and relates more to the social and cultural connections and to learning skills in a joyful manner (Iwasaki 2007, Wang & Wong 2014), contributing to the meaning in life of its members (Kono 2020).

8.6 Amateur practice and *katazome* as a commodity

The amateur practitioners did not consider their *katazome* as products that they were willing to trade against money. Rather, they considered their *katazome* as commodities with social value and were happy to share their works with other members of the group or with friends. In general, these amateur products circulate in selected networks, but do not get a proper attention from formal networks, making apparent the value that the different networks are able to infuse in the appreciation of objects and crafts (Knott 2011). Considering culture as the social products that express symbols and commodities (Wuthnow and Witten 1988), the results of the fieldwork reinforce the difference between amateurism, where culture is represented by social products appreciated through a social consumption, and professionalism, represented by social products traded as commodities of economic value.

8.7 The cultural value of amateur practice of *katazome*

The amateur practice of *katazome* related to doing something that was authentic and traditional. *Katazome* was part of a tradition that was worthwhile protecting, and as such the interviewees transmitted the idea of it being part of the cultural heritage of Japan. A second cultural aspect of *katazome* related to the practitioners themselves considering that it was proper doing *katazome* as they were Japanese. This sense of national identity came out several times during the interviews, with comments about their admiration for the engagement of the (foreigner) researcher in *katazome*, *more than the proper Japanese*.

8.8 Amateur practice and the continuity of *katazome* tradition

In an historical analysis of more than 2000 publications since Meiji on *keiko* goto, Tanimura Reiko found evidence that women are those who keep the traditional culture of Japan, through *keiko*, and that keiko has helped the construction of national identity through the practice of traditional crafts (Tanimura 2015). The results of the present study are consonant with Tanimura and support the perspective that amateur practice supports the continuity of *katazome* tradition through practical actions at individual level. By assuming an active role and explaining and educating others about the technique, the amateur dyers transmitted the value to this tradition to the inner circle of the people visiting their homes to whom they explain what they do or display the *katazome* they have made, to a wider circle of people they reach when greeting the New Year with *katazome*-dyed postcards, and to a further wide circle of people coming to exhibitions transmitting the taste and educating them about the *katazome*.

9. Concluding remarks

The present ethnographic study adds to the evidence by other authors on the importance of being culture-sensitive, getting the appropriate access to informants and information (Brinton 2003), spending long time in situ, or being accepted by the group as *one of them* while doing fieldwork in Japan (Moeran 2006 and 2007). It also adds to the evidence gathered in other studies on the benefits for those engaging in amateur practice (Iwasaki 2007, Knott 2011, Wang & Wong 2014, Hackney 2016). Unlike simply producing *katazome*, to the members of the amateur group practicing *okeiko* meant belonging to a community and engaging in serious leisure that gives a certain meaning in life (Kono et al. 2020).

The emotion felt in front of an oeuvre by Serizawa Keisuke was only the first step for many women towards becoming amateur practitioners of traditional folk stencil dyeing. Belonging to an amateur group, translated in having a space to practice *katazome* with other women, acquiring new skills, and establishing social relations that lasted far longer than their time at the atelier. The *kōbō* constituted a safe space for the members to be themselves while experiencing a sense of wellbeing. The members of the amateur group were conscious of their role in the continuity of the *katazome* tradition and on the social and symbolic value of their works beyond their economic value.

The results of this case study cannot be generalized. However, they uncover not only the benefits for the members of the amateur group as individuals, but also the social and symbolic value of their contribution to the *katazome* tradition. As such, this study provides an important evidence which

calls for further investigation into the amateur practice of *katazome* in other groups around Japan. Additional information on the amateur practice of *katazome* would allow a more accurate estimation of such contribution of the social and symbolic value to the continuity of *katazome*. Another issue to be explored would be the extent to which the monthly fees and other payments which the members of the amateur groups provide to the atelier support the professional craftspeople of the atelier, many of whom struggle to survive solely from the crafts` production. A further issue worth investigating is the role of existing support initiatives to traditional crafts in fostering and supporting the craftspeople teaching amateur members in their ateliers by consolidating information, networking resources, and providing ateliers with incentives to start amateur groups.

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Maria is a Spanish medical doctor, who was granted a PhD in medical sciences in Japan and a DrPH in organizational management in the United Kingdom. She had a career in global infectious diseases control and in organisational evaluation policy. Maria is also an amateur dyer and belongs to an atelier devoted to Japanese traditional folk stencil dyeing since 1985. From 1990 to 2016 she lived outside Japan and combined her professional career with her amateur dyeing interests. In 2016 she re-joined her atelier in Japan, combining dyeing practice with research on the continuity of the stencil dyeing tradition in Japan and the fate of these ateliers. Currently she is a PhD candidate in art and cultural heritage in Japan at the International Christian University, Tokyo. https://maria-santamaria.art; ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7817-7645.

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