

Tokyo Metropolitan University
Graduate School of Humanities

**Western Potters in Japan: Identities, Traditions
and Histories from a Cosmopolitan Perspective**

日本における西洋人陶芸家：
コスモポリタンな視点からせまるアイデンティティ、伝統、歴史

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Abstract

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Departing from a transnational and cross-border approach to the social sciences and the field of Japanese studies, this doctoral thesis examines the life-stories, lifestyles, technical processes, artworks and worldviews of Westerners who have crossed national borders to practice ceramics in Japan. Based on ethnographic research and in-depth qualitative interviews following the ethnosociological method of life-story account proposed by Daniel Bertaux (1997), this research explores the potters' personal stories of migration in their intersections with wider cultural narratives, traditions and histories born from the transnational trajectories of Japanese culture and ceramics. The main aim is to investigate how images of Japan are embodied, appropriated, negotiated and resignified through the subjects' bodily practices and experiences in the country.

Western images of Japan have long focused on the exotic and unique features of the people and their culture. Along with Japanese writings on Zen Buddhism, traditional aesthetics and folk crafts, specific historical, political and social trajectories marked by the ideologies of Orientalism and Japanese cultural nationalism have contributed to the creation of an aestheticized image of Japan, focused on the ideas of craftsmanship and spirituality. As a material cultural practice, Japanese ceramics developed national and regional features, later essentialized as a quintessential part of Japanese culture and tradition. By examining the potters' embodiment and negotiation of the meanings attached to Japanese ceramics and their corporeal, sensorial and emotional connections with Japanese techniques and materials, cosmopolitan and hybrid aspects were revealed. Drawing on Harumi Befu's (1989) emic-etic distinction and Yoshio Sugimoto's (2018) proposal of methodological cosmopolitanism in the field of Japanese studies, this research aims at promoting a dialogue between local and global knowledge, while questioning the limits of cultural identity and belonging in the contemporary world.

Key-words: images of Japan, art, migration, transculturalism, cosmopolitanism.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	11
PART I HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	
1. Images of Japan: from orientalism to cosmopolitanism.....	21
1.1. Introduction.....	21
1.2. Japanology and Orientalism.....	22
1.3. Japanese studies and the theories of Japaneseness (<i>nihonjinron</i>).....	26
1.4. <i>Nihonjinron</i> criticism and multicultural Japan.....	31
1.5. Beyond deconstructionism and new directions.....	38
1.6. Conclusion.....	45
2. Traditional arts and crafts in modern Japan: historical trajectories, political constructions and sociability nets.....	47
2.1. Conceptual issues.....	47
2.2. Meiji period.....	50
2.3. Interwar development.....	55
2.4. Post-war period.....	59
2.5. Recent trends.....	66
2.6. Conclusion.....	70
3. Materiality and spirituality in Japanese ceramics.....	73
1.1. Rethinking the role of objects in culture and society.....	73
1.2. The aesthetics of materiality and spirituality.....	79
1.3. Conclusion.....	98

PART II ETHNOGRAPHY OF WESTERN POTTERS IN JAPAN

1. Western potters in Japan.....	103
1.1. Introduction.....	103
1.2. Research background.....	104
1.3. Methodology.....	106
1.4. Data sample and collection tools.....	108
1.5. Location of the interviews.....	113
1.6. Selection of case-studies and limitations.....	115
1.7. Nationalities and gender.....	117
1.8. Period of arrival in Japan.....	118
1.8.1. The pioneering generation.....	119
1.8.2. The bubble generation.....	124
1.8.3. The “Lost Decade”	129
1.8.4. New generation.....	130
1.9. Conclusion.....	133
2. Life-story of Western potters in Mashiko.....	135
2.1. The place.....	135
2.1.1. Introduction.....	135
2.1.2. A brief history of Mashiko ceramics.....	140
2.1.3. Mashiko and Hamada.....	141
2.1.4. Shimaoka and the acceptance of foreign apprentices.....	145
2.1.5. Mashiko Pottery Fair	156
2.1.6. The decline of Mashiko ceramic industry.....	160
2.1.7. Mashiko today.....	166

2.2. The potters.....	171
2.2.1. Andrew Gemrich (1967-), USA.....	171
2.2.2. Douglas Black (1967-), USA.....	175
2.2.3. Euan Craig (1964-), Australia.....	190
2.2.4. Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo (1957-), Spain.....	207
2.3. The pottery learners.....	211
2.3.1. Suzanne Wang (1970-), USA.....	207
2.3.2. Timi Lantos (1985-), Hungary.....	215
3. Identities, traditions and histories from a cosmopolitan perspective.....	219
3.1. Introduction.....	219
3.2. Imagining Japanese ceramics.....	220
3.3. Thinking through making.....	229
3.4. (Hi)stories or craftsmanship.....	236
3.5. The enchantment of technology.....	241
3.6. Negotiating identities and traditions.....	250
3.7. Community and local development.....	263
3.8. Cosmopolitan aspirations, ecological worldviews and the search for happiness and well-being.....	268
3.9. Japan as utopia.....	274
3.10. Conclusion: towards a cosmopolitan view of culture and humanity.....	279
CONCLUSION.....	281
APPENDIX I Spicing up a 150-year-old porcelain factory: Art, Localism and Transnationalism in Arita's Happy Lucky Kiln.....	289

APPENDIX II Artists' Profiles.....317

REFERENCES.....337

INTRODUCTION

Departing from a transnational and cross-border approach to the social sciences and the field of Japanese studies, this doctoral thesis examines the life-stories, lifestyles, technical processes, artworks and worldviews of Westerners who have crossed national borders to practice ceramics in Japan from the mid-1960s until today. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth qualitative interviews following the ethnosociological method of life-story account (*récits de vie*) as systematized by Daniel Bertaux (1997), I will explore the personal narratives of Western potters in Japan in their intersections with the historical, political, social and transnational trajectories of Japanese ceramics. For that purpose, I will understand Japanese ceramics as a material cultural product that condenses meanings, values and ideals translated as Japanese culture.

The goal of this doctoral thesis is to examine how the potters' discourses, practices, identities and worldviews embody wider histories and traditions born from the process of making images of Japan, marked by Western Orientalism and Japanese cultural nationalism. In particular, I will look at images of Japan in its aestheticized features, which focus on the ideas of craftsmanship and spirituality, born from the transnational trajectories of Zen, the tea ceremony and the folk crafts movement (*mingei*), which have impacted greatly on the images of Japanese ceramics abroad. Furthermore, I will examine how these images are appropriated, reinterpreted and resignified through the process of displacement and the bodily, sensorial and emotional relationships established with objects, practices and materials within the fabric of their everyday lives in Japan. In order to achieve this goal, I will analyze the potters' personal trajectories from three main academic perspectives to which this study can add relevant contributions:

1. Migration and mobility: in particular in its lifestyle and cultural motivations from West to Eastward direction, which are still poorly studied. By illustrating the significance of imagination, myth and cultural narratives in mobility, the trajectories of Western potters in Japan can contribute to shedding light on an often overlooked aspect of transnational migration in the contemporary world. Going beyond

the dichotomy between low-skilled and high-skilled migrants, their life-stories highlight the role of a search for self-realization, a sense of adventure and a search for radically different experiences through the culture of the Other in migration and mobility today.

2. Material culture studies: by approaching Japanese ceramics as a material cultural product, we can go beyond the dichotomies of art and craft that reflect unsymmetrical power relations between Western and non-Western knowledge systems. Besides identifying the historical, political and cultural ideologies in which Japanese ceramics are embedded, I will examine how their meanings change according to the relationships they established with people in different cultural contexts, thus highlighting their promiscuous and subversive potential. In this creative process of appropriation and resignification, Japanese ceramics can become *transculture*.

3. Transcultural Japanese studies: by bridging Eastern and Western binaries represented by the ideologies of Japaneseness (*nihonjinron*) and Eurocentrism, which translate a nativist and centralist methodology, respectively, that hinders global dialogue. Following Sugimoto's (2018) proposal of a cosmopolitanism methodology in the field of Japanese studies, I will adopt a multicultural perspective as a solution for the essentialism versus universalism issue, thus bringing emic values into the etic sphere. By looking at the Western potter's trajectories in Japan from a cosmopolitanism perspective, this research can contribute to bridging Japanese and Western local knowledge for worldwide dialogue.

Following Harumi Befu's (1989) emic-etic distinction, I will propose that, in the process of negotiating images of Japan with their bodily practices and experiences in the country, Western potters have found in the emic values tied to Japanese ceramics, etic ideals reflected in a search for self-realization, happiness and well-being through a closer connection with nature and the material world.

Hence, my hypothesis is that the Western potters' imaginary of Japanese ceramics echoes not only the historical, social and political trajectories of Japanese culture but a search for alternative ways of being in the world beyond Western normative patterns, revealing anxieties about the present and utopian projects for the future. In this process, Western potters in Japan reveal cosmopolitan orientations, rooted in a shared understanding of humanity and its place in the universe. Moreover, their negotiation of

both Japanese and Western cosmologies in their discourse and practices shows their hybrid, syncretic, fluid and dynamic identities with multiple belongings.

By working with techniques and process identified as “uniquely” Japanese, their stories bring light to the process of transmission of local knowledge in a globalized and interconnected world, challenging fixed ideas about national and cultural identity and belonging. Furthermore, their negotiations of the meanings attached to Japanese ceramics through their material practices highlight the potential of art, creativity and imagination to subvert ideology of Orientalism and Japanese uniqueness.

This project aims to make an original contribution to a mostly unaddressed theme of academic research by approaching the field of Japanese studies through the study of transnational cultural exchanges. Through it, I aim to add to wider discussions such as: the possibilities and limits of the Orientalist theory and critiques of the *Nihonjinron*; exchanges between Japan and the West in the field of arts and crafts; the impact of the Japanese discourse of nationalism on arts and cultural policy; the impact of migrants in rural communities and their revitalization; international mobility and migration; transculturalism, cosmopolitanism and localism. Furthermore, through an in-depth qualitative approach based on ethnographic fieldwork, this work can contribute to highlight the human, personal and subjective aspects of transnational migration and transcultural exchanges.

This research is divided into two main parts. The first part focuses on the historical and theoretical background through an interdisciplinary approach to art, society and culture; the second part is comprised of the description and analysis of the data obtained through ethnographic fieldwork, qualitative interviews and written questionnaires with a total of forty Western professional potters, ceramic artists and pottery learners in Japan, contextualized into a broader academic discussion encompassing the academic fields approached in part one.

The first chapter encompasses a literature review of the field of Japanese studies through a genealogy of Western knowledge of Japan from the modern period until today. Following Neustupny’s (1980) periodization, I will look at different paradigms that have dominated the academic field, marked by the Western ideology of Orientalism, the Japanese discourse of uniqueness (*nihonjinron*), its subsequent criticism contextualized

within the broader discipline of postcolonial studies. Finally, I will point in new directions to a multicultural and cosmopolitan approach to the field.

In particular, we will see how, in the last thirty years, a wide range of authors in the framework of various academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (Sugimoto, 1989; Yoshino, 1992; Morris-Suzuki, 1998; Befu, 2001; Lie, 2001; Oguma, 2002) have questioned the notions of natural nation and ethnical homogeneity in the context of Japan proliferated by the *Nihonjinron*, revealing its connections with the construction of Japan as a modern nation-state and cultural nationalism. Approached as a form “reverse orientalism” (Moeran, 1997; Kikuchi, 1998), “auto-Orientalism” (Befu, 2001) and “Occidentalism” (Goodman, 2008), the discourse of Japanese uniqueness has contributed to the dissemination of a simplified and idealized image of the country that disregards cultural, social and gender variations at the local and regional levels. By making use of traditions, often inventing new or reinventing preexisting ones (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Morris-Suzuki, 1998; Yamada, 2009), the *Nihonjinron* has aimed to create a national sense of belonging through the establishment of a shared connection with the past, a process to which the Japanese arts and crafts were not exempted.

Despite contributing to illuminate the essentialist myths behind the theories of Japaneseness, this wave of criticism and deconstructionism has also brought to the surface the blank left by it. The impossibility of studying a particular culture, society or group without a certain degree of generalization is worsened by the fact that the concept of culture has itself been a subject of critique. Furthermore, the analysis of cultural exchanges has become increasingly problematic in face of the complexities and contradictions brought by an interconnected globalized world (Appadurai, 1996). Therefore, even though postcolonial studies have brought light to the Eurocentrism behind the analysis of the “colonial other”, the categories and tools employed in such criticism have themselves been denounced as Eurocentric, for they often ignore native discourses and actors (Clammer, 2000; Inaga, 2001; Pouillon and Vatin, 2011). One of the prospects of addressing the dilemma is found within the postmodern definition of cosmopolitanism, not only to conceptualize contemporary societies but also the methodological tools for its analysis through the mediation of local and global knowledge (Sugimoto, 2018).

The second chapter explores the artistic and cultural exchanges between Japan and the West focusing on the period after the opening of the Japanese ports in 1853. We will see how the importation of Western technology, concepts and ideas have impacted the social and institutional systems of Japanese traditional art and crafts, leaving them in an ambivalent position. Starting with the Japanese participation in the World Exhibitions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we will look at the governmental attempts to project the newly formed nation in the global stage through craft promotion.

In the prewar era, Japanese traditional crafts were appropriated in the context of Japanese nationalism, reflected in a proliferation of folklore studies and archaeological excavations in old regions of pottery production, which led to a resurging interest in practices that once belonged to the elite, such as that of the tea ceremony, or the lower classes, reflected in the development of the folk crafts (*mingei*) movement, within a growing urban middle class. In the postwar era, traditional Japanese aesthetic values, such as those represented in the concept of *wabi-sabi*, were reinvented within the discourse of Japanese uniqueness and officially institutionalized through a series of cultural policies that included the creation of the title better known as Living National Treasure (*ningen kokuho*). In recent years, the Japanese government has also taken a leading role in promoting Japanese culture abroad through a national branding policy labeled as Cool Japan.

Chapter three brings to the discussion the role of objects in the analysis of culture and society. As holders of meaning and power that result from historical, political and social trajectories, objects can be seen as active social subjects in their relationship to people. In this sense, Japanese ceramics condense a set of values, actions and ideas presented as Japanese culture, yet their meanings are not fixed, only floating. Departing from a focus on materiality advocated by authors Arjun Appadurai (1988), Alfred Gell, (1992; 1998; 2006), Michael Ashkenazi and John Clammer (2000) and Tim Ingold (2011; 2013), I will discuss the concepts of art, craft and material culture in relation to Japanese pottery. For being a handmade object produced with local materials and techniques that value the participation of nature, Japanese ceramics appear as a privileged category for reflecting upon the relationship between objects, emotions, materiality and spirituality.

The importance given to simplicity, imperfection and naturalness in Japanese ceramics reflects spiritual and ethical values that come mainly from Zen Buddhist and the aesthetics of the tea ceremony. Translating the taste of the Japanese warrior class of the Momoyama period (1573-1603), these were appropriated in the modern era as a quintessential symbol of Japaneseness. The image of Zen as a metaphor of the Japanese soul was disseminated in the West from the 1950s at the hands of Daisetsu Suzuki, giving rise to a Zen boom in Europe and the United States, which attracted Western artists and intellectuals to Japan. Together with the international propagation of the *mingei* theory by philosopher Yanagi Soetsu and potters Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach, these aestheticized, exoticized and idealized images of Japan and its traditional culture have contributed to Western representations of the country focused on ideas of craftsmanship and spirituality.

In recent years, the *mingei* ideas have once again been appropriated by an urban educated Japanese middle class to refer to handmade craft objects connected with a local, traditional and ecological production. By allowing a sense of ethical beyond conspicuous consumption, this trend relates to other global contemporary movements that reflect dissatisfaction with modern industrial society and its negative impacts on the environment. Represented by a renewed interest in handmade crafts translated in the so-called makers' movement and do-it-yourself (DIY) and practices of recycling and reparation, together with new trends of urban-rural migration, these contemporary social developed can be contextualized within the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist mode of production and consumption that focus on service, knowledge and creativity. This has led to a reappraisal of handmade crafts, the redefinition of the meaning of craftsmanship as the embodiment of both knowledge and skill and its reassessment within a more humane and sustainable mode of life and work.

The second part of this doctoral dissertation is comprised of the description and analysis of the data obtained from the execution of in-depth qualitative interviews and written questionnaires with a total of forty Western potters and pottery learners in Japan. Through the financial support of a research grant from the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science, I visited the studios of twenty-three potters located in countryside areas of the country: Mashiko (Tochigi), Kasama (Ibaraki), Minakami (Gunma), Sasama (Shizuoka), Tokoname (Aichi), Shigaraki (Shiga), Kyoto and Ayabe

(Kyoto), Sasayama and Awaji (Hyogo), Bizen (Okayama), Misato (Shimane) and Arita (Saga). Though these fieldwork trips, I was able to understand the potters' discourses and practices within the place-based ceramic identities of the geographical regions they were established.

The first chapter of the second part of this thesis includes a general overview of the fieldwork, its methodology and limitations, followed by a quantitative analysis of the sample focused on nationality, gender, the location of the potters' studios and their period of arrival in Japan. Divided into five main phases starting in the mid-1960s until today, I will explore the overall historical, social, political and institutional developments that allowed the potters to come to Japan with tourist, student, cultural activities and art-related visas to practice ceramics in Japan. In the majority of the cases, they have married Japanese nationals and established their lives permanently in the country, thus blending mobility into migration.

The second chapter delves into the life-story accounts of four professional potters-artists and two pottery learners based in Mashiko (Tochigi prefecture), a small rural town located at about 150 km north of Tokyo, known for the production of folk-style ware. The region is particularly relevant for this study for its high concentration of outside practitioners when compared to other traditional Japanese pottery production centers. They who have come to Mashiko from different areas of the country and the world, drawn by its openness, history, infrastructure, as well as its connections with the *mingei* movement. Thus, in the first section of this chapter, I will the region in its geographic, historical and socio-artistic developments, focusing on the transnational networks born from Mashiko's links with the *mingei* at the hands of potters' Shoji Hamada and Tatsuzo Shimaoka. This will set the background for the potters, three Americans, one Australian, one Spanish and one Hungarian national, a total of four men and two women, to narrate their stories in the second section, which will be presented in the format of six case studies.

The third chapter is comprised of the analysis of the potters' accounts, lifestyles, technical processes, artworks and worldviews within a broader academic discussion that draws on the themes approached on the first part of this dissertation. I will argue that the potters' life-stories, lifestyles, identities and worldviews are connected to a search for values beyond Western normative standards, thus placing Japan as a place of both

nostalgic and utopian possibilities. This is reflected in: a desire for a more sustainable and organic relationship between humans and the environment; a pursuit of happiness and well-being through self-fulfilling and self-determined lifestyles; a search for aesthetic pleasure and spirituality through a closer relationship with the material reality; and ideas of craftsmanship as a reference for a more humanizing and gratifying work through the development of creativity and imagination. In this process of negotiation, Western potters in Japan reveal postmodern identities characterized by hybridism, fluidity and multiple belongings.

As a transnational migrant with a trajectory of mobility in between three continents, my research is inevitably informed by my own personal experiences of sociocultural adaptation and identity negotiation. While this might put me in a favorable position to study the issues at hand, it also demanded a greater commitment to a constant critical assessment of the assumptions resulting from this familiarity.

Originally trained as an archeologist, I dig thousand-year-old potshards from the ground as a student at the University of Lisbon in the early 2000s. After moving to Brazil in 2008, where Japanese potters and artists had immigrated in the postwar era creating new and hybrid ceramic traditions, I was able to intersect my training in the study of material culture with my interest in Japanese arts and culture. During my master course at the University of São Paulo, I examined the trajectories of migration and identity negotiation of two Japanese women potters working with traditional Japanese wood-firing techniques in countryside areas of Brazil.

After living in a Brazilian rural community centered on Japanese pottery traditions, I wandered the opposite direction, coming to Tokyo in 2015 to develop the study presented here. Hence, my academic trajectory in the past decade has focused on the study of art and material culture through the lens of mobility, transnational migration and transcultural exchanges by employing methods of qualitative ethnographic social research with emphasis on Japan.

PART I

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Images of Japan: from Orientalism to cosmopolitanism

1.1. Introduction

Starting with the first contacts between Japan and Europe in the modern period, Western images of Japan have long focused on the exotic and unique features of the people and their culture. In this chapter, I will undertake a genealogy of Western knowledge about Japan, centered on the dialogue, often uneven, between East and West from the modern period until today. In this dialectic process, images created about Japan in the West have influenced Japanese self-images.

Based on Neustupny's (1980) periodization of the field of Japanese studies, I structured this chapter into four main sections, reflecting the different paradigms that have dominated the study of Japan in academia: the Japanology paradigm, dominated by the ideology of Orientalism; the Japanese studies paradigm, nourished by the theories of Japaneseness (*nihonjinron*), an indigenous reaction to Western hegemony colored with cultural nationalism; the contemporary paradigm, informed by cultural studies and the deconstruction of colonial knowledge; and a fourth section pointing in new directions towards a cosmopolitan understanding of Japan.

Following a chronological order, I will draw on authors within the field of Japanese Studies, focusing on the contributions and limits of each paradigm in understanding the process of construction of images of Japan in the West, as well as its relations to each period's anxieties and challenges. While focusing on academia, we will see how academic knowledge has both influenced and translated widespread representations of the country both domestically and abroad.

This first chapter aims to contextualize this doctoral thesis within the field of Japanese studies from a cross-cultural and transdisciplinary perspective while providing the theoretical basis for the ethnographic description and analysis of the life-story of Western potters in Japan undertaken in Part 2. Therefore, it consists mainly of a literature review of the leading authors and works that discuss the main issues within the discipline of Japanese studies, focusing on the field of social sciences from a cross-border approach.

1.2. Japanology and Orientalism

The West has discovered Japan on two occasions: in the middle of the sixteenth century when the Jesuits, who came in the wake of the Portuguese merchants, penetrated the country (but were expelled in the following century); and three hundred years later, with the US-led naval action to force the Empire of the Rising Sun to open up to international trade (Lévi-Strauss, 1998: 7, my translation).

The earliest efforts in understanding Japan can be traced back to the arrival of the European Jesuit missionaries to the country in the sixteenth century, the first to provide first-hand information about the Japanese archipelago, its people and culture to Europe. Besides the letters from the Society of Jesus to Rome, initiated on a regular basis from 1549 by Francisco Xavier (1506-1552), other missionaries such as Luis Fróis (1532-1597), author of *Treatise on the contrast of morals between Europe and Japan* (1585) and later João Rodrigues (1561-1633), who expanded Fróis work on the study of Japanese language, history and culture, are of notice.

During the following century, Jesuit writings would be the primary source of information about Japan in Europe. With the banning of Christianity by the shogunate in 1614 and the consequent expulsion of all missionaries in 1639, Dutch merchants became the new main source through which information about the country was transmitted to Europe for the next two hundred years. Reporting from their trading post in Dejima, Nagasaki, to the world from 1641 until the end of the closed country policy in 1854, “the several Dutch accounts which had by that time already reached the enthusiastic eyes and ears of a European public enjoyed from then on a period of wider popularity, namely the descriptions referring to the ‘journey to the court’ at Edo (Tokyo)” (Curvelo, 2003: 148).

But it was from the second half of the eighteenth century, with the thorough development of academic disciplines triggered by the philosophy of Enlightenment, that scientific interest in Japan expanded. One the chief works of this period, Diderot’s *Encyclopedia*, features ninety-nine articles about Japan, including information about its history, religion and often anecdotic writings about its mores and culture. The excerpts

written about Japan were based on second or third-hand information and thus crowded with errors, distortions and lack of rigor, accompanied by exoticist bias and affirmations of the superiority of European culture, based on analogies between Japan and France (Nakagawa, 1992: 251-262).

With the opening of Japanese ports in 1854, first-hand information about the country became more available as foreign scholars entered the country and the Japanese started traveling to Europe. However, Western descriptions of Japan by early travelers were closer to personal essays and subjective impressions rather than a thorough scientific analysis. The interest in Japan was not isolated from other regional studies and the obsession with all things Japanese was rooted in Orientalism, an ideology described by Said (1978) as the Western creation of knowledge about the Orient, often dominated by feelings of superiority and a history of colonial domination. The fascination with Japan followed an interest in the Orient as the opposite polar of the West in the definition of its own identity as contrast. Japan as a place of absolute alterity was reflected in these first studies, abounding not only with exoticism, fetishism and essentialism but also dilettantism and feelings of superiority and condescendence that translate the power relations between East and West during this period. In fact, even though Japan was never officially colonized by Western powers, Harada (2006) and others argue that the country has, nonetheless, been a subject of Orientalism since Western imperialism and colonialism were practiced in the country after the Meiji Restoration.

This time was also marked by the influx of Japanese objects to the West, which sparked collector's interests and led to an almost obsession-like fascination for Japanese goods, thus contributing to the establishment of Japanese collections at museums all around Europe. This gave rise to a movement known as Japonisme, defined by the French collector and art critic Philippe Burty in 1872 as 'the study of the art and genius of Japan', which exerted a strong influence on Western artists. Many of the first European Japanophiles were art collectors attracted by the perceived "primitivism" and "innocence" of Japanese artists, in a reflection of this period's anxieties with Western modernity, as discussed by Karatani (1998). While the author argues that the aestheticization of Japan undermines colonialism through appreciation

and respect of the Other (*ibid*: 153), Brahim (1992) has described Japonisme as the “happy face of Orientalism”.

Japanology developed in this context as an academic discipline that aggregated the study of the country’s history, economy, politics, philosophy, language, literature and culture. According to Kreiner (1992: 33), the term came into use sometime in the nineteenth century to indicate a scientific approach to the field. Furthermore, during this time, the focus was on the geographic area of study instead of academic disciplines and thus academic societies and university departments focused on the study of Japanese and other oriental languages began to open all around Europe. Japanology as an academic discipline was developed through two main routes: by pioneers working in Europe who never had the chance to go to Japan; and by Japan resident scholars who had wide access to a great number of primary sources (*ibid.*: 46).

For Joseph Kitagawa (1987: 291), “the first-generation Western Japanologists not only laid the foundation for Japanology in Western countries but also stimulated Japanese scholars”. In the same way, Western interest in Japanese art contributed to a Japanese to reevaluate their own heritage in a moment of transposition of Western knowledge and institutions to the country, as was the case of the traditional arts and crafts approached in the following chapter. Thus, on the one hand, Japan appropriated and negotiated Western images of Japanese culture to define its own identity through the process of auto-Orientalism (Befu, 2001a)¹. On the other hand, the movement against Western imperialism, cultural westernization and Eurocentrism led to nationalism and the colonization of other parts of Asia, where Japan exercised its own Orientalism (Nishihara, 2005; Harada, 2006; Kober, 2014). This was marked by the ideology of Pan-Asianism, which focused on a shared Asian identity and the idea that Asian people should unite against Western imperialism with Japan as its leader, thus justifying Japanese imperialism, militarism and colonialism in other parts of Asia.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, Japan started to develop its own scholarly culture based on Western categories of thought. Eiji Oguma (2018) distinguishes between two trends in the history of Japanese studies in Japan: the representation of others and monologues. The latter began in the Meiji era when the

¹ This process has also been called “domestic Orientalism” by Eiji Oguma (2018) and “reverse Orientalism” by Brian Moeran (1997) and Yuko Kikuchi (1998).

University of Tokyo started compiling the Japanese national history with the aim of establishing a sense of shared Japanese national identity with the emperor at his center, emerging as opposition to Western Orientalism. However, the author stresses that, while Japanese anthropologists took it in their hands to study Japan, they appropriated the ethnocentric and colonialist outlook of the West in the scholarship of its own subaltern cultures, such as the Ainu people and Okinawans. This blurred the lines between monologues and the representation of others (Oguma, 2018: 23). Furthermore, as noted by Daisuke Nishihara (2005: 242-243), “at the turn of the century, Japanese intellectuals were well aware of the problem of the representation of the Orient to the Western world”:

Looking back on the world of a century ago, Japan was the only developed nation in the East. Most other Asian and African countries were colonies suffering from the exploitation of Western powers. In this context, the strategy adopted by Japan was contradictory. When it was necessary for the nation to insist on the uniqueness of Japan, stress was first put on the spirit of the Orient. When it came to the matter of civilization, Japan behaved like a fully Westernized state. Japan adopted a we-are-Asian policy when the nation needed cooperation from other Asian countries. However, it practiced Western-style imperialism when it ruled its neighboring colonies. (Nishihara, 2005: 245)

Accordingly, Japan accepted the ideology of Orientalism as a subject and became itself an agent of Orientalism through the practice of colonialism and imperialism in Asia. Furthermore, the Western representations of Japan also affected Japanese self-representations. However, with the country shifting from a premodern nation to a colonial power, these idealized, aestheticized and often patronizing images of Japan that had dominated the West in the late-nineteenth century, which focused on its arts and traditional culture and saw Japanese people as harmonious and innocent, started changing. Thus, from the early twentieth century until the end of the Second World War, Japan came to be seen in the West as a violent, cruel and militaristic nation.

This dualistic representation of Japan as both romantic and exotic and, at the same time, violent and threatening reflects the Western ideology of Orientalism as

described by Said (1978). Hence, in an attempt to escape from Western hegemony and become an agent of its own representations, Japan started to take charge of its communication by shaping a discourse that would be capable of impressing the Westerners (Kober, 2014: 102). This process would give birth to the so-called theories of Japaneseness (*nihonjinron*) in the postwar era.

1.3. Japanese studies and Nihonjinron

Ruth Benedict's seminal book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) is often considered one of the most noteworthy works on Japan from the prewar era. Yet, its influence on the ways Japanese society would be approached in the period after the war is quite significant. Dominated by functionalism and a holistic approach to culture typical of American scholarship of the period, Benedict's work attempted to lock Japanese mentality in a well-structured scheme based on cultural models and binary simplifications that she drew on from her anthropological knowledge of primitive traditional societies. Nevertheless, the book had a substantial impact on Japanese academia, leading to discussions about the characteristics of Japanese culture and personality amongst Japanese scholars and attracting the interest of the Japanese general public. This was due, in part, to Japan's own holistic tradition as argued by Sugimoto and Mouer (1986) and Yoshino (1992). The monograph had a long-lasting repercussion in the images of Japan in the postwar era, influencing not only Japanese studies in the West but also the self-images of the Japanese, nourishing postwar theories of Japaneseness.

The Japanese defeat in the Second World War and the following American occupation of the country led to a political and structural reorganization that began with the suppression of the cult of the emperor and a reevaluation of Japanese society. The American occupation also provided the possibility of direct daily contact with Japan for an extended period, leading to the formation of the first generation of Japan specialists after the war (Befu, 1992: 19). Nonetheless, the American scholarship of Japan in the immediate postwar period was still marked by the Orientalist ideology of Western superiority and condescendence towards the East. It was also in the first

years after the end of the Second World War that the term Japanology started being challenged and replaced by Japanese studies, which valued academic disciplines more than regional areas of study. As a paradigm, Japanese studies emerged in a moment where knowledge about the country started having practical use outside academia and, in this context, academic research was used for politics, social policies and economics, reflecting the agenda of the period (Okano, 2018: 2).

Drawing on Sugimoto (2003: 13-17), studies about Japan in the West in the postwar period that follow this paradigm can be divided into four phases. The first, from the end of the Second World War throughout the 1950s, coinciding with American occupation, was profoundly influenced by Benedict's work, conceiving the country as primitive and backward and thus in need of the West for educating and developing. The second phase starting in the 1960s saw the country under a more positive light with modernization and Westernization expanding rapidly and orderly. The third phase beginning in the late 1960s started to emphasize Japanese uniqueness and its role on the nation's economic development, which became the focus of the fourth phase, from the 1970s up to the 1980s, when the so-called Japanese "economic miracle" led the West to see Japan as a model to be followed. Oguma (2018: 26) argues that, because Western Europe and the United States were experiencing a recession, Japan looked stronger in comparison, thus fueling a sentiment of admiration and respect towards the new world superpower. During this time, popular images of Japan focused on corporate culture, cars and electronics as Japanese consumer goods started being exported in high quantities.

One common characteristic of the Japanese studies paradigm was assuming the correspondence between people, territory, culture, society and state and an analysis that focused on the comparing Japan with the West, especially the United States. As a result, the elements of Japanese society most worthy of attention were those that more drastically contrasted with it, following the American tradition of functionalism visible in Benedict's work. However, Befu (1992; 2001a) has noted that if the analysis were to be made from the point of view of other societies, in particular Japan's neighboring China and Korea, the distinctiveness emphasized would probably be completely different. Furthermore, the focus on difference and alterity rather than on the shared characteristics of Japan and the West, has contributed to perpetuating the

myth of *Exotica Japonica*, that is, an image of Japan as different, exotic, mysterious and strange, as the polar opposite of the West, in a clear inheritance of the ideology of Orientalism. At the same time, Japanese scholars were influenced by these Western Orientalist views of Japan expressed in the *Nihonjinron*, which, in turn, were embodied by the Japanese studies paradigm in the West. By approaching cultural nationalism, the theories of Japaneseness saw Japanese society as group-oriented, homogeneous, harmonious, hierarchical and stable, images that dominated the scholarship in Japanese in the postwar years.

According to several authors (Clammer, 2001; Befu, 2001a; Nosco, 2005), the origins of the *Nihonjinron* discourse can be found in the nativist school (*kokugaku*), when Japan tried to define its identity in opposition to China in an attempt to re-establish Japanese culture as it was before the influence of Chinese thought. By focusing on early Japanese texts, the divinity of the emperor and Shinto principles, the nativist school aimed at building a sense of Japanese collective identity (Nosco, 2005). However, with the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate and the consequent opening of the ports to foreign nations, the preponderance of the Chinese model was replaced by that of the West, to which Japan sought to assert itself as a modern nation-state. With the union of nationalism with imperialism, the Japanese state supported a conception of Japan as a multiethnic nation, in order to justify the annexation of other Asian territories and people of different ethnicities under the Japanese flag. After the war, with the Japanese defeat and the end of the Japanese empire, self-images of Japan took a different route by focusing on the correspondence between nationality, ethnicity and culture.

Based on Ernani Oda (2011), the reconstruction of Japanese identity after the war went through two main stages: a first of “overcoming”, which highlighted the negative aspects of the Japanese tradition and the need for the country to modernize, showing a certain feeling of inferiority and backwardness of Japanese culture; and a second of rescuing the theories of Japanese uniqueness, stirred by the extraordinary economic growth that Japan began to show in the 1950s and 1960s.

Ignoring the extensive ethnographic evidence of Japan's diversity by region, gender, profession, ethnic identity and social class, the basic premises of the *Nihonjinron* were thoroughly summarized by Befu (2001a): the homogeneity of

Japanese culture; the correspondence between land, people, culture and language; a methodology based on comparisons with the West; and a racial and ethnic hierarchy that is reflected in the discrimination of foreigners and Japanese minorities such as the Okinawans, Ainu, *burakumin* and Korean descendants. As such, the *Nihonjinron* frequently ignores the contributions of China and Korea to the development Japanese culture and thus supposedly unique traits of the Japanese that are shared with their Asian neighbors are very poorly known or even acknowledged (*ibid.*: 66).

The *Nihonjinron* is therefore formulated by comparing Japan with other cultures, mainly the West, in order to arrive at what is presumably unique to Japanese culture. Furthermore, the *Nihonjinron* often assumes that Japan is so unique to the point of being impenetrable others. Quoting Befu (2001a: 67), “comprehension of these unique features supposedly requires not rational or logical understanding but an intuitive insight that only the natives can achieve”. Likewise, the Japanese language is presented as uniquely Japanese and extremely difficult to master by foreigners (Tai, 2003: 13). Other cases include the ability to eat certain Japanese foods (the most typical examples being raw fish *sashimi* and fermented soybeans *nato*), appreciate a certain type of simple and subtle beauty (represented by the concept of *wabi-sabi*) or even the existence of four separate seasons (*shiki*). Thus, as Goldstein-Gidoni (2005: 159) sharply put it, unlike other cases of ethnicity that reflect upon the difference of the "other", in the case of the *Nihonjinron* it is "our" difference that is emphasized. In fact, in recent decades, the Japanese government has started to rely on this self-exoticization for the exercise of soft power through a strategy of cultural diplomacy that emphasizes the supposedly unique aspects of the country's culture, as we will explore in the next chapter.

However, the *Nihonjinron* as discourse and ideology is not unique to Japan, with American exceptionalism being one of the most ubiquitous examples. Thus, the use of history to construct and legitimize a common and shared sense of culture is part of the process of invention of traditions that happened in the moment of creation of many other nation-states. Furthermore, even though the *Nihonjinron* is often approached as a form of cultural nationalism and its popularity coincides with a resurgence of cultural nationalism in Japan, Yoshino (1992) stresses the importance of acknowledging that most authors whose works are often considered *Nihonjinron* cannot be categorized as

nationalists themselves. The author also notes that it is imperative to distinguish between the groups who produced the *Nihonjinron* and those who consume it. The main danger of the *Nihonjinron* thus lies in the fact that scholars who have published in editions aimed at the general public may have their work decontextualized from academic discussions and reproduced by the general population without sufficient critical analysis and contextualization (Yoshino, 1992; Tai, 2003). Because of that, these theories have been described as “the commercialized expression of modern Japanese nationalism” (Dale, 1986: 14) or an almost-like system of belief, “disseminated by journalists, academics, foreign businessmen and servicemen who have lived in Japan and by their Japanese counterparts who have lived abroad” (Sugimoto & Mouer, 1986).

In this sense, Befu (2001a: 78-90) has described the *Nihonjinron* as a cultural model that characterizes an ideal and desirable state, functioning as a moral imperative within the Japanese. As the author puts it, “not to behave as prescribed is not only unusual and strange, it is regarded as ‘un-Japanese’ and against the normative standards of society” (*ibid*: 79). Thus, for Befu, the *Nihonjinron* can be seen as a description of behavior that becomes a prescriptive model of behavior, which in turn serves as a source for Japanese national and cultural identity. In this process, it becomes a hegemonic ideology at the hands of the government and is finally put into practice by the corporate establishment. Consequently, the *Nihonjinron* has become something close to what Sugimoto and Mouer (1986) call a self-fulfilling prophecy. Furthermore, as Eika Tai (2003: 14-16) has noted, the discourse of Japanese uniqueness perpetuates the cultural dominance of the male economic and intellectual elite over the other Japanese, shaping their values and behavior, while ignoring the cultural practices and habits of other groups considered “marginal”.

In addition, while the *Nihonjinron* appeared in part as a reaction to Western epistemological hegemony, it was also strongly influenced by theory born in the West. Kuwayama (2009) stresses this ambivalent relationship in the excerpt below:

On the one hand, there is a strong attachment to Western theory and methodology because Japanese scholars have worked very hard to master them. On the other hand, there is a deep-seated resistance, as well as resentment,

against Westerners for having dominated Japan. In Japanese studies, these ambivalent feelings have often given rise to a categorical rejection of Western theory, followed by a bold, yet rather reckless claim, that only Japan-made theory (...) can fully explain Japan (Kuwayama, 2009: 44).

Hence, while Japan has always been seen as the exotic Other since its first contacts with the West, these stereotypical representations have also been nurtured by the Japanese themselves. In this sense, Western Orientalist images of Japan have influenced Japanese self-images, prompting the creation of a native discourse that rejected Western hegemony despite being based on Western categories of thought. Nonetheless, these self-reflective representations of Japan have also influenced Western academia, in a dialectical epistemological cycle of making images of Japan.

1.4. Nihonjinron criticism and multicultural Japan

The 1960s and 1970s were marked by political and social changes worldwide that would greatly impact the ways of doing social sciences and cultural analysis. In particular, this period witnessed the last processes of decolonization, thus encouraging a retrospective critique of Western colonialism and other forms of imperialism and its heritage of domination and subordination, led by a new generation of western and eastern researchers influenced by the work of Edward Said (Vatin, 2011: 8). As one of the most influential publications about the relationship of the West with the non-Western world up to today, Said's seminal monograph *Orientalism* (1978) looked at how, throughout history, the West has conceptualized and dominated the Orient, thus highlighting the connections between knowledge, geography and power.

This period was characterized by the criticism and deconstruction of previous categories and models, which were seen as intertwined with the political ideology of colonialism, giving birth to postcolonial studies and leading to the decline of area studies and the consolidation of gender, cultural and subaltern studies from the 1990s onwards (Vatin, 2011). Tearing down the holistic views of culture that dominated academia and questioning the ambiguous legacy of European Enlightenment,

postcolonial and postmodern theories stressed hybridity, fluidity, multiplicity, fragmentation and confront.

This process has also had a significant impact on the study of Japan, reinforced by the internal changes that started to take place in Japanese society from the late 1980s and 1990s: declining birthrate, urban exodus, increase of foreign immigrants in response to labor shortages, together with the economic decline triggered by the burst of the bubble and followed by the so-called "lost decade". The expansion of the process of globalization that led to the growth of transnational movements of people, goods, practices and knowledge were reflected in the domestic discourse of internationalization (*kokusaika*) and the spread of multiculturalism (*tabunkashugi*), thus encouraging studies on Japan in relation it to other societies (Okano, 2018: 3). In this context, studies on Japan started to be approached beyond the previously presumed correspondence between people, land and culture, turning the focus towards migration and consumption (*op. cit.*).

In this context, in the last thirty years, a wide range of authors in the framework of various academic disciplines of the humanities and social sciences have questioned the notions of homogeneity and uniqueness in the context of Japan proliferated by the *Nihonjinron* (Sugimoto and Mouer, 1980; Dale, 1986; Yoshino, 1992; Oguma, 1995, 2002; Morris-Suzuki, 1998; Befu, 2001). Two of the first authors to articulate the growing criticism of the holistic approach to Japan promoted by the *Nihonjinron* were scholars Yoshio Sugimoto and Ross Mouer. In their *Images of Japanese Society* (1986), the authors question the validity of the group-model in Japanese society, emphasizing the failure of the *Nihonjinron* in addressing the existence of conflict within their depictions of Japan as a monochromatic whole that disregards class, gender, age and regional variations:

Explanations of Japanese society which emphasize the role of national character tend to play down the importance of social conflict and variation. They seldom mention the role of authority and power (in particular that of the nation-state) in regulating social life. They fail to consider the ramifications of structured social inequality. They do not really come to grips with the presence of psychological manipulation or physical coercion or the fact that power is concentrated in the

hands of an established group in society. Conflict is seen as the exception in Japanese society, and open antagonism is interpreted as being the product of only a few social deviants (Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986: 10).

This wave of deconstructionism became noticeable in the early nineties and has contributed to the demystification of essentialist and stereotypical views of Japanese culture and society, unraveling a political agenda connected to the processes of nation-state building and cultural nationalism that served the interests of the ruling establishment. As a result, authors within what Neustphy (1980) called the “contemporary paradigm” have become more critical in their depictions of Japan and, therefore, much of the recent scholarly work in the field of Japanese Studies started approaching cultural traits and practices previously seen as uniquely Japanese from a hermeneutical viewpoint, often pointing out their recent invention in the context of national identity construction. By showing the shifting nature of national boundaries and stressing the ethnic, cultural and social variations at local and regional levels, authors within this paradigm have resorted to alternative models for the examination of Japanese society reflected in the development of multicultural perspectives.

Moreover, besides the fact that Japan has never been a culturally or ethnically homogenous country since its origins, the last thirty years have witnessed an increasing complexity concerning the people inhabiting the archipelago, mostly as a result of immigration. And Japanese culture is not only restricted to Japan. Globalization and the growth in the transnational movements of knowledge, commodities, and people that it has entailed, have contributed to the expansion of Japanese culture beyond the borders of the nation-state through three main processes that Befu (2001b: 4) has called human dispersal, organizational transplantation and cultural diffusion.

In fact, as a country of institutionalized emigration since the late nineteenth century, Japan has sent its citizens across the world, contributing not only to the diffusion but also the reinvention of Japanese culture in different territories and socio-cultural contexts. Examples range from the Japanese-American communities in South-America and the United States, who have created their own versions of Japanese culture through the hybridization with local realities and thus contributing to the

creation of multiple and fluid “Japans”. Morgan Pitelka (2007) notes how these new expressions of Japanese culture have been regarded as “inauthentic” when measured against Japanese national conceptions of Japanese culture. Curiously, the inverse happened in Brazil, when postwar Japanese immigrants were perceived by the prewar Japanese-Brazilian communities as being too westernized. Yet, even Japanese people and their artistic-cultural products could “lose” their “Japaneseness” after spending some decades in the country. In my study of Japanese women potters who immigrated to Brazil in the 1960s (Morais, 2013, 2015a), one of the artists works was said to be no longer “Japanese” during an exhibition in Japan. Thus, discussions about the “authenticity” of certain expressions of Japanese culture also reveal the hierarchies behind the conception of “Japaneseness”.

Hereof, following postcolonial approaches that focus on hybridity and fragmentation, the need for conceiving culture as process and dialogue, while recognizing creolization as an act of cultural creation, transmission and mixing, has been stressed by Douglass and Robertson (2003). In this sense, through its movement across time, space and culture, features of Japanese culture have become *transculture*:

The dividing lines between Japan and Others, including the conception of what is “pure” and “impure”, are no longer so clear as they were once assumed to be. These new and complex contexts reveal a transcultural world that is overlooked when we are preoccupied with conceptual dichotomies and dialectical oppositions. What we are seeing instead is a transcultural, transnational society with fluid boundaries, constant change, and often innovative cultural formations (Douglass and Robertson, 2003: 5).

One of the major processes that have contributed to the reevaluation of monolithic concepts of “Japaneseness” in the last decades is immigration. According to Befu (2013: 9), while between 1960 and 1980 foreign population in Japan saw an increase of just 0.2%, from 1980 to 2010 the number rose 300%, hitting the record of 2,471,258 in June 2017 (Ministry of Justice, 2017). The majority of foreign national in Japan come from other Asian countries, mainly China, South Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam, representing almost 83% of all foreigners in Japan, followed by South

America (10%), Europe (2,9%) and North American (2,8%). And while foreign nationals residing in Japan still account for less than two percent of the total population, around 15,000 become naturalized Japanese citizens every year (Befu, 2009: 31). As a result, the last three decades have witnessed a growth in international marriages, accounting for one in every thirty registered marriages in 2013 (“A Look at International Marriage in Japan”, 2015). As a consequence, the number of mixed-heritage children has also increased, further blurring the boundaries between the Japanese and Others. According to Douglass and Roberts (2003: 12), more than 80% of foreign nationals live in the three great metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka, and Chubu.

However, while the 1980s were characterized by the rise of a discourse of internationalization (*kokusaika*), this did not reflect in increased social integration of foreigner residents and ethnic minorities within the Japanese archipelago. In fact, according to Burgess (2015: 114), the discourse of *koukusaika*, pervasive in the political arena, was created by the elites to describe Japan’s relations with other nations and appeared partly as a response to foreign pressure. In fact, in Befu’s (1983) analysis of the Japanese discourse of internationalization, “learning a new language” or “traveling abroad” were the main features described by interviewees when asked about the meaning of the expression. The Japanese political discourse of internationalization has been criticized by several authors for its sole aim of serving national economic interests and thus has been referred as “internal internationalization” (Hatsue 1985 *apud* Tai, 2009: 142-143) and connected to nationalism (Befu, 1983: 261).

The above critique resonates with Saskia Sassen’s (1996) analysis of globalization, which she describes as a process that manifests itself first and foremost in economic terms, through the free flux of capital. In the opposite spectrum, the free movement of people is being increasingly controlled and restrained by protecting the arbitrarily created borders of the nation-state. Attending to the tension between denationalizing economic space and renationalizing political discourse in most developed countries, especially through immigration, Sassen highlights how the governments have had a contradictory role through its different regimes for the circulation of capital and people. She adds that “there is a combination of drives to create border-free economic spaces yet intensify border control to keep immigrants and refugees out” (Sassen, 1996: 58). This situation is visible in the Japanese

government's reluctance in accepting permanent immigrants and its strict criteria for the reception of refugees, which accounted only for 28 people in 2016, despite the number of applications reaching 10,000 (Miyazaki & Funakoshi, 2017). And in 2017, from the 20,000 applicants, only 0.01 percent were granted asylum (Wilson et al., 2018).

The end of the 1980s was also significant for the affirmation of the cultural identities of the Ainu, Okinawan and permanent Korean and Chinese residents. The wave of *dekasegi* from Brazil, many of whom were of Japanese descendant, also contributed to shaking preconceived ideas about the Japanese culture and identity. In the 1990s, the discourse of internationalization was replaced by that of multicultural coexistence (*tabunka kyosei*), which has been described as a Japanese version of Western concepts of multiculturalism (Guarné and Yamashita, 2015: 58-61). By emphasizing the dichotomy between foreigners and Japanese through essentialized definitions of culture based on fashion, food and festivals, the idea of "multicultural coexistence" celebrated a reified idea of culture through the commoditization of difference and thus flirted with nationalism (*op. cit.*). Iwabuchi (2015) has also stressed how these polarized conceptions of "we" and "others" end up ignoring the multicultural realities within the Japanese nation.

The multicultural co-living policy discussion thus evades the vital question of who are Japanese citizens, proper members of society, and reinforces the rigid boundary between "Japanese" and "foreigners", whereby the engagement with cultural diversity within Japan is superseded by the advancement of international cultural exchange between "Japanese" and "foreigners" (Iwabuchi, 2015: 38).

Thus, during this period, issues of social integration were often overlooked and discussions about the legal status of citizens' rights and their working conditions were scarce (Tsuda, 2006). Having transitioned from a country of emigrants in the beginning of the twentieth century to a place of immigration from the 1980s, Japan still lacks effective integration policies, since foreign workers are often seen as temporary sojourners rather than permanent settlers or, as Tsuda (2006: 4) harshly puts it, as "labor power to be regulated and not as people with human needs and rights". For the

author, foreigners in Japan are still seen as outsiders, who cannot constitute part of the Japanese nation and thus are not “worthy to partake of the rights and social services reserved for members of the nation-state” (*idib.*: 5). And while declining birth rate and labor shortages have brought up the acceptance of foreign workers as a viable solution to the country’s economic problems, long-term stay is often discouraged. An emblematic example of this stance was Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's statement about his policy of prioritizing one-time three to five-year working visas for immigrants to “work and raise incomes for a limited amount of time and then return home” (Moreshead, 2015). The same strategy was used by the Japanese government to allure Japanese nationals to immigrate to the Americas in the early twentieth century. Their official advertisements appealed to the opportunity to make a small fortune from working in Brazil’s coffee plantations and then return to their homeland, which, in most cases, never happened (Morais, 2010).

Furthermore, besides contemporary migration, what is today conceived as the Japanese archipelago has been receiving populations from other regions of Asia since prehistoric times, contributing to the formation of what is called today as “Japanese culture”. Many of the elements that are often defined as essential to the “uniqueness” of Japanese culture actually came from abroad, thus showing its underlying hybridism. More recently, in the Meiji period, Japan saw the influx of Westerners and, during the period of Japanese colonial empire, many people from what is today China and Korean also entered the country in large quantities. Despite this, the ideology of homogeneity and mono-ethnicity still predominates in Japanese society, where ethnic minorities are marginalized and seen as “forever outsiders” and foreigner residents are seen as destined to eventually return to their home countries. In fact, this extends to non-ethnically Japanese nationals, such as the resident Koreans and their descendants who, being born and raised in Japan, are often told to go back to “their country” in demonstrations of extreme right-wing xenophobic movements, which have grown in recent years.

While the intake of foreign nationals to Japan has exponentially grown in the last three decades, with immigrants bringing their families to the country or establishing new ones, Douglass & Roberts (2003: 3) note that “many government representatives and citizens continue to believe that this is a temporary phenomenon, occasioned by

acute labor shortages in low-wage occupations, which will be overcome through factory automation and off-shore relocation of corporate Japan's labor-intensive industries". As a result, the question "when will you back to your country?" is often heard time and again by foreign residents in the country and, even if said without racist and discriminatory intentions, it reflects the hegemony of the ideology of homogeneity.

According to Oda (2011: 110), the trend of deconstructing homogenized and essentialist images of Japanese culture has been losing its place since the 1990s due to a new set of events that have taken place at national and international levels: end of the Cold War and the consequent emergence of a new world scenario; the speculative bubble burst, which ushered in an era of recession; and the Kobe earthquake and the Tokyo subway sarin gas attacks, both in 1995, which have contributed to increase the atmosphere of instability and uncertainty in Japanese society. The 2000's were also marked by a new vague of nationalism in Japan, expressed in the events such as the 1999 national anthem and flag law, revisionism of history textbooks, moves to legalize the use of military force, politicians visits to Yasukuni shrine (Tai, 2009: 140) and, more recently, mobilization to change the Japanese Constitution with the re-election, for the third consecutive mandate, of prime minister Shinzo Abe, who has allegedly has connections with neo-nationalistic groups. Thus, while the Nihonjinron discourse has been fading and its criticism has gradually taken root in Japan's intellectual community in the last decades, it stills exerts persistent influence in Japanese society, especially in the popular and political discourse.

1.5. Beyond deconstructionism and new directions

As a hegemonic ideology with a government ratified agenda, the Nihonjinron has made use of traditions, often inventing new or reinventing preexisting ones, in an attempt to create a shared connection with the past and the arts and crafts of the country, as we will see in the next chapter, were not exempted. As an intellectual reaction to the dominance of the West and the acceptance of Western standards as universal, theories of Japaneseness stressed the exceptionalism of Japanese culture

and society, purging any possibility of dialogue beyond Japan, that was itself defined by the correspondence between nation, ethnicity and culture.

Per contra, postcolonial theory has thoroughly emphasized the artificiality of the category of national culture, summarized in Benedict Anderson's definition of nation as an "imagined community" (1983), a concept made of symbols, institutions and representations. However, while the ideas of nation and culture have been subject to criticism and acknowledged as political and social constructs, constantly negotiated and manipulated by powerful dominant groups, studying a culture, society or group without a certain degree of generalization is a challenging, perhaps even impossible, task. In fact, Sugimoto (2018) has pointed out the paradox between the danger to make generalizations and the need for social sciences to generalize and essentialize cultures, societies and groups to a certain degree. Furthermore, while the concepts of nation and national culture have been conceptualized as fluid and fragmented within the framework of postcolonial studies and thus seen as problematic and artificial categories, smaller-scale groupings and concepts can also be questioned for having the same issues, as Sugimoto (2018) sharply puts it:

Is East Asia not an "imagined community"? Is the culture of resident Koreans in Japan not 'invented'? Shouldn't Ainu culture be problematized? Are these entities not social constructs as well? Is it not the case that, upon referring to some units (other than nation-states), we are also assuming a measurable degree of their internal homogeneity and externally fixed boundaries? These questions point to the extent to which anti-national investigation is vulnerable to the same issues as nation-based research. Are we all essentialists to some degree? (Sugimoto, 2018: 178)

Furthermore, investigating culture and cultural exchanges has also become increasingly problematic in face of the complexities and contradictions brought by an interconnected globalized world (Appadurai, 1996). Even though postcolonial studies have illuminated the Eurocentric values behind the analysis of the "colonial other", the categories employed to undertake such criticism have themselves been denounced as Eurocentric and oblivious to native discourses and actors. In fact, Vatin (2011) argues

that the use of the prefixes “anti”, “neo” or “post” shows the failure of Western categories of thought in describing and analyzing major contemporary phenomena. According to the author, this expresses not only linguistic and conceptual limitations but also an intellectual and scientific inability to understand grasp present realities without referring to labeled pasts (Vatin, 2011: 11).

Thus, the author argues that we are still living a world of post-Orientalism, which has similar essentializing features to the practices and discourses of the Orientalism it criticizes. For this reason, he calls for the recognition of different Orientalisms and different Orients and the need for a new methodology that gives voice to local actors and agents (*op. cit.*). Hence, while the criticism of the *Nihonjinron* has contributed to illuminating the essentialism behind such theories, it has also brought to the surface the blank left by it. Consequently, in the last few years, the criticism of Orientalism and the *Nihonjinron* has itself been subject of critical analysis and review.

Following this tendency, Clammer (2001) defends that one the major flaws of the *Nihonjinron* criticism is the fact that it overlooks it as a genuinely indigenous discourse that embodies a form of local knowledge, ignored and discarded by its critics as “nothing more than nationalism-of-the-Right in quasi-intellectual disguise” (Clammer, 2001: 10). Similarly, Sugimoto (2018: 179) points to the fact that, within the blind criticism of *Nihonjinron*, is a strong bias that assumes that “Western ideas are progressive, liberal and reformist, while Japanese perspectives are assumed to be conservative, conventional and even nationalist”. Furthermore, while the *Nihonjinron* has been reconsidered within the tradition of holism in Japanese thought, the social and political underpinning of Western categories of thought is usually forgotten in the name of “universalism”. This shows, as Kuwayama (2009: 52) puts it, how the emics of Western society have been elevated to the etics of the world.

It seems necessary to clarify the use of the concepts of emic and etic in this context. The terms were initially applied to the field of linguists by Kenneth Pike in the 1950s to distinguish between *phonetics* as a “a universal system of describing the sounds found in the various languages of the world” and *phonemics* as “the study of the sound system of a given language”, as explained by Befu (1989: 324-325). However, the terms started to be employed in cultural analysis and, in that context, *etic* came to refer to “concepts and systems of classification that could be applied to all

cultures without references to the culture's own categories for classifying meaning", while the word *etic* was applied to "descriptions of cultural phenomena in terms which make sense to those actually living in a specific culture" (*op. cit.*).

In the case of Japan, emic concepts have been emphasized by the Nihonjinron in order to highlight the unique aspects of Japanese culture by stressing concepts that had no translation (and, supposedly, no application) in other languages, such as *amae* in the field of psychology or *wabi-sabi* in the field of aesthetics. However, Befu (1989) has proposed the significance of the application of the etic-emic distinction in cross-disciplinary and cross-comparative research in the field of Japanese studies. Drawing on Befu's work, Kuwayama (2009) points out that, while the *emic* approach can hinder cross-cultural analysis, its application often derives from a dissatisfaction with a Western discourse on Japan and the assumption of Western *emic* concepts as universally applicable to all cultures. Furthermore, the author notes that, in defining the *etics* of a specific society, *emics* of dominant groups are often chosen as representing the whole. In this sense, the etic versus emic issue echoes the endless discussion of universalism versus particularism.

In this context, Clammer (2000: 205) has argued that the Nihonjinron discourse can be seen as an attempt to escape from a "universalist" history that homogenizes and Westernizes the Other, preventing it from being the protagonist of its own cultural analysis. Furthermore, the assumption and acceptance of Western theories as universal affects not only Japanese studies but also scholarship on other marginalized or peripheral societies. Therefore, Sugimoto (2018) calls for the recognition of widely accepted Western "universal" theories and knowledge as actually locally grown and thus influenced by geographical and cultural constraints as much as Japanese indigenous epistemologies are. However, Clammer (2001: 13) notices that while anthropologists have been able to recognize local cosmologies within non-Western theory and "their practical significance for the structuring of everyday life and group to group relationships amongst hunting-gathering peoples, they have been less than successful when applying the same mode of analysis to 'complex' societies" such as Japan. In this sense, the author asks for a conception of knowledge that goes beyond Western rationality and which recognizes the "affective, corporeal, mystical, and/or rooted conceptions of nature and its sources in experience, memory and suffering

rather than in thought and its expression mediated through material objects, mythology, religion, art and images of the self” (Clammer, 2001: 143). The author also observes that Western social theory based on a rationalist model has recently been challenged by poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches fueled, in part, by social movements inspired in Asian philosophical and religious systems. As explored further in the third chapter, the recognition of the emotions and senses as valid objects of anthropological and sociological analysis are visible in the growing number of academic studies that focus on emotions, consumption and material agency.

Conforming Clammer’s position, Sugimoto (2018: 169) has questioned the universality of the logical-rational thinking, noting that the dominance of this model is often used to undermine Japanese theory. This issue was already present in the theories of Japaneseness, as remarked by Yoshino (1992):

[The Nihonjinron has often] emphasized the ‘non-logical’, non-verbal and emotive mode of communication of the Japanese as opposed to the logical, verbal and rational mode of Westerners. In such a discussion the Japanese mode tends to be assumed to be the exception and the Western mode to be the norm. Logic is most likely to mean Western Aristotelian logic, which tends to be regarded as the universal logic (Yoshino, 1992: 11).

Drawing on this issue, Shigemi Inaga (2010) has exposed the challenges involved in the establishment of a dialogue between East and West in the field of philosophy and aesthetics. According to the author, since the basic premise for discussion is logic, a Western *emic* concept that is not universally applicable to all philosophical traditions, establishing a dialogue that is symmetrical rather than uneven is virtually impossible if Japan rejects Western’s terms:

Oriental philosophy can exist in so far as it reveals its incapacity of holding a dialog with Western philosophy. And yet this incapacity of dialog also implies, quite logically, that Oriental philosophy is by definition useless for Western philosophy, for its lacking in dialogue capacity. The only possibility left for Oriental philosophy would be to logically analyze in a Western style the refusal of

logical thinking in Oriental thinking. This lack of symmetry and the refusal of reciprocal knowledge is not the fault of Oriental philosophy. Far from that, it is the logical consequence of the prerequisite which the Occident imposed upon the Orient as its only possible and logically tolerable response to the Occident (Inaga, 2011: 43).

Nevertheless, one of the major problems of the *Nihonjinron*'s attempt to fight Eurocentrism by stressing the uniqueness of the Japanese mode of thinking is that it presumes the impossibility of dialogue between Japan and the West in Japanese terms, as noted by Inaga (2010) in the quote above. This paradox may be seen as the fault of both the particularistic tendency of the *Nihonjinron* and the universalistic tendency of the West.

However, while Clammer (2001) has called for the reevaluation of the *Nihonjinron* as a form of indigenous epistemology, he also stresses the need to look beyond the theories of Japaneseness for local knowledge and homegrown social theories, which are invariably embedded in cosmological and ontological effects of the religious frameworks of Shintoism and Buddhism (Clammer, 2001: 14). In the same way, standard 'universal' sociology originated in the West is built on foundations deriving from Jewish and Christian conceptions of person and history (*op. cit.*). Sugimoto (2018: 179) also alludes to the relative void of studies that investigate "the likelihood that some indigenous Japanese thinking is civil, transformative, radical and even cosmopolitan". In chapter seven of his book *Japan and its others* (2001) Clammer further explores this possibility through the analysis of Japanese social movements, which mediate local and global knowledge in their struggles.

One possible solution for overcoming Eurocentrism and West-East binaries in academia has been proposed by Taiwanese intellectual Kuan-Hsing Chen in *Asia as method: Toward Deimperialization* (2010). In this monograph, the author proposes an "inter-referencing approach of comparing societies geographically closer or that share similar historical experiences" as a way of challenging the cultural imagery formed by capitalism, imperialism and colonialism (Wee Ng, 2013). Following Chen's proposal, Okano (2018: 13) suggests that "points of reference can be found not only in Asia but also elsewhere (including Latin America and Africa) and that studying Japanese society

and culture would be more fruitful if analyzed through these multiple perspectives”. One example of this cross-referencing is found in Kaputu’s (2011) study of Japanese aesthetics, which looks at Kyoto architecture through comparisons with the African experience. Thus, transcultural approaches to Japan from the point of view of other non-Western societies can bring new insights to the dynamics of Japanese culture.

This resonates with Mouer and Sugimoto’s (1986) suggestion of a multicultural perspective in the comparative study of Japan. By looking at cultures from a cosmopolitanism perspective, Sugimoto’s recent proposal of “methodological cosmopolitanism” also appears as a solution to the “universalism versus particularism” dichotomy by appealing to what he calls a *multiversal* approach:

Post-monocultural, post-universal and post-national, one can envisage *methodological cosmopolitanism* as the cornerstone of Japanese studies and participate in the debate about cosmopolitanism taking place around the world. It is methodological, rather than substantive or empirical, to the extent that it points to the organization of methods to research the possibilities of non-Eurocentric models and templates for social inquiries. It is multiversal universalism, an attempt to bring a variety of Western frameworks into a global conversation without contending that there should be one single mode of analysis. It is cosmopolitan in transcending national borders and national interests while searching for indigenous, native and homegrown ideas and insights for worldwide dialogue. In this sense, the cosmopolitan approach sets itself apart from what may be labeled as *centralist methodology*, which presumes the untethered universality of concepts and theories, mostly emanating from the West (Sugimoto, 2018: 181).

By using different points of reference that mediate between the local and the global, we can establish a symmetric dialogue between East and West and search for multi-particularistic universalistic projects beyond those based on nation or culture (Delanty, 2008; Beck & Sznaider, 2010; Chernillo, 2012). In this sense, “methodological cosmopolitanism” can bring *emic* ideas into the *etic* arena, highlighting the commonality of human experience while emphasizing its diverse manifestations:

While our understanding of Japan increases as we engage in emic analysis and learn of its unique aspects, at the same time etic comparisons help us to discover how Japan is part of the humanity (Befu, 1989: 341).

As a defender of the radical and universalist tradition of European Enlightenment, Marxist sociologist Vivek Chibber has criticized postcolonial theory for the resurrection of the exact Orientalist views of the East as Other that it tried to undermine. According to the author, by focusing on the social analysis on culture and cultural subjectivities, postcolonial theory has overlooked the importance of universal categories like class and capitalism (Chibber, 2013). In this sense, the author stresses to the need for recognizing the existence of social projects and ideals shared by all humankind, no matter what culture they belong to:

There are some aspects of our human nature that are not culturally constructed: they are shaped by culture, but not created by it. My view is that even though there are enormous cultural differences between people in the East and the West, there's also a core set of concerns that people have in common, whether they're born in Egypt, or India, or Manchester, or New York. These aren't many, but we can enumerate at least two or three of them: there's a concern for your physical wellbeing; there's probably a concern for a degree of autonomy and self-determination; there's a concern for those practices that directly pertain to your welfare. This isn't much, but you'd be amazed how far it gets you in explaining really important historical transformations (Vivek Chibber in an interview by Jonah Birch, 2013).

1.6. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we saw how Western knowledge of Japan has often reflected the power relations between the two regions, fed by Orientalist and Eurocentric assumptions and ideologies. At the same time, Japan appropriated Western representations to build its own discourse of uniqueness in an attempt to

create a connection with the past and a shared sense of cultural identity that ignores the diversity of the people living in the Japanese archipelago. Yet, this is not the situation only in Japan. In the current context of economic uncertainty, institutional denationalization and loss of sovereignty of the state, governments all over the world are still holding on to monolithic images of culture, identity and tradition in order to protect their national borders and *status quo* within the world stage.

In the next chapter, we will see how the Japanese government has made use of traditional arts and crafts in order to create a quintessential idea of Japan with both domestic and international appeal, which has been endorsed and promoted by the government as an instrument of soft power through cultural diplomacy in the past decades. By drawing on an often reinvented past to convey feelings of belonging within the domestic realm, it has established a connection with nationalism, constructing essentialist but powerful images of Japaneseness and transmitting them into the world.

2. Traditional arts and crafts in modern Japan: historical trajectories, political constructions and sociability nets

2.1. Conceptual issues

What do we talk about when we talk about Japanese traditional arts and crafts? What types of objects are included in this category and what cultural, social and ideological meanings do they entail? And finally, how have they been invented and reinvented throughout the history of modern Japan in order to shape a unified and monolithic image of Japanese culture in a period of national identity making? In the previous chapter, I examined the genealogy of Western images of Japan, born from a dialectical process between the ideology of Orientalism and Japanese self-images. In this chapter, we will see how Japanese self-representations marked by the discourse of Japaneseness and cultural nationalism are reflected in the domestic discourse about traditional Japanese arts and crafts.

In popular imagination, the expression “traditional Japanese arts and crafts” often entails cultural expressions connected with the past and that convey specific ideas of “Japaneseness”, such as the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, martial arts, woodblock prints, ceramics and many others¹. Since the aim of this chapter is not to discuss the origin and features of these arts, but instead to examine them in the context of an institutionalized national discourse that reflects historical, political and social processes involved in the making of images of Japan, if we dissect the expression “traditional Japanese art” into the three words that compose it, we can immediately identify the problems arisen by it.

As explored in chapter one, in the last three decades scholars from the field of Japanese studies have questioned the notions of natural nation and ethnic homogeneity in the context of Japan disseminated by the *Nihonjinron*. Despite this,

¹ In the website of *The Virtual Museum of Japanese Arts*, produced for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Kodansha International Ltd., Japanese arts are divided into six categories: fine arts (painting, sculpture, *ukiyo-e*, architecture and gardens); craft (wood and lacquerware, metalwork, ceramics, woven and dyed textiles, swords and armor); performing arts (*kabuki*, *nō*, *kyōgen*, *bunraku*, dance and music); pastime arts (flower arrangement, tea ceremony, calligraphy, *bonsai*); martial arts (*sumō*, *judō*, *kendō*, *kyūdō*, *karate*, *aikido*); and others (dolls, *ninja*, Japanese cuisine, *zazen*, *tanka* and *haiku* and festivals).

popular images of the country and its traditional culture still often show simplistic depictions that ignore historical, ethnical and regional variations. In this context, we might ask: should the arts of Okinawa or the Ainu region of Hokkaido be included in the category of traditional Japanese arts, since both these regions have only been incorporated into the Japanese national territory in the second half of the nineteenth century? While the answer to this question might not be considered very problematic today, more complicated issues arise if we look at the former Japanese imperial colonies, an issue which has been approached by Kikuchi (2010) through the lenses of crafts. In her study, the author shows how domestic ideas of “Japaneseness” have changed according to specific political agendas. Hence, the definition of “Japan” and “Japanese” isn’t something fixed and, in some cases, it is still a matter of dispute.

Similar to the concept of nation, national identity and national culture, so the concept of tradition lacks a clear definition. The idea of tradition has been thoroughly problematized by Hobsbawm and Ranger in their seminal monograph *The Invention of Traditions* (1983). In this work, the authors argue that traditions that often seem or are considered old are actually quite recent, when not entirely invented. In this sense, the role of “invented traditions” reproduces that of the nation: to inculcate a set of normative values and behaviors by establishing continuity with the past. We might therefore ask: how old must an artistic expression be in order to be considered traditional? Morris-Suzuki (1994: 14) has pointed out that, in fact, most of the traditional local craft products sold today at souvenir shops around Japan have originated in the Tokugawa age, that is, no more than four centuries years ago. And according to the Association for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries, to be recognized as Traditional Craft of Japan, a particular object must be manufactured by implementing traditional techniques of at least one hundred years old. Thus, in this chapter, we will see how some aspects of Japanese arts, often described in the media as “millenary traditions”, are actually quite recent or have been reinvented and restructured in the modern period.

As a result, the question of authenticity frequently arises when talking about culture and cultural traditions. And while no cultural practice is truly authentic, the Japanese government has taken an active part in reframing (trans)cultural practices within a quintessential and monolithic idea of “Japaneseness”. As such, the substantial

Chinese and Korean heritage present in many of the country's centuries-old cultural practices is not usually acknowledged. In fact, emblematic Japanese craft techniques often seen as "traditional" or "quintessentially Japanese" have actually been introduced from the neighboring countries, one example being high-temperature wood-firing in climbing kilns (*noborigama*), imported from Korea after the Japanese military invasions of the country in the sixteenth century and the consequent capture of Korean craftsmen, who developed these techniques in Japan.

Furthermore, Morris-Suzuki (1994) has noted that, before the Meiji period, the country's political decentralization, reflected in its division into competing economic units, led to the development of a heterogeneity of styles and techniques in different regions, thus making it hard to refer to a homogenous and, even more so, atemporal "Japanese style". In fact, it was only after the Meiji Restoration that the Japanese government started making constant use of history with the goal of legitimating a sense of shared culture and the creation of a unified discourse on Japanese crafts had an important part to play in this process.

Finally, the definition of art has also been a field of ongoing dispute and often dominated by Eurocentric essentialist notions of geniality and creativity. According to the English Oxford Living Dictionaries, art consists of "the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power". From a critical perspective, however, this reductionist conception has been regarded by several authors as a modern invention (Shiner, 2003) and as a cultural and social system (Geertz, 1976; Luhmann, 2000), with origins in the eighteenth century Europe. Furthermore, as a cultural product, traditional Japanese arts possess the same issues as other types of cultural practices, invariably shaped by history, society and political ideologies. The problematization of the concept of art as a material cultural practice will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Hence, in this chapter I will investigate the historical trajectories, political constructions and sociability nets that have contributed to the construction of a stereotyped image of traditional Japanese crafts predominant in the popular imagination, focusing on the national context from Meiji Restoration until today. The goal is to discuss the definition of traditional Japanese crafts and show how their

identity is actually intertwined with political ideologies, historical constructions and cultural representations. Following the first participations of Japan in the International Exhibitions of late nineteenth century, the rediscovery of old pottery kilns and the revival of tea ceremony amongst the urban elite in the 1920s, the folk crafts movement (*mingei*) of the prewar and postwar years, the creation of the title of Living National Treasure in the 1950s, the explosion of the domestic tourism in the 1970s and the more recent “Cool Japan” nation branding, this chapter will illustrate the main historical moments that have contributed to the definition, reinvention and revitalization of certain traditional Japanese arts in the last one hundred and fifty years.

2.2. Meiji period

As mentioned in the previous chapter, cultural and artistic exchanges between Japan and the West started with the arrival of European Jesuits to the Japanese archipelago in 1549, prompting the first exports of Japanese objects to Europe. After the banning of Christianity in 1614, national seclusion policies restricted the commercial exchanges with the outside, allowing only the Chinese and the Dutch to engage in trading activities, the later confined to the island of Dejima, Nagasaki. However, due to the decline of Chinese exports as a consequence of internal disruptions, the Dutch Indian Company started to export great amounts of Japanese porcelain and thus, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Arita ware², produced in the current prefecture of Saga in the southern island of Kyushu, became a fashionable item amongst European aristocracy. Western fascination with Japanese porcelain has even been called “porcelain sickness” and, because of its omnipresence in castles, palaces and other privileged dwellings of late-modern Europe, it became one the most representative styles of Japanese ceramics in the European imaginary until today (see Appendix II for a case-study about the reinvention and revitalization of Arita ware).

However, it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that Japanese objects became available to a wider audience, after the period of seclusion ended with

² Also known as Imari for the name of the port used for its transportation.

treaties to open the Japanese ports, leading to the Meiji Restoration in 1868. This time coincided with the beginning of the World Exhibitions that took place in Europe and the United States from the second half of the nineteenth century with the goal of promoting the culture and industry of participating countries. The emergence of these international events is closely related to advances in manufacturing, science, and technology triggered by the advent of the Industrial Revolution and functioned as a way of national assertion and promotion in a moment of widespread nation-state formation. As a newly formed nation, Japan was aware of the importance of presenting itself to the public on the international stage and, thus, the Japanese government became an active agent in the creation and manipulation of images of Japan both domestically and abroad.

The first of the World Exhibitions took place in London in 1851, but it was only two years later that Japanese objects would first be seen in Dublin and, in 1862, about six hundred pieces were exhibited in London, the same year of the arrival of the first Japanese embassy to Europe. In 1867, despite civil wars preceding the Meiji Restoration, Japan sent delegates to the Paris World Exhibition, taking lead in promoting national interests through its participation in these demonstrations of national power (Irvine, 2013: 28). The Paris exhibition received over nine million visitors and it marked the beginning of the fad for Japanese things, giving birth to the term 'Japonisme'. Japanese crafts in general and woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*) in particular had a great impact on Western artists, with the most acknowledged names including Vincent Van Gogh, Edgar Degas and Gustav Klimt. In fact, the influence of Japanese arts and crafts in the West propelled the surge of several modern art movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the Arts and Crafts, Impressionism and Art Nouveau.

However, it was the Vienna World Exhibition of 1873, held under the motto *Kulture und Education*, that the recently formed Meiji government officially participated for the first time. It was also then that the word *bijūtsu* (美術) appeared as a translation of the German word *kunst* (art) and the word *kōgei* (工芸) as the translation of the English word "craft". In this sense, craft came to refer generally to manufactured products such as pottery, lacquered woodwork, metal or any other type of "artistic" utilitarian objects that didn't fit in the Western category of art, which was

essentially restricted to works of painting and sculpture. Still, as Moeran (1997: 13) argues that, while certain styles of pottery, in particular those related to the tea ceremony, have been seen as "artistic" in Japan since feudal times, especially due to their relation to the warrior and aristocratic elite, the existing word for *art* (*geijutsu* 芸術) in premodern Japan used to comprise a broader meaning than its Western counterpart. According to art historian Doshin Sato (2011: 76), *geijutsu* was originally used to refer to the six skills (*rikugei* 六芸) that any Chinese man must possess: moral behavior, music, archery, equestrian art, calligraphy and mathematics, thus generally denoting "an extremely high level of achievement in technical areas". This is visible in the meaning of the ideograms that compose it (芸 *gei* = art; 術 *jutsu* = technique), which focus on the concept of art as the ability to perform a job well (Okano, 2016). However, with the importation of the Western concept of art to Japan, which became dominant from the late nineteenth century onwards, the focus on the idea of skill switched to the concept of beauty (美 *bi*), creating a separated word for craft (*kōgei*).

Yet, the Meiji government's engagement with Western concepts, technologies and institutions, encouraged by a need to equal the West as a modern world power, did not only lead to the creation of two new words (*bijutsu* and *kōgei*) that originally encompassed cultural practices expressed by only one (*geijutsu*). It also created a previously nonexistent hierarchy between cultural expressions that took root in the newly-created Japanese art world. In fact, one of the most important Japanese art exhibitions of the early twentieth century, the Ministry of Education Art Exhibition (*Buten*), created in 1907 and renamed Imperial Art Exhibition (*Teiten*) in 1919, only exhibited works of fine art, such as painting and sculpture, excluding craft from its categories. Because of that, Japanese craftsmen were confined to the crafts exhibitions organized by the Ministry of Commerce and Agriculture, even though it was greatly due to the international success of crafts that the Japanese art world was formed and Japan started gaining artistic recognition at a global scale (Moeran, 1997: 14).

The international success of Japanese crafts in the 1873 Vienna World Exhibition led the Meiji government to realize the potential of Japanese exports. In 1876, the Government Craft Design Office (*Seihin Gazu-gakari*) was established as a department within the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the role of defining guidelines for the

designs to be created for the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878 (Yokomizu, 2013: 68). These guidelines included: to promote of unique techniques that are declining, review old exquisite skills and preserve and improve them; to make sure the product is fit for demand in the place to be exported, amongst others (*op. cit.*). This shows how the Japanese government's attempted to create a connection with the past while capitalizing on Western tastes. The Government Craft Design Office led to the creation of the Japan Art Association (*Ryuchikai*) in 1879, which aimed to promote the national industry and craft by encouraging the creation of designs that appealed to a Western audience. American art historian and famous Japanologist Ernest Fenollosa was one of the Western specialists invited to give a lecture at *Ryuchikai* at a time when the Japanese public was turning its attention to the West and its arts. In his study of Fenollosa and aesthetics, Kato (1999) argues how the historian's disappointment with the tendencies of contemporary European art and his nostalgia for classical antiquity led to him to turn to Japanese arts, praising its traditional aesthetics and underling the superiority of Japanese painting. This incited the nationalistic mentality of his audience and even contributed to a revival of the style known as *nihonga* (Kato, 1999).

Between 1862 and 1910, the Japanese government participated in three of the nearly seven dozen international exhibitions and pottery was one of the crafts most frequently presented due to its importance for the export market (Moeran, 1997: 13). The Western fad for things Japanese led Japanese crafts to become an important export product under the policy of industry and manufacture promotion (*shokusan kogyo*), acquiring high status as industrial goods (Sato, 2011: 192). However, for its industrial character, *kogei* (crafts) began to be confused with *kogyo* (industry). Moeran (1997: 13) stressed how, similarly to Europe before the widespread of industrialization, not only was it difficult to separate art from craft but also craft from industry in late nineteenth century Japan. In fact, despite mass production and labor division (*bungyou*) being already practiced in Edo period's manufactures, it was only after the introduction of modern industry and machinery that a gradual autonomy between the two concepts emerged (*op. cit.*). Therefore, in order to stress the artistic qualities of Japanese crafts, the word *bijutsu kogei* (artistic crafts) started to be used from 1885 at the industrial domestic exhibitions. According to Kamogawa (2015: 17), the term was created in order to stress the position of handicrafts as an art form, distinguish it from

the manufacturing industry and establish its cultural role as a uniquely Japanese form of art.

In 1890, the Ministry of Education and the Imperial Household Agency took over the development of artistic crafts (*bijutsu kogei*), naming artisans under the title of "Imperial Arts and Crafts Experts", who received support in exchange for producing works for the international exhibitions. Through these, the Meiji government took an active part in the construction of a quintessential image of Japan, which responded to Western anxieties about industrialization and romantic visions of a rural past (Karatani, 1998). The discovery of Japanese art by the West represented, in part, a search for Europe's lost pre-modern past, making Japan a ghost of that past and an idealized reflection of it.

Because of its international success and marketability abroad, craftwork was supported by the Japanese government to increase its trade revenue and adopted as a symbol of the newly created nation. High-quality handmade crafts not only distinguished Japan from the West, who had lost a great part of its craft traditions after the Industrial Revolution but also showed Western nations that Japan had something superior to them. Furthermore, this period of asserting itself towards the West was also characterized by an ideology that was verging upon nationalism, prompted by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894. In that way, the reevaluation of almost obsolete craft practices, which were reinvented and considered traditional, reveals the Meiji government's attempt to establish continuity with the past, a practice that has often characterized nationalist policies. In fact, Waal (2002: 190) has compared the Japanese government's approach to crafts during this period to that of the ideology of the Third Reich in Germany from 1933 to 1945, which was concerned with supporting and promoting *volkisch* craftwork as a way of exalting national identity.

The craze for Japanese things known as Japonisme, which swept the European and American intellectual and artistic elite of the late nineteenth century, had also a more popular version known as 'Japonaiserie', "a more superficial fashion for exotic Japan that was, nevertheless, very popular among the middle and upper class" (Irvine, 2013: 14). However, the inflow of Japanese things into Western upper-class daily life and the need to keep up with the high demand led to mass production and a

consequent fall in the standards of craft objects, as revealed in the criticism to the Japanese participation in the 1900 Paris Exhibition (Pollard, 2003). At this time, art had started to occupy a central place in the international exhibitions but Japanese objects were criticized for its lack of progress in comparison to the West. Since only in non-industrialized countries art was synonymous with handmade goods, as Pollard (2003: 80) notes, mechanization, industrialization and mass production deflated the “aura” of Japanese crafts in Westerners’ eyes.

Consequently, in a wish to catch up with the West, Japan’s rapid industrial advancements clashed with Europe’s romantic nostalgia for its own pre-industrial past. This tendency was reflected in the Arts and Crafts movement, developed in the second half of nineteenth-century Britain and spread throughout Europe and the United States between the 1880s and the 1910s. Resulting from a romantic nostalgia for the craft trades of the past when they were becoming obsolete by mechanical reproduction, the Arts & Crafts Movement emerged at a time when Japanese art began to influence European artists, who saw in Japan “wonderfully skillful artists who were under the influence of a free and informal naturalism” (Crane *apud* Moeran, 1997: 221), thus satisfying the prevailing medievalism, orientalism and romantic primitivism of the time (Moeran, 1997; Kukuchi, 2004). Feeling discontent with its own modernity, the West had found in Japan a glimpse of its pre-industrial past and therefore Japanese modernization, industrialization and militarization appeared as a threat to an idealized, innocent and peaceful image of a “traditional Japan” promoted by the Japanese government itself. Thus, after capitalizing on Western tastes and industrializing its production to meet foreign demand, the craze for Japanese things started gradually fading as Japan emulated the modern West, establishing itself as a colonial power after the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905.

2.3. Interwar developments

While the development of Japanese crafts from the second half on the nineteenth century was dominated by a tendency towards mechanization and standardization, the beginning of the new century saw the rise of artist-craftsmen who

stressed the importance of individual creative expression influenced by the Western modernist movement. In this context, after the Taisho era (1910-1926), crafts began to be recognized as artistic expressions and a crafts section was introduced at the Imperial Arts Exhibition (*Teiten*) in 1927. The appearance of artist-craftsmen was parallel with other movements that sought to acknowledge the beauty of handmade mass-produced objects, such as the folk crafts movement (*mingei*) and the peasant art movement (*nomin bijutsu*), which aimed to raise the manifestations of everyday, rural and simple life to the level of art. The growing modernization and urbanization of Taisho era (1912-1926) also brought anxieties with modernity to Japan, propelling a search for its own endangered past and traditions. The expansion of the Japanese Empire led to the need to recover a shared past, boosting folklore studies and archaeological excavations, which in turn led to a growing interest for Japanese traditional practices that had been ignored during the first decades of modernization (Moeran, 1997: 14).

In fact, during this period, Japan saw the development of a new urban and educated middle class, which appropriated forms of recreation and consumption that had before been limited to the enjoyment of a mostly male aristocratic and intellectual elite (Brandt, 2007: 74). According to Atsushi (2014: 4-7), the beginning of Taisho era marked the first stage of Japan's consumer society, which developed between 1912 and 1941 exclusively in major metropolitan areas such as Tokyo, where the population grew from 6.6 percent in 1920 to 10.2 percent in 1940. Still, this increasingly urbanized and westernized middle class only accounted for between 10 to 20 percent of the Japanese population. Thus, the majority of the Japanese still lived poverty in rural areas and some still earned their life making handmade goods in small family enterprises, which were then consumed by a small minority of the middle and upper class (*ibid.*: 10). The revival of Japanese traditions appeared as a reaction to urbanization, modernization and westernization and, in this context, practices that had only been performed within old aristocratic families started being appropriated by the growing urban middle class as symbols of wealth, social status and a shared sense of national identity.

One of the most emblematic Japanese cultural practices that underwent significant reappraisal during the beginning of Showa era was that of the tea

ceremony, which would come to represent a quintessential image of “Japaneseness” until today. One of the factors that contributed to the revival of the “way of tea” (*chado*) was the success of Kakuzo Okakura’s (1862-1913) seminal monograph *The Book of Tea*. Originally published in English in 1906 with the aim of reaching a Western audience, it was only translated into Japanese twenty-three years later, in 1929, coinciding with the peak of Japan’s imperial venture and nationalism. In this monograph, Okakura defines Japanese identity through the tea ceremony, which he considers one of the most representative symbols of Japanese aesthetic culture, emphasizing its superiority based on the precepts of Zen-Buddhism and harmony with nature (Marro, 2011). According to Karatani (1998), Okakura inherited the Western notion of art during his period as an assistant to American Ernest Fenollosa and applied it to Japanese art. Influenced by the idealism of the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), Okakura is considered the founding father of the “myth of Asian spiritualism” (Marra, 1999: 65-71). Rocha (1996) has argued that it was largely because of Okakura that *chanoyu* came to be seen as a metaphor for Japan’s cultural identity, a paradigm of the “Japanese soul” or an ideal representation of it. Kristen Surak (2013) has also thoroughly examined the relationship between the tea ceremony, Japaneseness and cultural nationalism in her analysis of the social world and inner workings of *sado* through insights obtained through one decade of training. In fact, through its institutional organizations, the way of tea still acts as an important tool in the maintenance and reproduction of the ideology of homogeneity not only in Japan but also abroad, where the Urasenke school, which represents between 70 and 80 percent of all tea practitioners (Mori, 1991; Dougill, 2006), is established in over one hundred different countries. This role of tea as a representation of a “Japanese spirit” is also visible in the fact that the tea ceremony is almost always present in events related to Japanese culture abroad, as explored by Guichard-Anguis (2001).

Another author that attempted to define Japan by contrasting Western materialism with Asian aesthetics and spirituality was Sōetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), who founded the folk arts (*mingei*) movement together with potters Shoji Hamada and Kanjiro Kawai in the mid-1920s. Seeking the recognition of the cultural, artistic, social and spiritual role of traditional handicrafts in a moment when Japanese traditions seemed endangered by the fast-paced modernization and urbanization, it praised the

beauty of the everyday objects handmade by anonymous craftsmen. Fueled by the growing urban middle-class and its nostalgia for a Japanese rural past that was slowly disappearing, it drew on a combination of Western romantic ideals with Zen Buddhist concepts and the aesthetics of the tea ceremony. The movement gave rise to the creation of the Nihon Mingeikan (Museum of Japanese Folk Arts), opened in 1936 and dedicated to the exhibition of popular objects used by ordinary people as well as craft artworks created by celebrated individual artists.

In her study about the politics of folk craft in imperial Japan, Brandt (2007) has shown how, in the interwar period, the concern for traditions endangered by modernization, together with the development of a new urban consumer culture, contributed to the promotion of a new aesthetic based on traditional cultural practices, which was reflected in the growing popularity of folk crafts. In particular, department stores, which sprang across Japan's major cities in the 1920s and 1930s, had a major role in the sale and promotion of *mingei* products, not only through commercialization but also through temporary exhibitions that presented the latest trends (*ibid.*: 106-107). According to the author, the popularity of folk crafts derived in part from its connection to a quintessential "Japanese spirit" that matched the nationalistic thinking of the time (*idib.*: 123).

The success of *The Book of Tea* and the impact of the *mingei* movement led to the proliferation of archaeological excavations in traditional areas of ceramic production, prompting a resurgence of the ceramics used in the tea ceremony during the Momoyama period (1568-1615). This gave birth to a movement known as Momoyama revival in the 1930s, mostly translated into ceramics and which had potters Toyo Kaneshige (1896-1967) and Toyozo Arakawa (1894-1985) as its most famous representative artists. Encouraged by the nationalistic climate of the time, artists interested in the technical aspect of utensils for the tea ceremony began to investigate the works produced in the so-called six ancient kilns of Japan (*rokkoyo*): Bizen (Okayama prefecture), Shigaraki (Shiga prefecture), Tamba (Hyogo prefecture), Echizen (Fukui prefecture), Seto and Tokoname (Aichi prefecture). By reproducing the techniques used in those containers, which had lost popularity during the Edo era, these artists contributed to establishing a connection with the past through their artistic work (Moeran, 1997). However, Moeran (1990) argues that many of the

regions known today as old traditional ceramic kilns, such as those named after the styles Mino, Karatsu, Bizen and Mashiko, were rediscovered by the potters Toyozo Arakawa, Muan Nakazato, Toyo Kaneshige and Shoji Hamada respectively in the 1930s. Furthermore, while the famous six-old kilns terminology was created by potter and scholar Fujio Koyama in the post-war era, many have argued that it does not reflect the diversity of regions with active pottery kilns in the medieval period, which well exceeds the count of six.

In sum, at the beginning of the Meiji period, Japanese crafts were seen as important export items, functioning also a symbolic resource to convey images of Japan as a modern nation to the West. In the interwar period, traditional crafts started to be appropriated by a growing middle class as distinctive everyday commodities and a vanishing cultural resource, encouraged by feelings of nostalgia and a quest for an idealized and soon to be lost past. In addition to folk crafts, the interest in rurality and tradition acquired new meanings, strengthened by the threat that industrialization and urbanization posed to the preservation of traditional lifestyles. This contributed to the rise of domestic tourism as a form of recreation of a new urban middle class, fueled by a growing infrastructure of railways and inns leading to a domestic tourist boom in the postwar era.

2.4. Post-war period

After a period of cessation of craft activities during the Second World War, the postwar era saw the establishment of several governmental measures put in place to protect traditional culture in a context of redefining national identity after the Japanese defeat and the consequent abnegation of the divinity of the emperor. At an international level, there was a need to change the image of the country from military aggressor to a peace-loving democracy. In this context, the traditional arts and crafts, which became increasingly associated with Zen aesthetics, cooperative work and harmony with nature, had a significant role to play in the making of post-war images of Japan.

Originated from a series of measures for the preservation of historical, artistic and cultural heritage that date back to the Meiji period, the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (*Bunkazai Hogōhō*) was first enacted in 1950 as a reaction to a fire in the Hōryūji temple in Kyoto and the subsequent destruction of valuable mural paintings of its Golden Pavilion in 1949. The original provisions of the law envisioned three categories: tangible cultural properties, such as buildings, paintings and crafts; intangible cultural properties, which include endangered traditional techniques and various performing arts; and historic sites, places of scenic beauty and natural monuments. The enactment of the law led to the establishment of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Properties, a precursor of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunkacho*), created in 1968 as an extra-ministerial bureau of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Under the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, the national government designates and selects the most important cultural properties and imposes restrictions on activities such as the alteration of their existing state, repairs and export.

Furthermore, since 1954, the Agency for Cultural Affairs has been responsible for selecting individuals and groups as official carriers of intangible cultural properties, a title which is colloquially known as Living National Treasure (*ningen kokuho*). The receivers of the title are bestowed with an annual stipend of two million yen, as well as national and international prestige, in order to give continuity to traditional techniques through the training of successors and documentation. However, in 1955, the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties was revised in order to include not only endangered traditional techniques but also "important intangible cultural properties". Rupert Faulkner (2001: 3-4) argues that the initial scope of the measure was extended in order to cover practices that were not necessarily in danger of being lost but that were important for historical or artistic reasons, showing a cultural agenda that has been institutionalizing preferred models, such as those of the tea ceremony. Wahei Aoyama, a contemporary craft gallery owner in Tokyo, wrote a bleak critique of the Living National Treasure system in which he exposed the regional political lobbies behind the process of choosing the next holder of the title:

The Cultural Property Preservation Act states that the Minister of Science and Education appoints LNTs [Living National Treasures]. The Minister makes his decision based on the proposals of the Committee for Cultural Property Preservation, comprised of academics and members of the Agency of Cultural Affairs. It is this Committee which debates, discovers, and researches potential candidates for IICP [Important Intangible Cultural Properties] status. They gather their information from small regional committees throughout Japan. In fact, these regional committees are similar to lobbyists that try to promote their respective prefectures by pushing a regional potter for LNT status. Receiving such a status will bring fame, prestige, and tourists to local kiln sites associated with the potter. Unfortunately, this process has become one reason for the politics and discontent behind LNTs (Aoyama, 2004).

Similarly, in his examination of the art world of contemporary Japanese ceramics, Moeran (1987: 32) recognizes that, while a potter might come to be acknowledged a reputable artist by selling works (especially in one-man shows) at prestigious department stores and winning prizes at exhibitions, the nature of his or her (mostly his, as we'll see further on) social relations is a key factor in the achievement of the title of Living National Treasure. Hence, by receiving this title, a named craftsman is acknowledged not only in the artistic qualities of his work but also in the regional and national relevance of his techniques, with his social importance impacting directly on his community.

Moreover, Harumi Befu (2001a) has pointed out how the governmental measures for the protection of cultural properties often reflect the state's approval of certain types of art and the institutional promotion of aesthetic values seen as traditional. One example is the case of the ceramics of the Bizen region, where between 1955 and 2004 five potters have received the title of Living National Treasure, not because the technique was in danger of extinction, but because it represents a quintessential Japanese character, particularly through its identification as one of the "six old kilns of Japan" and its close connection with the aesthetics of the tea ceremony. However, other crafts that do not conform to the state's ideal of

“Japaneseness” do not often receive governmental support, thus struggling for survival.

Besides these symbolic power imbalances, the title of Living National Treasure has also perpetuated gender inequalities, which are due, in part, to the traditional system of *iemoto*, in which the transmission of craft techniques is passed down through patrilineal lineage. This is observable in the fact that, in a total of seventy individuals considered Living National Treasures today, only eleven are women, the majority of who produce works traditionally associated with domestic activities, such as textiles and dolls. In fact, until today, no female potter has ever been designated holder of important intangible cultural property, even though many women artists have stood out in the area of contemporary sculptural ceramics or apprenticed with Living National Treasures in traditional pottery techniques, as investigated by Todate (2009). However, because of the *iemoto* system and, in the case of ceramics, the association of traditional pottery to the heavy and dirty work of wood-firing, traditional crafts are still often dominated by male practitioners. In contrast, contemporary crafts have been increasingly conquered by women, who come mostly from higher education art institutions and enjoy more freedom in this domain.

Yet, the institutionalization of preferred models includes not only the aesthetics of the tea ceremony and the ancient pottery kilns with centuries-old history but also the more recent *mingei*. In fact, Brandt (2007: 225) argues that the relations between the Mingei Association established in 1934 and the state during the war period are visible in “the very identification of traditional handicraft techniques as an invaluable national resource, along with the high proportion of mingei artist-craftsmen among those first named Living National Treasures”. The author further points that, within the first four Living National Treasures designated by the Japanese government in 1955, two were related to the *mingei* movement: Shoji Hamada and Kenkichi Tomimoto. In addition, amongst the thirty-six Living National Treasures chosen up to 1975, five were closely associated with the initial *mingei* movement. This shows how, by the end of the Second World War, *mingei* had received official approval and ratification from the Japanese state, becoming known to almost all Japanese by the 1960s and thus turning into a “household word, a widely diffused type of commodity, and a seamless part of the common sense of Japanese cultural identity” by the 1970s (*ibid.*: 2).

As a result, the 1960s and 1970s saw an enormous demand for folk crafts known as the “*mingei boom*”, which coincided with a process of avid Americanization and the consequent nostalgia for Japanese tradition and the rural countryside (Moeran, 1997: 211). According to the author, the boom contributed to the revitalization but also the standardization of traditional pottery centers, leading to the establishment of new kilns around Japan and the expansion of crafts exhibitions in urban centers. Furthermore, the development of domestic tourism encouraged urban and suburban Japanese to travel to remote sites of Japan and discover traditional aspects of their culture before they vanished, contributing to this boom. Besides *omiyage*, many Japanese tourists began collecting objects associated with the rural past, leading to a growing interest and consumption of folk crafts in the post-war period.

The interest in folk crafts was also related to the idealization of rural Japan as a symbol of Japanese identity, as argued by Schnell (2008: 201). In fact, the fetishism for the countryside has been approached by several authors (Ivy, 1995; Robertson, 1998; Creighton, 1998). In particular, Robertson (1998) has interpreted this trend as fear of vanishing cultural identity that leads to self-exoticism through the idealization of the rural experience. In particular, the author has analyzed the creation of *furusato-mura* (“old-village” villages) as tourist destinations for urbanites in search of traditional “authentic” experiences that sometimes include hand making crafts. Furthermore, for Schnell (2008: 213), the marketing of the Japanese countryside as an “exotic landscape of adventure and discovery” has helped to promote auto-orientalism. The domestic tourism boom was made possible by the expansion of railway and hospitality infrastructure in the postwar period, with the Japan National Railway’s tourism campaign “Discover Japan” of the 1970s as its most emblematic “securely nativist project of national (re)discovery” (Ivy, 1995: 29).

In this context, department stores have continued to play an important role in the promotion and commercialization of Japanese cultural traditions, leading to a retro boom in the 1970s and 1980s. In her investigation of the subject, Millie Creighton (1998: 128) states that, during the postwar period, department stores started to focus on leisure activities by helping more affluent customers to discover fulfilling lifestyles. The flourishing of Japanese consumer society in the decades after the war, together with the fact that most Japanese now lived in metropolitan areas and led a modern,

westernized and affluent lifestyle that had allowed them to obtain a high level of consumer goods, the focus on the selling of things was redirected to the selling of experiences. This led to what the author calls “a marketing age of *mono igai no mono*, or selling ‘things other than things’” (*op. cit.*).

Michihiro Watanabe (1999), Director-General of the Department of Culture of the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan until 1991, also describes this trend that began in the late-1970s, after a period of economic rapid growth had led to rapid urbanization and industrial development. This created a “complex society characterized by mass production/mass consumption-based economic structure” leading to standardization and the decay of communal ties. It was in this context of economic abundance that the Japanese urban middle class started pursuing a better quality of life, engaging in different cultural, recreational and leisure activities as a way of reaching personal and spiritual fulfillment (Watanabe, 1999: 61), a tendency visible in the expansion of cultural and art institutions, learners and enthusiasts during this period. According to the author, the number of museums in Japan increased by 60 percent between 1987 and 1997, with the number of visitors increasing from 210 million in 1986 to 282 million in 1989. Similarly, the number of visitors to art galleries tripled from around 19 million in 1982 to 56 million in 1992 and the number of university graduates from four-year and two-year arts universities also increased five times between 1960 and 1991. At the same time, cultural centers offering instruction in several hobbies and skills, such as flower arrangement, pottery making and the tea ceremony, proliferated in the late 1980s. This interest in Japanese cultural traditions was also reflected at a local level, with many regions and artists rediscovering their identities in the 1970s and 1980s (Watanabe, 1999).

Furthermore, the author has also noted how, in terms of Japanese cultural policy, one of the trends of the 1980s and 1990s was the return to old traditions. In fact, according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs’ budget for 2017, only less than one third of the costs are allocated for the promotion of arts and culture, including the training of artists, while the other two thirds are designated for “enhancement of cultural properties protection” and “national cultural facilities” (Commissioner’s Secretariat Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2017). This shows how Japanese cultural policy still focus more on the preservation of traditional culture and heritage, which is seen as

“the foundation upon which future cultural development will be built” (Watanabe, 1999: 77), relegating artistic and cultural creation to the Japan Arts Funds and private contributions.

Two decades after the promulgation of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, which is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Japanese government launched the Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries (Densan Act) in 1974, overseen by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). Until today, this law has designated 225 group products as Traditional Japanese Crafts, thirty-one of which are ceramics. According to its brochure, the Association for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries, created in 1975 as a consequence of the METI law, “actively promotes Japanese Handicrafts on a global scale and contributes to their market expansion”. The leaflet also states that for a craft to be recognized as Traditional Craft of Japan, it must fulfill all of the following conditions: to be used mainly in everyday life; to be primarily manufactured by hand; to be manufactured implementing traditional techniques of at one hundred years old; to be produced with raw materials that have remained unchanged for at least one hundred years; and to maintain a certain scale of production and be established as a local industry. The Association holds a showroom in Aoyama, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Tokyo, known for its high-end boutiques and restaurants.

In this context, the word *mingei*, which had come to signify cheap old-fashioned local products bought as souvenirs from the countryside by the average Japanese, has been recently appropriated by an environmentally conscious and educated urbanite middle class to refer to sophisticated and expensive handmade items. Characterized by simple but modern designs, this new *mingei* is often sold at select shops located in fashionable neighborhoods of Tokyo and other big metropolitan areas (one of the most conspicuous examples being the D&Department Project³). The conception of these goods as handmade focus on its connection with a local, traditional and

³ D&Department Project is a company created in 2000 by designer Kenmei Nagaoka based on his concept of “long life design”, which emphasizes five main criteria: know, use, buyback, repair and continuity. With twelve shops around Japan, the shop focus on the selling of up-cycled furniture and locally produced handicrafts from all the forty-seven prefectures of Japan. In Tokyo, they have a shop and gallery located in the high-end Shibuya Hikarie retail complex and a shop and café in the trendy neighborhood of Setagaya, where they serve dishes made with organic seasonal vegetables from regional farmers.

ecological production, allowing a sense of conscious consumption, as I will explore further in the next chapter. Moreover, they fulfill the role of cultural capital, functioning as symbols of economic and social status for the urban middle and upper-middle class.

In sum, as schematized by Yuko Kikuchi (2015), after the Second World War professional craft activity in Japan has developed into four categories, which sometimes overlap: traditional art crafts (*dento koge*), created by master-craftsman who follow a particular historical tradition that is usually endorsed by the government; mingei-style crafts, used in everyday life and recently revived in the context of lifestyle trends; *kurafto* or craft design, promoted as a part of the “Good Design” movement and now often involving the collaboration between regional manufacturers and designers; and craft art or “craftical formation”, comprised by individual artistic works that may or may not follow traditional shapes and techniques.

2.5. Recent trends

As we saw in the previous section, the economic and social conditions of the postwar period led to a growing interest in Japan’s “soon to be lost” traditions and the objects that represented that vanishing past within the Japanese themselves. This moment coincided with a boom of the Nihonjinron literature, prompting a search for the Japanese uniqueness in a moment of rapid economic growth and the consequent regain of confidence and national pride. During this time, the diffusion of Japanese culture abroad was made mainly through the marketing and selling of industrial and consumer products through a process that Burgess (2015) calls “economic diplomacy”, accompanied by the discourse of internationalization (*kokusaika*) from the part of the Japanese government during the 1980s as an attempt to control foreign images of the country.

However, the 1990s brought the end of the bubble economy to Japan, leading to economic deflation, instability and the consequent collapse of Japan as a manufacture-based society. In particular, the change to a post-industrial model was expressed in the development of service and creative related industries from the mid-1990s, a moment

that coincided with the increasing diffusion of Japanese popular culture abroad, whose popularity peaked in the 2000s. Thus, in an attempt to expand its soft power in a context of increasing globalization, the Japanese government shifted its focus from economic to cultural diplomacy, thus further influencing the cultural diffusion and imagining of Japan.

Similarly to what happened in the World Exhibitions of the Meiji period, when the Japanese state deliberately made its first systematic efforts to promote a distinctive and often “self-exoticizing” image abroad, contemporary developments of Japan-related events in the global stage have been responsible for creating an appealing but also often stereotyped image of “Japaneseness” through the expansion of cultural exports. In this context, increasing internationalization and globalization have been an essential tool in the task of promoting and propagating officially approved Japanese values outside the country (Befu, 2001: 82). Goldstein-Gidoni (2005: 157) has shown how the concept of Japanese culture promoted by cultural events related to Japan abroad is strongly influenced by how Japanese culture is presented by the Japanese, both in Japan and in the structure of international organized contacts. In this way, “Japanese culture” as a labeled cultural product is first produced in Japan, mainly for local consumption, and only then travels to the global arena (*ibid.*: 174).

Likewise, Japanese cultural events sponsored by the Japanese Embassy, other governmental agencies, and many private organizations often rely on traditional performing arts and handicrafts to convey images of “Japaneseness” abroad. In her analysis of French images of Japan, Sylvie Guichard-Anguis (2001) has pointed out the role of “ephemeral” cultural productions such as those of the tea ceremony, flower arrangement and incense in the presentation of Japanese cultural values such as peace, harmony, tranquility and love of nature, which have been seen by the Japanese government as valuable resources of soft-power. However, Japanese traditional culture has never attracted widespread international attention, appealing mostly to a relatively wealthy and educated segment of the global audience, essentially its elite and upper-middle-class sector. Paradoxically, it has been “popular” culture such as *anime* and *manga*, which does not convey the nationally useful “distinct” Japanese

values that traditional culture does, that has attracted a wide range of enthusiasts abroad (Burgess, 2015: 123).

Therefore, the Japanese government has taken advantage of the popularity of its "popular" culture to pursue national interests abroad through what Koichi Iwabuchi (2015) calls a "pragmatic and opportunistic" national branding cultural policy program known as "Cool Japan". According to Burgess (2015: 113), the expression "Cool Japan" has been used by the government since 2005 but it was only in 2010 that the Creative Industries Promotion Office was established and, from 2013, it was included in prime-minister Shinzo Abe's political strategy with a budget of 50 billion yen. The author adds that the term has been used "in a broader, generic sense to describe Japanese government's promotion of Japanese (pop) culture in general, especially in the years after 2000" (*op. cit.*).

The Cool Japan program is not, however, limited to the promotion of *anime* and *manga*, but includes everything related to a "Japanese lifestyle", from fashion to food, as well as traditional handicrafts and the so-called "Japanese sense of beauty". In May 2017, as a part of its Creative Industries policy, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry released a concept book titled *Wonder Nippon!*, which aims "to convey Japan's unique sensibilities and values to the rest of the world as the foundation of commodities and services provided under the Cool Japan Initiative" (METI Releases Concept Book, n/d). The program describes several "traditional" Japanese values such as simplicity and anonymity, which are supposedly derived from the Japanese relationship with nature, and its impact on craft production. This reveals how Japanese crafts and its associated ideas of Japanese craftsmanship are still deeply intertwined with what the state wants to convey to the world as Japanese culture, cultural values, tradition and identity through a process that Koichi Iwabuchi (2015) calls "brand nationalism". The Cool Japan program thus relies upon images of cultural authenticity and "Japaneseness" in order to overcome Japan's economic recession through the increase of overseas demand for Japanese cultural products, as Burgess explores further in the quote below:

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) used notions of Cool Japan to improve Japan's image abroad, while the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI)

sought to maximize economic benefits that might flow from the popularity of Japanese culture overseas (Burgess, 2015: 118).

Nonetheless, Tsutomu (2008) argues that soft power through the use of Japanese culture is essential to boost Japan's economy, mainly its business and industrial sector. But for Oda (2011), this view of Japanese culture as a stereotyped product, one to be marketed and consumed, reflects nationalistic ideals mirrored in the desire to return to old traditions. In addition, as objectified products, Japan-made cultural products enter the global market under the label of "Japanese culture":

Like all consumer goods, this notion of Japanese culture is clearly embedded in a global market. It should, therefore, be attractive not only to the domestic consumer in Japan but also to other countries, whose approval becomes decisive for the status and value of this "Japanese culture". (Oda, 2011: 112, my translation).

In this sense, the Cool Japan project has clear political and economic goals: stimulate the Japanese markets, keep control of national images in the context of globalization and recover national pride (Burgess, 2015). However, for Daliot-Bul (2009) the major problem of the Cool Japan project is the fact that it relies on a familiar, conservative and a self-exoticizing discourse associated with the period of Japanese imperialism in neighboring Asia, which reproduces cultural and ethnical nationalism. While representing a "Japanese ethos" and making political and diplomatic use of it, it frequently ignores problems relating to its beneficiaries "and whose culture, interest and voice are attended too", as Iwabuchi (2015: 30) puts it, thus seldom engaging with the public interest. As such, while projecting a self-reflective image of itself abroad, Cool Japan lacks self-criticism and openness to listen and learn from others (*ibid.*).

In fact, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Japanese government to control the national image of Japan abroad in a context of intensive globalization, since there are many actors besides the government who are involved in the creation of the images of the nation, such as private foundations, universities, museums, Japanese

people abroad and foreigners living in Japan. While the “Cool Japan” project has spread Japanese culture abroad, creating what some authors have called a new vague of “Japonisme”, reflected in the expansion of Japanese-language learning overseas (an 83.5% increase between 1993 and 2006), the exponential growth of overseas tourists and the rise of international students, the policy hasn’t kept up with the increasingly multicultural reality in contemporary Japanese society. In this way, while interest in Japanese culture overseas might eventually lead to the coming of foreigners to study or work in Japan, Iwabuchi (2015: 38) stresses how “the discussion of multicultural co-living has a fundamental drawback in its polarized conception of “Japanese” and “foreigner”, which defines “Japanese” in an exclusive and homogenizing manner”.

It is claimed in a Japanese policy statements of cultural diplomacy that the advancement of international cultural exchange, rather than the use of hard military power, will be the key to the creation of a peaceful world for cultural diversity is mutually respected and celebrated and multilateral understanding and dialogue is promoted (“Bunka gaiko” 2005). Although mutuality is much stressed, what the policy eventually aims to promote is a one-way projection of the appealing images of a nation and the promotion of a nation-based kind of intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity while hindering internal cultural diversity (Iwabuchi, 2015: 36).

During a seminar at Maison Franco-Japonaise in Tokyo entitled *The Politics of Japan’s Soft Power*⁴, public diplomacy specialist Yasushi Watanabe argued that overlooking the situation of foreigners in Japan might actually subvert the success of the “Cool Japan” policy. This is because, in today’s globalized world, non-Japanese nationals living in the country are in daily and direct contact with their families and friends overseas through social networking services and thus are active actors in the creation and propagation of images of Japan. In this sense, engaging with multicultural policies and acknowledging foreigner residents as active contributors to Japanese society and essential to the survival, transmission and renewal of its cultural values

⁴ November 17th, 2017.

and traditions, might not only be necessary but also a strategic endeavor from the part of the Japanese government if it wants to maintain the attractiveness of Japan abroad.

2.6. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I examined the political projects, cultural negotiations and social connections involved in the construction of specific features associated to Japanese traditional crafts, which are a result of historical processes specific to Japanese modernity. The image of Japan centered on millenary traditions is still reflected in the image of its arts and crafts disseminated inside and outside of Japan today. However, many of these “traditional” traits are a product of the culture of the Japanese elites and had little to do with most of Japan's population until the modern era. It was only after the democratization of society motivated by Japan's modernization that objects, rituals and practices that once belonged to the aristocracy started to circulate among the general population. This process called "samuraization" by anthropologist Harumi Befu (1971: 50), who defined it as "the spread of the ideology of the ruling warrior class" amongst common people was not restricted to the arts and crafts. It extended to food, religion, ethics, marriage, family organization and other sectors of Japanese life and it translated in the institutionalization of habits and practices that once belonged to the higher sectors of Japanese society. In this process, some traditions were invented, others were restructured and an ancient shared past was redefined in order to legitimate the present. Even the popular art movements such as the folk and farmer crafts happened from top to bottom, being led by urban intellectuals and bureaucrats who believed to know the best practices of production that craftsmen should follow. At the same time they contributed for the preservation and appreciation of these expressions, their paternalist and reforming character also led to stereotyping and standardization, homogenizing their identity in order to represent a “unique” local character (Brandt, 2007).

The purpose of this chapter was thus to question concepts and ideas usually associated with Japanese traditional arts, showing how, rather than something fixed and innate, they are the result of historical, social and political projects, which include,

amongst others: the dialogue between local production and Western standards and tastes; manifestations of wealth and social status; democratization of practices that once belonged to the elite; nationalist projects to promote traditional values; besides local, individual and artistic specificities not mentioned here. For, as anywhere in the world, Japanese arts and crafts embrace multiple realities and features which vary depending on the region, period and social class, as well as the history, values and beliefs of the person or group that produces it. In this sense, besides the historical, social and cultural context in which different practices are developed or preferred, we should also look and give voice to specificities and subjectivities of groups and people whose material and artistic expressions are often overlooked as representative of a culture or nation. By understanding the ideologies intertwined with the construction of an identity of Japanese traditional arts and crafts, we can acknowledge the various cultural manifestations of a nation or group without resorting to simplifications that ignore the diversity and multiplicity of expressive forms, traditions and populations existing in Japan and worldwide.

3. Materiality and spirituality in Japanese ceramics

3.1. Rethinking the role of objects in culture and society

Since the beginnings of anthropology, objects have been valuable tools in understanding people's culture, their views on the world, on others and on themselves. By materializing concepts and intentions, objects reflect a society's values and ideals and their meanings often result from historical and political constructs. At the same time that they are a product of the world they are in, they also create and transform that world indefinitely. As holders of meaning and power, they can act as “social subjects” in their relationship to people, triggering emotions and providing experiences. By entering the world of materiality we can give meaning to the physical existence of objects and their life stories.

This section brings the role of objects in the analysis of culture and society to the discussion. Starting with the study of non-Western Others, ethnographic objects have often been interpreted as a reflection of local cosmologies, materializing cultural practices both in its production, exchange and consumption. In her investigation of the indigenous Kaxinawa people, anthropologist Els Lagrou (2010) stressed the relationship between a people's conceptual schema, their social intentions and the materialization of these artifacts:

The whole society produces a style of being, which is accompanied by a style of liking and, because the human being is made a social being through objects, images, words and gestures; they become vectors of human action and thinking about the world (Lagrou, 2010: 1, my translation).

Hence, production, exchange and consumption of material objects constitute an important means for social interaction and cultural exchange (Clammer, 1997). However, while ethnographers have often looked at the products of “traditional” societies as a reflection of their worldviews, social networks and cultural schemes, this approach has less frequently been employed in the analysis of “complex” societies. In

contrast, the analysis of these cultural expressions has been relegated to the field of art history, which tends to focus “on the autonomous power of objects and the details of the biographies of artists” (Pitelka, 2008a: 3). When approached by the social sciences, the target is often on the dissemination and consumption of these objects and rarely through the lens of production (Rothenberg & Fine, 2008). One of the reasons for this separation lies on the concept of art itself, a distinct category of cultural practice that originated in the West only around the eighteenth century and which has not often been inclusive of frameworks that go beyond Western regimes of knowledge.

According to Gell (2006: 219-220), academic approaches to what constitutes an “art object” can be divided into three prevailing theories: the aesthetics theory, the interpretative theory and the institutional theory. The first, inspired by Kant’s philosophy and his idea of aesthetic superiority, emphasizes the intrinsic qualities of an artwork, which would be the result of the artist’s intention or skill, and has permeated discussions about art in the first half of the twentieth century. Contrarily, the interpretative theory, dominant in the field of art history, sustains that an artwork is not defined by any external aesthetic quality, but that it will be interpreted as so in the light of a system of ideas that is founded within an art-historical tradition. Lastly, the institutional theory is based on sociological analysis and on the premise that there are no intrinsically ‘artistic’ qualities in an artwork, as claimed by the aesthetic theory, nor does it have to be connected with the mainstream of art history, as proposed by the interpretative theory. Differently, the definition of an object as art depends solely on whether it is classified as so by the existing system of art. This system, born from specific social and political circumstances located at of the dawn of European modernity, is composed of a network of interested parties who have the power of decision, such artists, critics, art dealers, museum curators, collectors and so on. By rejecting essentialist and static definitions of art, the institutional theory calls for a reevaluation of the links between art and society.

Etymologically, *art* comes from the Latin word *ars*, originally encompassing the notions of technique, skill and talent, that is, the ability to do something well in a broader sense. In fact, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the Japanese word for art (*geijutsu*) before the influence of Western concepts from the late nineteenth

century, also alluded to this meaning. Similarly, Shiner (2001) argues that there was no traditional system of arts in the West before the eighteenth century. Since an artwork was seen as a result of technical skill and its function related to its role in the rest of life, there was no separation between artist and artisan. However, with the emergence of the bourgeoisie and Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, the two concepts gradually separated. On the one hand, the role of the artist became associated with that who creates beauty through geniality for the pleasure of others. On the other hand, the role of the artisan became connect to that who uses art for commercial ends, especially through the use of tools and machines. Therefore, in the general understanding, art became associated to a mental, aesthetical, unique, individual and free activity, while craft was related to a physical, functional, traditional, repetitive and conditioned one.

The idea of the artist as a highly gifted individual working in isolation is the legacy of the European Renaissance and its ideology of individualism. In his monograph *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennett (2008) stresses the fact that few Renaissance artists worked in isolation and that the craft workshop and the medieval guild have continued as the artist's studio, filled with assistants and apprentices. Similarly, Howard Becker (1982) regards the work of the artist as a cooperative activity that depends on a network of people, including those responsible for the materials and equipment necessary to produce the artwork, but also those responsible for its distribution and appreciation, without which a certain object would not enter the art world. In this sense, David Inglis (2005: 20-21) argues that artists and their artworks are as embedded in social networks and part of wider cultural forces and dominant patterns of thought as medieval craftsmen and their works were.

Furthermore, informed by the ideology of colonialism and orientalism, nineteenth-century European intellectual elites redefined cultural expressions produced by particular groups with particular functions as art, applying it to ages and places in which the concept of art did not exist (Inglis, 2005: 12). James Clifford (1988) has also looked at the fate of what he calls "tribal artifacts" and other cultural practices of the so-called primitive, exotic or marginal societies once they were relocated in Western museums, exchange systems, disciplinary archives and discursive traditions. In this transplantation to a modern Western system of art, objects from

other periods and culture often lose their original value and meaning while simultaneously acquiring new ones. In addition, they were frequently dismissed as craft or entered the lower ranking category of folk arts (*op. cit.*), as was the case of Japanese objects presented at World Exhibitions, as examined in the previous chapter.

Thus, as Inglis (2005: 12) puts it, “the label art is never neutral”, it is part of the social world and bound with politics and power. The author also notes that “when a person defines a particular object as ‘great art’, to the sociological eye this tells ‘us’ less about the ‘artwork’ itself and more about the tastes and preferences of the social group that person hails from” (*ibi.*: 14). This affirmation echoes Pierre Bourdieu’s conception of art as a type of cultural capital that promotes social mobility through the conference of social status and power. For Bourdieu (1977), the physical embodiment of cultural capital is expressed in the concept of *habitus*, a system of dispositions acquired through inculcation that generates daily practice, affecting our taste for cultural objects. Hence, for Bordieu (1997), aesthetic sensibilities are shaped by the *habitus* and thus greatly defined by social class, resulting from social inequalities. Therefore, the popular separation between high and low arts is but a reflection of social stratification and not a result of the intrinsic quality of a specific cultural expression. In this context, objects produced, used and appreciated by the lower classes are often perceived by society as having relatively little aesthetic value.

However, if we follow Clammer’s (2015: 9) definition of culture beyond abstraction and as practice (as things that we actually *do*), we can examine the role of objects in society and delve into the complex relationships they form with people. Exploring the place of material culture in contemporary Japanese society through the lens of consumption and its relation to emotions and identity (Clammer, 1992; 1997; 2000), the author advocates a ‘post-rational’ approach that has been taking place in poststructuralist and postmodern tendencies in Western social theory after the cultural turn. This ‘post-rational’ approach focus on the place of the body, senses and subjectivities in social activity and its importance in the cultural analysis of Japan, especially in the field of the arts, ethics and aesthetics. Connecting art, culture and development, Clammer (2015: 14-15) calls for a democratization of aesthetics that surpasses Western, fixed and elitist views of what constitutes art. By regarding art as material expressions of culture and social imagination, often constrained by political

and economic conditions, the author proposes a concept of development that goes beyond economic and material concerns and recognizes aesthetics, spirituality and creative expression as basic human needs (ibid.: 3). Furthermore, as a source of utopian imagination, social reflection and political activism, art may also function as a way to envision and construct another world (*op. cit.*).

In this sense, Arjun Appadurai (1986) and Igor Kopytoff (1986) have proposed an anthropology that looks at the “social life” of things and their actions in the world. Focusing on the processes of circulation and globalization, Appadurai investigates the relationship between the practices through which localities are produced by distinguishing between two types of knowledge politics: one embedded in the production of an object and other embedded in its consumption. The first case includes the technical, social and aesthetic aspects that are dominated by “standardized recipes” and interpenetrated by historical, sociological and cultural ideologies and assumptions. Both authors, therefore, propose an analysis of the life trajectory of objects that includes the outline of their biography, as well as cultural regulation and interpretations, which are open to individual manipulation, interpretation and value shifts in the process of circulation (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986).

However, the materiality of things can also be seen as transcending human agency. Drawing on the theories of material agency advanced by Alfred Gell (1998) and Bruno Latour (1999), Daniel Miller (2005) has called for the need of anthropology to overcome the duality between objects and subjects. Rescuing the perspective of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) that the sociability of people is partly done through objects, Miller’s theory of materiality is based on an ethnographic understanding of material culture and in the hybridization of subject and objects. Calling for an approximation between anthropology and philosophy, Miller (2005) examines the dual relationship between materiality and immateriality, pointing out the paradox between humanity’s belief on the inherent superiority of the immaterial world and the search to transcend materiality through material means:

The more humanity reaches toward the conceptualization of the immaterial, the more important the specific form of its materialization. This is appropriate to a

wide range of other areas. Modern art depends on a very similar strategy. The more esoteric the conceptualized, the more value its performance. The more we come to believe that art is actually transcendent, the more its material form is worth in dollars (Miller, 2005: 28)

In this sense, the author urges the social sciences, which have long been privileged means to study “what makes people”, to explore “how things that people make, make people” (Miller, 2005: 38). By condensing actions, relationships, emotions, representations, values and ideas, objects are the way that people act, relate, produce and exist in the world. While mirroring the world in which we live in, they also constantly act on the world, constructing and reconstructing it, for their meaning and effect change according to the context in which they are inserted. Gell (2006: 234) has sharply described this floating character of objects as “promiscuous” for their ability to move freely “between cultural domains/ transcultural domains without being essentially compromised. This they can do because they have indeed no essences, only an indefinite range of potentials”.

In entering the world of materiality, this chapter will explore how Japanese ceramics embody idealized images of “Japaneseness”, with their meanings and effects changing according to historical, social and political trajectories within and beyond national borders. After approaching the domestic trajectories of Japanese crafts in the previous chapter, we will now see how their meanings navigate and shift through national and cultural borders and impact on cultural and artistic expressions beyond Japan. For being a handmade object, traditionally produced with local materials and techniques that value the participation of nature, Japanese ceramics appear to be a privileged category for reflecting upon materiality and spirituality. By condensing a set of values, actions and ideas translated as Japanese culture, institutionalized in the context of Japan and exported abroad, Japanese ceramics have been a source of fascination and inspiration to artists all around the world. Moreover, by relating to a lifestyle of simplicity and closeness to nature, they have attracted people from all over the world searching for alternative and self-fulfilling lifestyles to come and practice ceramics in Japan.

3.2. The aesthetics of materiality and spirituality

First of all, I shall clarify the ways in which I am using the word aesthetics in the context of this discussion. I follow the epistemological meaning of aesthetics in a broader sense, as sensorial and emotional values embodied in social life and bodily practices and not as a Western system of knowledge born as a branch of philosophy in the eighteenth century that did not reach Japan until the nineteenth century. While Marra (1999: 1) has defined the application of the category of aesthetics to pre-modern Japanese realities as an “act of hermeneutical hegemony”, Japanese thinkers have nonetheless become versed in the field of Western aesthetics and applied it to the explanation of Japan in the modern period. For the author, the notion of “Japanese aesthetics” refers thus to a process of philosophical negotiation between Japanese thinkers and Western signifying practices in the creation and development of images of Japan (Marra, 1999: 2).

However, Japanese society, like any other society in the world, has grown a style of linking and a sense of beauty that is reflected in its arts and material culture and strongly marked by historical and socio-economic conditions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the aesthetic sense of the aristocratic and warrior classes of the early modern period was later appropriated as “Japanese” and related to all classes, geographical areas and historical periods in an attempt to construct a sense of a shared identity and culture through the use of traditions by the newly found Japanese nation in the Meiji period.

Marra (1999) highlights how most of the aesthetic categories later appropriated by Japanese thinkers in the light of contemporary philosophy can be found in Japan’s classic literature and poetry: the idea of impermanence (*mujô*), transience (*mono no aware*), subdued beauty (*wabi*), rustic beauty (*sabi*) and refined style (*iki*), just to mention a few. Many of these categories were developed or reinterpreted in the context of Zen Buddhism and associated with traditional arts such as the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy and pottery. Hence, according to Cox (2003: 1), what is popularly called Zen arts in English is “recognizable by institutional features, social practices and aesthetic and spiritual values which are attached to their actions, objects, spaces and texts”.

And while some authors have criticized the tendency for aestheticization in relation to Japan, often permeated by Orientalist and exoticist assumptions, Clammer (2001) has stressed the need to consider alternative epistemologies that go beyond Cartesian logic and Western dialectics in the examination of cultural expressions based on sensory, non-rational and non-discursive experiences such as the bodily practices related to Zen arts:

In Japan and Japanese social thought the non-rational is given equal weight to the rational, the emotions are considered central to cultural analysis, aesthetics is represented as being in many ways the central cultural value to which even ethics is subordinated or from which it is derived, a sophisticated form of animism lies at the basis of a huge range of local social practices and beliefs and in which a totalizing cosmology in which Cartesianism is rejected is the larger frame (Clammer, 2001: 159).

In his study of Japanese traditional arts, philosopher Robert E. Carter (2008) has found a Japanese sense of ethics and morality in arts such as the tea ceremony and pottery. The author argues that the physical training and practical skills developed through their practice goes beyond artistic and aesthetic pursuits and extended to personal development at a philosophical, social, ethical and psychological level. In short, they functioned as a means to self-realization, self-cultivation and self-development for their relationship with Confucian thought as well as Buddhist and Shintoist religious aspects. In this sense, the practice of these arts would appear not only as a means to achieve beauty, but also the transformation of the self through the embodiment of mindfulness, body-mind relations, non-dualism and interconnectedness with nature.

However, McMahan (2008) argues that the idea of Zen that focuses on an inner process or experience is actually the result of the restructuring of the Zen Buddhist tradition into a new, modern and hybridized form that can be traced back to the work of philosopher Daisetsu Suzuki. According to the author, some of the tendencies of Buddhism modernism are an inward-directed, detraditionalized spirituality directed toward integration of mind, body and spirit, and a discourse focused on

interconnectedness, wholeness, self-fulfillment, spontaneity, transcendence of the ego and personal development, which derives from the influence of Romanticism, transcendentalism, and western psychology in ascetic aspects of Buddhism (McMahan, 2008: 248-250).

First published in English in 1938, Daisetsu Suzuki's *Zen and its influence on Japanese Culture* had a pervasive influence on the exotic and esoteric images of Zen Buddhism born both in North America and Europe. According to Koré (2000, para. 11), the popularity of Zen in the West lies partly in the fact that Suzuki's interest in Western thought and philosophy made its ideas digestible to a wider public. European interest in Buddhism started in the 1920s from a literary perspective, attracting writers and intellectuals, with one of the most influential interpretations being that of German philosopher's Eugen Herrigel's in his *Zen and the Art of Archery* (1948). In the post-war period, these modern aspects of Buddhist, together with other ideas loosely identified as Eastern philosophy, became a fad among young Europeans (*ibid.*). In particular, British theologian and philosopher Alan Watts played an important role in disseminating Zen to a wider public and inspiring many young Europeans and Americans to consider Zen practice, contributing to the development of alternative spiritualities such as the New Age movement and other countercultural movements such as the beatniks and hippies. Yet, this modern idea of Zen Buddhism lost most of its original religious and institutional features when transposed to a modern Western context.

Besides his seminal monograph, Suzuki also spread his modern ideas of Buddhism through his international travels. In fact, he lectured at Columbia University from 1952 to 1955, contributing to the so-called "Zen boom" within North-American artistic and intellectual circles, which eventually brought a number of artists to study Zen and its related arts to Japan. Ellen Pearlman (2012) has investigated how these hybridized ideas of Zen-influenced avant-garde art movements in the United States, reaching artists that were in search for ways to integrate art back into life, taking it out of the confined space of the museum and relating it to the present moment.

For Cox (2003: 40), however, this second wave of Japonisme of the post-war era, "reduced the historical and anthropological complexities of the Zen arts to questions of aesthetic style, by privileging concepts that ultimately defer to the mystical

experience of the individual artist". While reflecting an aestheticized image of Japan that suited Western preferences and opposed Western modern rationalism to an exoticized and mystified image of the East as intuitive and connected to nature, these interpretations of Zen also searched for the universal values beyond its institutional arrangements, political implications, historical trajectories and culturally marked features (Cox, 2003). However, despite its universal aspirations, Suzuki's work has also been connected to cultural nationalism through his essentialization of Japanese culture and thus his works are often included in the category of Nihonjinron.

Drawing on Suzuki's writings, Buddhist scholar and tea ceremony master Shin'ichi Hisamatsu has also been responsible for connecting modern ideas of Zen with traditional Japanese aesthetics. In his English-language monograph *Zen and Fine Arts* (1958), he has added to the construction of an image of Zen as a maximum expression of the refinement of Japanese culture and a metaphor of its soul and spirituality (Yamada, 2009; Borup, 2014), which would be materialized in traditional Japanese arts such as the tea ceremony, flower arrangement and ceramics.

In this context, Zen also became to represent the essence of "Japaneseness" and the arts and practices related to it reached the level of high culture, becoming a powerful source of cultural capital. Thus, in an age where culture and cultural difference are valuable commodities, Zen goes through the same process in which it is essentialized, fetishized and consumed. Furthermore, in Western popular knowledge, the meaning of the word Zen has expanded to signify anything related to peacefulness and mindfulness. Cristina Rocha (2006) explores the impact of this new modern hybridized idea of Zen within the white Brazilian elite from the 1950s. Instead of drawing from the traditions of the Japanese community present in the country, which was still more or less marginalized in the first decades of the post-war, Brazilian notions and practices of Zen arrived by route of Europe and North America, showing a clear aspiration for cultural capital and cosmopolitan modernity.

Thus, particularly through its close connections with the tea ceremony, Japanese ceramics have often been understood as embodying spiritual values of Zen Buddhism, reflecting its relationship with nature and the aesthetics of simplicity and imperfection. This situation echoes the historical, socio-economic and political trajectories that can be traced back to the taste of the elites of Momoyama period and the reorganization

of Japanese values after the Meiji Restoration and, more structurally, in the post-war era, as explored in the previous chapter and summarized by Yamada (2009) in the following quote:

A lot of things we consider to be traditional culture unique to Japan are in reality social systems created quite recently. When Japan was inundated by the post-Meiji wave of modernization, people became conscious of things like martial arts, landscape architecture, and Zen, and reorganized them. Actually, the great wave of this reorganization started in the decades after World War II and still continues (Yamada, 2009: 27).

Morgan Pitelka (2005; 2008b) has examined the historical and social trajectories that impacted in the cultural production of sixteenth-century Japan when the preference for the more sophisticated imported Chinese porcelain was gradually replaced by the simpler Korean and Japanese productions. This change in the aesthetic sensibilities of the aristocratic and warrior classes is traditionally attributed to the political influence of tea master Sen-no-Rikyu, who is known for having sponsored the creation of a new type of tea ceramics known as *raku*¹, through his patronage of Korean descendant tile manufacturer Chojiro. While Pitelka (2005) argues that the historicity of this well-known story is unclear, the idea of the *raku* tea bowl as an epitome of “Japaneseness” has survived until this day, partially fueled by Okakura’s definition of Japanese identity through the tea ceremony. Furthermore, *raku* has crossed national borders and traveled abroad, acquiring new meanings and forms at the hands of Western contemporary potters.

One of the main figures in this process of building a new interpretation and going beyond the technical conventions of the traditional Japanese *raku* was American potter Paul Soldner (1921-2011). More interested in *raku* as a technique and an aesthetic rather than a tradition, Soldner’s adapted the form to his own taste and purpose, contributing to the creation a new and modern *raku* ceramic tradition that disseminated in Europe and the United States from the 1960s, now commonly known

¹ In brief, the *raku* technique consists of firing a lead-based glazed clay vessel, usually made by hand instead of the potter’s wheel, at low temperature in a small kiln, during a short period of time.

as Western or American *raku*. The easy and quick process of *raku* pottery making, which can be achieved by firing the pieces in a small gas kiln on a low temperature for just a few hours, has made the method easily accessible, drawing the attention of ceramics students and amateurs and contributing for its popularity abroad. Furthermore, the visual spectacle created during the removal of the incandescent pieces from the kiln has transformed the *raku* firing in a kind of performance. However, the use of the label *raku* has been criticized by more conservative circles of the Japanese ceramic art world for its difference from the original Japanese technique. Despite producing different aesthetic results, Western *raku* is also mostly used for the production of decorative pieces, due to the toxicity of the materials, thus distancing the practice from its original context: the elitist and rigid world of the tea ceremony. Nonetheless, as Pitelka (2005: 2) notes, the word *raku* has entered the vocabulary of ceramic professionals and aficionados, thus revealing one of the processes by which certain features of Japanese ceramic culture have become *transculture* in a globalized interconnected world where objects “promiscuously” travel beyond national borders and meanings.

Another figure who has contributed to the introduction of *raku* in the West before Soldner was British potter Bernard Leach (1887-1979). Having lived in Japan for almost a decade during his early adulthood, he built what is presumably the first Eastern-style wood-fired climbing kiln (*noborigama*²) of the West in the artist colony of St. Ives in 1920. Through his relationship with Japanese philosopher Yanagi Soetsu, whom he met in Japan 1911, and Japanese potter Shoji Hamada, Leach became one of the main representatives of the Japanese folk crafts movement both in Japan and abroad, contributing to the dissemination of the idea of *mingei* in the West.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Japanese folk crafts movement *mingei* (literally “people’s art”) sought the appreciation of the domestic beauty of everyday objects made through the cooperative work of anonymous artisans living in rural communities, using mostly natural processes, simple techniques and traditional styles.

² Literally meaning “climbing kiln” for usually being built on a slope, which allows the hot air coming from the fire, located on the lower ground side, to travel up the kiln and come out through the chimney, built on the opposite side in higher ground. Originating as a development of the earlier *anagama* (literally, “hole kiln”), it is usually comprised of three or more firing chambers, allowing a more efficient firing. It was introduced in Japan in the seventeenth century by Korean potters as a consequence of the so-called Japanese Pottery Wars in the Korean peninsula.

Appearing in a moment of industrialization, urbanization and Westernization, the *mingei* philosophy was presented as a model of social organization, collaborative community and selflessness and opposed to the Western logic of capitalism, individualism and mass-production.

Authors Brian Moeran (1997), Yuko Kikuchi (2004) and Karen Livingstone (2008) have examined the parallels between the Japanese folk crafts movement and the British Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century, which had William Morris and John Ruskin as its most influential figures. While the *mingei* movement first developed as a religious philosophy at the hands of Yanagi, the British Arts and Crafts developed as an artistic movement by seeking an appreciation of the work of the craftsman, natural materials and traditional techniques in a moment of increased industrialization and mass-production. Nonetheless, it also had strong social and political intentions. Stressing the importance of the connection between arts, society and labor, it sought to establish “a new democratic ethics for living and working in the modern world” (Livingstone, 2008: 242). In fact, the movement encouraged the creation and expansion of craft guilds and artists’ colonies all around Europe and was often coupled with a search for a sense of national and cultural identity through the rediscovery and revival of traditional techniques, patterns and forms (*ibid.*: 249). However, besides searching the European past for inspiration, many artists of the Arts and Crafts movement also looked East, especially Japan, in search of a model of society untouched by modern industrialism. The Arts and Crafts movement in England led to the development of studio crafts, which differs from the medieval craft guilds by the fact that it is done by one or a small group of artists who execute all stages of a small-scale production of handmade objects. Contrarily, in the European medieval guilds, masters, artisans, journeymen and apprentices would work together in a system of specialized labor division, producing mostly standardized objects in a highly efficient and proto-industrial manner.

The ideas of Morris and Ruskin didn’t take long to reach Japan, where artists and intellectuals were also turning their eyes to the West, its values, aesthetics, art and literature. One of those responsible for the introduction of works of Western artists and writers in Japan was the Shirakaba circle, described by Kikuchi (2004: 4) as a group of “liberal idealistic young intellectuals who opposed militarism and aristocratic

feudalism, taking Tolstoyan idealism and individualism as their guiding principle". It was partly through his close connection to the Shirakaba group that Yanagi was introduced to the Western arts and theories that would later inspire the creation of his *mingei* philosophy. Moeran (1997: 21) has also stressed the role of Japanese potter Tomimoto Kenkichi (1886-1963), who studied interior decoration in England between 1908 and 1910, and British potter Bernard Leach (1887-1979), in the spreading of the British ideas from arts and crafts movement to their fellow friends Yanagi and Hamada in Japan.

Mari Nakami (2011) has examined Yanagi's relationship with guild socialism, which originated in England in the first decade of the twentieth century influenced by the ideas of William Morris. Similar to the Arts and Crafts movement, guild socialism saw the European medieval craft guilds as a model for social organization and collaborative work, reflecting a critique of the ideology of industrialism, individualism and capitalism. According to Nakami (2011), Yanagi's interest in the idea of "community" as an ideal was heavily influenced by guild socialism and the discourse of "social reform" that had started to attract the interest of Japanese intellectuals at the moment between the two world wars. The author further points out that, while experiences of guild socialism in Japan were marked by utopian ideals, in many cases, this 'community orientations' ended up supporting the totalitarian regime (*ibid.*: 153). Faulkner (2003) has also mentioned how the Japanese folk crafts movement appropriated the social and moral concerns of the British Arts and Crafts movement by presenting the *mingei* philosophy as "an instrument of social and artistic reform that looked to the past as a model for the present" (*ibid.* para. 6). However, Moeran (1997) argues that while Morris was more concerned with folk art as an expression of social problems, Yanagi preferred to emphasize the individual's spirit by focusing attention on beauty and the cultural role of the *mingei* (Moeran, 1997: 37-40).

In fact, as a religious philosophy, the *mingei* drew on modern interpretations of Zen Buddhism developed by Daisetsu Suzuki and Kitaro Nishida, in particular the ideas of intuition or direct seeing (*chokkan*) and non-dualism, which he used to define the quality of folk craft objects and define the concept of beauty in the context of morality (Kikuchi, 2004; Carter, 2008). Furthermore, he appropriated the ideas of "self-annihilation" developed by William Blake and related them to the original precepts of

Buddhism (Nakami, 2011). By focusing on the concept of *tariki* (other-power) rather than the *jiriki* (self-power) idea developed by the Pure Land Buddhist teachings, he saw beauty in the transcendence of the individual and, in this process, the selfless and simple work of the artisan was presented as a means to achieve Buddhist salvation (Kikuchi, 2004; Matsui, 2005; Nakami, 2011). In addition, through the work of the traditional Japanese craftsman, Yanagi sought a “peculiarly Japanese” way of life and production, defining Japanese cultural identity in opposition to the western model and thus approaching cultural nationalism. In this sense, Kikuchi (2004:8) has argued that it was in this process of hybridizing western and eastern ideas that Yanagi found a sense of Oriental cultural identity.

Furthermore, Kikuchi (2004) and Brandt (2007) have thoroughly explored the connection between Yanagi’s *mingei* philosophy and Japanese nationalism, demonstrating a strong connection between the two. While there is no arguing with the fact the *mingei* movement was intertwined with power relations and the socio-political context of Japanese imperialism in the period between the two world wars, Yanagi himself was a critic of the military occupation of Korea and the language assimilation policy of Okinawa. This is just one of the many examples of how the *mingei* as both a religious philosophy and a social and artistic movement abounds with ambiguities and contradictions. Despite the influence of Western ideas, the *mingei* appeared as a reaction to Western hegemony, claiming originality over the British ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement (see Kikuchi, 2004). Furthermore, even though Yanagi’s *mingei* philosophy looked for a sense of Japanese cultural identity in the works of the anonymous craftsman, the *mingei* as an artistic movement was headed by individual artists such as Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach.

While the Hamada was a non-traditional craftsman, who entered the world of ceramics through its chemical training at university, and Leach was from European origin, both potters adopted ideas, forms, styles and techniques from different cultures of the West and Asia. Therefore, in spite of Yanagi’s rejection of the idea of the individual artist through his praise of the collaborative work of the anonymous and selfless craftsmen, thus defining the *mingei* philosophy as essentially anti-modernist, Hamada and Leach added the modern ideal of personal expression by valuing the individuality of the artist. In fact, many of those who endorsed the *mingei* philosophy

identified themselves as *mingei* artist-craftsmen and even though Hamada did not sign his pieces he often signed the wooden boxes that accompanied them. Furthermore, Leach and Hamada are considered as two of the pioneers of the development of the studio crafts movement both in Japan and the West, a work style that emphasizes artistic individuality more than technical reproducibility and tradition, thus opposing itself to traditional local production.

Finally, although Yanagi advocated the democratization of art through the use of handmade products in the everyday life of common people, the works made by the *mingei* artist-craftsman were mainly consumed by an urban educated middle-class, thus fulfilling both the role of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1925) and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Moreover, Moeran (1997) mentions how Yanagi often adopted a patronizing tone towards the traditional craftsman that he visited, giving them guidelines about how their works should be made. Edmund de Waal (2003: 98) has also pointed out the class division between the university and art-school educated leaders of the *mingei* movement and the uneducated artisans that received their advice.

However, while the connection between *mingei* and the ideology of cultural nationalism have been thoroughly explored in academia, craft historian Glenn Adamson argues that the British studio ceramic tradition, born from *mingei* philosophy and Japanese aesthetics through the 'Leach Tradition', was formed by people who were cosmopolitan and syncretic and thus the opposite of nationalist (Crichton-Miller, 2017). Both Yanagi and Leach were, in fact, versed in different languages, had knowledge of the literature and arts of different cultural traditions and had experiences of living abroad. Yet, cosmopolitanism and nationalism are not always necessarily opposing ideologies and can be compatible in certain situations, as exposed by Guibernau (2013). Furthermore, it seems crucial to distinguish between *mingei* as a religious philosophy and a social and artistic movement, as well as to recognize the diverse uses and interpretations that the idea of *mingei* acquired in different historic and social-cultural contexts and at the hands of different actors. In fact, while in Japan Yanagi's philosophical ideas ended up being appropriated by a governmental nationalistic agenda, as explored by Brandt (2007), in the West they were reinterpreted at the light of existing orientalist and exoticist images of Japan and

connected to alternative Eastern spiritualities, while also contributing to the advance of avant-garde ceramic art movements. Thus, Westerners saw in *mingei* an opposite reflection of themselves, be it their own nostalgic past or a utopian future.

The aesthetic ideals of the *mingei* theory were disseminated in the West from Bernard Leach's studio in St. Ives, where he taught a whole generation of potters, leading to the creation of the so-called 'Leach Tradition' in ceramics, characterized by a mixture of English and Japanese traditions. In fact, in the preface of Leach's *A Potter's Book*, Yanagi defines the potter as the representation of "a union between East and West" (Soetsu *apud* Leach, 1960: xx).

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

Together with Yanagi's *An Unknown Craftsman*, published in English in 1972, Leach's *A Potter's Book*, originally published in 1940, has become "the Bible of craft theory by craft-makers and students at art and design colleges" (Kikuchi, 2004: 198). Thus, the East-West hybrid *mingei* theory has become a common standard for potters in the West through the Leach Tradition, contributing to the orientalization of craft theory as argued by Kikuchi (2004) in the quote below:

With the help of Zen Buddhist rhetoric and tea aesthetics, Mingei theory presented the strong nexus between the beauty of crafts and esoteric 'Oriental' spirituality and ideas. It greatly mystified and 'orientalized' the identity of 'crafts' and has remained as the factor which underpins the modern philosophy of studio crafts both in Japan and in Britain, where the 'Leach tradition' was established as a British version of Mingei theory (Kikuchi, 2004: 206).

In the postwar period, Yanagi, Hamada and Leach took the almost proselytizing role of disseminating the *mingei* theory further, giving lectures, workshops and

demonstrations throughout the Western world. After an initial visit to the United States in 1950, Leach received his first American apprentice in St. Ives, Warren McKenzie, who would later become an important figure in disseminating *mingei* hybrid “Leach’s Tradition” in the United States. For art and ceramics students particularly, the *mingei* tour meant an opportunity to watch, for the first time, processes of Japanese traditional pottery they had only seen in books. According to De Wall (2003: 154-156), American potters of that time were particularly interested in the pottery traditions from Bizen and Shigaraki, two of the so-called “six old kilns” of the medieval period, characterized by their rough, asymmetric and natural-looking aesthetics. The author and potter also mentions how Hamada’s “relaxed” way of working at the wheel, together with his use of Japanese calligraphic techniques for decoration, greatly impressed and influenced artists and students who, at the time, had started to explore the possibilities of clay not as an industrial and functional product but “an exploratory, improvisational art”, a “world of spontaneity and violent expression” (*ibid.*: 156).

In this sense, the *mingei* tour also created a bridge with the ideas of Zen that had started spreading in America at the time. Through the influence of the *mingei* and the Leach Tradition, the act of throwing at the potters’ wheel was seen as something spiritual and meditative and connected to the modern Zen Buddhist idea of no-mind (*mushin*). This understanding of the ceramic making as a process where the non-dualistic body and mind work together with the material was a decisive influence in the development of American avant-garde ceramics in the post-war era. In particular, this approach to working with the material contributed to the development of the abstract expressionist movement in ceramics at the hands of Peter Volkos (1924-2000), who was inspired by “Hamada’s intuitive, material-led attitude to clay” (Whiting, 2002: para. 3). In fact, Peter Volkos became worldwide known in the world of ceramics for its clay experimentations, happenings and sculptures as well also his use of wood firing in the *anagama*³ kiln. American contemporary expressionist ceramic artist Peter Callas (1951-) was the one who introduced Volkos to the technique after traveling for two months throughout Japan. In 1976, he was presumably the first to

³ Literally meaning “hole” kiln, it’s a type of pottery wood-fired kiln introduced to Japan via China and Korea in the sixth century. It was the first type of kiln to allow firing the pots at a high temperature of up to 1400 degrees Celsius, allowing the production of glazed pieces through the presence of flying wood ashes inside the kiln. It is usually fired for a duration of 48 hours up to twelve or more days.

build a traditional Japanese *anagama* kiln in the United States, which has since then spread across all the West. Thus, instead of looking to their own old indigenous ceramic traditions, North American artists and potters looked East for an art form connected with nature through a handmade process based on a close awareness of the material.

Interestingly, while American avant-garde ceramics were influenced by Japanese tradition, Japanese ceramics avant-garde movements appeared through the process of rejecting it. One of the most influential names in this Japanese development was Sodeisha (literally meaning “crawling on mud”), an avant-garde ceramic group created in Kyoto in 1948 by potter Kazuo Yagi. Challenging the concept of utility and function in ceramics, it rejected “one of the dominant models of Japanese ceramic tradition, the cultivated taste in the milieu of the tea ceremony for rustic ware such as Shino and Bizen” (Winther-Tamaki, 1999: 129). Influenced by European modernists, the Sodeisha introduced the concept of *objet d'art*, creating abstract sculptural ceramics that looked at clay as a physical material with endless aesthetic possibilities. In this sense, the Sodeisha appeared as an antithesis to the *mingei* group, although it led to similar results that the influence of the *mingei* philosophy and traditional Japanese ceramics stimulated abroad.

As a result of Yanagi, Hamada and Leach’s efforts, the *mingei* ideas, together with the ceramics of the tea ceremony and the six old medieval kilns of Japan, came to represent the quintessence of Japanese crafts. Morgan Pitelka (2004) has noted how, from the 1950s, Japanese ceramics started gradually appearing in American magazines and journals, leading to the expansion of the use of the techniques and discourse of Japanese ceramics by artists and studio potters in the 1970s and a rapid rise in the interest of Japan among makers and collectors of American ceramics in the 1980s and 1990s. As a category, *mingei* was also successfully exported to North America and Europe, where it still is commonly used by museum curators, art dealers, collectors and the like (Brand, 2007: 2). The term even gave birth to The Mingei International Museum, established in 1978 in San Diego, California. Thus, it was partially because of the *mingei* group and the Leach Tradition that Zen aesthetics and the *mingei* philosophy became one of the most pervasive images about Japanese pottery in Japan and abroad. This contributed to the idea of Japan as “a ceramists’ Mecca, an

enchanted land where anything and everything is possible, where potters enjoy the status of fine artists and are rewarded handsomely for their efforts” (Faulkner, 2003).

In the domestic context, the so-called *mingei boom* of the 1960s and 1970s mentioned in the previous chapter, not only led to the revitalization of traditional pottery centers but has also encouraged young potters and artists to come and practice ceramics in Japan. From the 1970s, traditional pottery regions such as Mashiko, Tokoname or Bizen have received dozens of foreign apprentices, who have learned traditional Japanese styles and techniques, as well as the philosophy behind Japanese crafts, successfully importing them back to their countries. Thus, nowadays it is not at all uncommon to find Western studio ceramic artists who had never been in Japan using traditional Japanese ceramic styles based on the aesthetics of *mingei* and the tea ceremony. Besides *raku*, other worldwide used Japanese styles include *shino*⁴ (which has received its own Westernized version colloquially known as “American Shino”) and *oribe*⁵, both of which have a strong connection to the world of the tea ceremony. The globalization of Japanese cuisine has also contributed to the spread of functional wares originally developed for the Japanese gastronomic context, such as tea bowls (*chawan*) for *matcha* (powdered green tea), rice bowls, *sake* cups (*guinomi*), *sake* bottles (*tokkuri*) and the small cups (*yunomi*) for daily tea drinking.

The influence of *mingei* and Japanese aesthetics in Western ceramics is also visible in a tendency to show the materials and the making processes, translated in the presence of unglazed fired clay, rocks and other “imperfections” and the marks of the potter’s hand in the fired pieces. Furthermore, the international dissemination of the ideas of *mingei* has also led to the explosion of popularity of Japanese traditional *anagama* and *noborigama* wood-firing kilns and its related techniques of ash-glazing abroad. In fact, while the use of wood-firing kilns has been decreasing in Japan in the last century, partly due to the decline of the traditional *kamamoto*, the introduction of gas and electric kilns and the expansion of urban centers, together with governmental

⁴ Originally used to denominate a style of Japanese tea ceramics from the Mino region (now Gifu prefecture) in the sixteenth century, *shino* now more generally refers to a pottery glazing technique characterized by a thick milky white texture with orange, reddish, brownish or greyish flashes of color.

⁵ Used to denominate a type of tea ceramics traditionally made in Tajimi, Mino region (now Gifu prefecture) in the sixteenth century and characterized by a green or bluish color glaze and decorated with iron glaze.

regulations, the practice has been expanding in the West, even leading to the creation of Japanese-style wood-firing pottery villages.

One of such examples is the French town of La Borne, located 200 km south of Paris. Starting as a pottery center in the thirteenth century, it developed as a contemporary artistic ceramics' center from the 1960s, where Oriental-style wood-firing kilns were introduced through the influence of the Leach tradition or introduced by French potters who had traveled to Japan. The region is now comprised of about fifty potteries and hosted the third European Conference of Wood-firing between August and September 2018.

Another example is the small village of Cunha, in the São Paulo state of Brazil, where the first *noborigama* was built in 1975 by a group of seven Japanese, Portuguese and Brazilian potters. Self-described hippies at the time, they worked together to create a community of experimental ceramics outside big urban centers, allowing proximity to nature and a convivial libertarian environment (Morais, 2015a: 206). The small town has now the biggest concentration of *noborigama* kilns in South American, with a total of seven, five of which are used by non-Japanese potters. The city is also home to the Cunha Ceramics Cultural Institute, implemented by Japanese potter Mieko Ukeseki in 2009 with the goal of promoting the art of ceramics by training impoverished local youngsters and creating artistic and cultural exchanges with universities and technical institutions (Morais, 2016).

Therefore, besides Western potters who had studied in Japan and their disciples, Japanese migrants were also responsible for the dissemination of Japanese pottery techniques abroad. Similar to North America, postwar Brazil also received a wave of Japanese artists, craftsman and technicians, who established *anagama* and *noborigama* wood-firing kilns in countryside areas of the country, developing their work with a mix of Japanese techniques and local materials and teaching them a new generation of Brazilian potters (Morais, 2010). Furthermore, while Western potters have found in Japanese techniques and aesthetics a means to explore spontaneity, improvisation and freedom of expression through the medium of clay, for some Japanese potters it was the opportunity to leave Japan that allowed them to work freely outside the constraints of tradition (Morais, 2013, 2015a).

Another more recent example of community-making that includes Japanese-style wood-firing is the Cerdeira Arts and Crafts Village. Located in the center-north of Portugal, the tiny three hundred year mountain village was totally abandoned in the 1980s when it was acquired by a German couple and slowly revived. After receiving more residents at the end of the 1990s, it started being revitalized through the support of the European Regional Development Fund and its Schist Villages program in 2001. In 2012, it was transformed into an arts and crafts center, with artistic residencies, craft workshops, rural accommodation and nature and environmentally sustainable tourism, where a modern-style wood-fired smokeless pottery kiln was built by Masakazu Kusakabe, a Japanese potter based in Miharu, Fukushima prefecture, in 2015. The case of Cerdeira echoes other rural revitalization movements that take advantage of tourism and hospitality, such as the *albergo diffuso* in Italy, as well as projects that connect contemporary art and regional development, which is taking place in Japan.

The popularity of Japanese ceramics has encouraged potters and artists to explore local materials by establishing their studios in countryside areas and, therefore, it is often associated to a lifestyle of simplicity, sustainability, self-sufficiency and closeness to nature. In fact, the growing postwar interest in Japanese crafts, aesthetics and spirituality coincides with the expansion of diverse social and cultural movements that have sought an approximation between man and nature, expressing dissatisfaction with modern capitalist society, economic materialism, overconsumption and environmental destruction. An example of these social developments is the back-to-the-land movement, which started in the early twentieth century but exploded in the 1960s and 1970s throughout Europe and North America. While back-to-the-landers are often described as nostalgic romantics or nature-loving *hippies*, historian Dona Brown has defined the movement as the embracement of a “producers” vision linking self-sufficient households, autonomous work, and personal independence (Brown, 2011: 51). Cases in Japan include Knight’s (1997) investigation of the rural resettlement in the Japanese mountains of the Kii Peninsula in the 1980s and 1990s, which focused on natural farming and the tensions arriving between local and newcomers. More recently, Susanne Klien (2016a) has explored the motivations of young urbanites to migrate to the Japanese countryside in search of quality of life and self-realization. The author has also examined the links between this trend and

disaster volunteering in northeast Japan within the rejection of the post-war values of material accumulation and the transition to a post-material post-industrial society (Klien, 2016b, 2017).

Moreover, post-modernization and the transition to Fordism to a post-Fordist mode of production have led to the rise of a new economy focusing on the service and creative sectors. In this context, the emergence of a knowledge-based society has also meant the reappraisal of the arts and crafts as having a vital role in rural development. In fact, from the 1990s, with the end of the bubble economy and, more recently, the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake, new cultural forms of protest such and the so-called “socially-engaged art” movement have emerged as a reflection of feelings of discontent with neo-liberalism and globalization (Mōri, 2005). Together with this trend, contemporary art festivals have also been expanding in rural areas throughout Japan, which have been investigated by Favell (2015), Klein (2016b) and Borggreen (2018), amongst others.

Machokta (2018) also explores how one Japan’s most famous contemporary community-art festivals, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field in Niigata prefecture, has made use of the Japanese notion of *satoyama* (mountain village) as an example of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, drawing on recent trend seen in global environmental movements. These are translated, for example, in the “Satoyama Initiative” supported by the United Nations and UNESCO (International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative, 2010). In fact, influenced by Asian systems of thought, American Indian spirituality and the knowledge of traditional preindustrial societies in general, Western environmental movements have been looking beyond Western civilization for a model of harmonious coexistence with nature. Clammer (2000: 217-243) notes how the New Age movement and the environmental philosophy of deep ecology reflect Japanese non-dualistic views of man and nature rooted in animist beliefs and Shinto cosmologies, contributing to offer alternative visions of society and humanity’s place in the universe.

However, Japanese traditional views of nature are also ambiguous and often contradictory to domestic environmental practices, as methodically explored in a volume edited by Asquith and Kalland (1997). Dolores P. Martinez (2008) has also questioned the so-called “Japanese sense of nature”, arguing that there isn’t a

homogeneous and unique sense of nature that could be generalized to all historical periods and class differences in the country, as it is usually proposed by the Nihonjinron. Following the trend of opposition Japan and the West, theories of Japaneseness often stress the contrast between the harmonious relationship of the Japanese with nature and the dominant and controlling attitude of the West (see Yukawa, 1962). Thus, it is crucial to make the distinction between the aesthetic experience of nature and the actual attitudes towards it (Asquith and Kalland, 1997; Martinez, 2008). Furthermore, Larry Lohmann (1993) has interpreted the cannibalistic logic by which Western environmental movements make use of other cultural traditions as resources to address Western needs as “Green Orientalism”.

Paradoxically, environmental concerns and their criticism of the capitalist logic of mass-production and mass-consumption are often solved through consumption itself. This contradiction is visible in a growing interest in “green” products that offer a feeling of “conscious consumption” while appropriating the tools of the capitalist logic it condemns. This trend has been described as “value-driven consumers”, “conscious capitalism” or “LOHAS” (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability). Associated with a well-educated, cultured, middle or upper-middle class, it is translated in an interest in alternative medicine (through a search for the integration between body/ mind/ spirit), consumption of natural or organic food, cosmetics and other products, ecotourism, alternative energies and transportation, amongst others. Focusing on the United States, Gelfer (2010) has explored how the LOHAS trend commercializes and commodifies alternative and New Age spiritualities by trading “authenticity” for profit.

In Japan, a similar tendency has started to take place within what Miura Atsushi (2014) has defined as the fourth stage of consumer society. According to the author, this stage is characterized by the focus on the social rather than the individual (as in the previous stage), reflected in the rise of sharing, the search for human connections and consumer aspirations that focus on the simple and the local. The growing reappraisal of the ideas of *mingei* by an ecologically conscious and educated urban middle class can thus be understood within the context of this wider societal shift.

In fact, Japanese philosopher Takashi Kurata (2015) has proposed a reevaluation of *mingei* at the light of contemporary social developments in Japan, where new consumer tendencies started appearing in the mid-1980s, becoming more visible after

2000 and peaking in 2010. In particular, he analyzes the role of *mingei* within the confluence of what he calls a rise in “social consciousness” (*shakai ishiki*), reflected in a growing general concern for social issues such as social welfare and local development, and “lifestyle consciousness” (*seikatsu ishiki*), visible in the expansion of lifestyle magazines, lifestyle shops (*zakka*) and lifestyle crafts (*seikatsu koge*), which appear as a modern version of *mingei* transposed to design. According to the author, as lifestyle consciousness increases, the more people focus on the objects that surround their everyday lives, thus arguing for the role of the *mingei* philosophy in the process of rethinking how to live and relate to living. Yet, he notes that while younger generations are now more interested in buying expensive and durable items that were previously consumed by an older, highly educated and affluent segment of the Japanese society., these social and lifestyle trends are mostly translated into consumption and have had little impact on society, a reality that is visible in the growing number of non-voters amongst younger generations.

Similarly, Japanese historian Takeshi Matsui (2005) has argued that the rise in environmental consciousness and aesthetic sense in everyday life reflects dissatisfaction with modern society and the impacts of the current industrial global system in the environment, stressing the role of *mingei* in this context. He notes how the search for quality of life, humane work and close contact with nature have been translating in an increased interest in more durable, often expensive, handmade-looking items, even if sometimes they are cheaply made by machine to look handmade.

Beyond the Japanese context, this mixture of ecological awareness, spirituality and interest in the exotic have also found a home in the appreciation of handmade objects that incorporate the Japanese aesthetic ideas of simplicity and imperfection. In a New York Times article about the growing trend of handmade ceramics amongst creative millennials in the United States, the author notices how young consumers are searching for the embodiment of a *deeper story about craftsmanship and creativity* in the things they consume (McKeough, 2015). Richard Ocejo (2017) has also explored the lives of young well-educated New York men who are choosing traditionally low-status but increasingly seen as “cool” and “trendy” manual occupations that embody a sense of craftsmanship in today's creative oriented but also the precarious new

economy. These new social contemporary developments, located at the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist mode of production, have led to the reassessment of the meaning of craft, which has become “a reaction against high-street branding and mall sameness alike, against the globalization of labor exploitation and consumer indifference”, as put by Jefferies (2011: 224).

Seeing the dehumanization of labor within the modern capitalist model of work as impacting negatively on the individual’s moral identity, sociologist Richard Sennett (2008) rescued Hannah Arendt’s (1958) idea of *Animal laborans* to define craftsmanship in broader terms. Understanding the pride and pleasure of physical making as a universal human trait that leads to happiness and satisfaction, the author sees in the figure of the craftsman a model for the relationship between labor and community, thus drawing on Marxist ideas of craftsmanship as something that provides a sense of enrichment and dignity to the human being.

1.3. Conclusion

Following the British Arts and Crafts movement, Japonisme, the Zen boom and the proselytism of the *mingei* group, amongst others, Japan has become part of every Western potter’s imagination, reproducing the romanticized and often exoticized images of the country that have dominated the West since the nineteenth century. However, while Western appropriations of Japanese forms, styles and techniques might be conceived as material manifestations of Japanophilia (a love or obsession with the idea of Japan), as proposed by Pitelka (2007), several features of Japanese ceramics have also become *transculture*, acquiring different meanings at the hands of different actors in different historical and socio-cultural contexts.

By materializing values, intentions and ideas, the flow of objects through national and cultural borders and through time and space, actively changes their meanings and actions in the world. In this sense, the production, dissemination and consumption of Japanese arts and crafts reflect not only values and meanings acquired within Japan, but also echoes human anxieties about the past and utopias about the future, reminding us of the commonality of human experience.

In the following chapters, I will show how Japanese ceramics appear as a ubiquitous example of what Alfred Gell (2006) calls the “promiscuity” of objects. In this context, the process of circulation of the knowledge embedded in these objects reminds of the character of culture as an endless dialectic process, fundamentally hybrid, always on the move, and not as something fixed, thus dismantling claims of originality and authenticity. Taking into account the historical, political and institutional trajectories presented in the previous chapters, the next part will delve into the life-stories, lifestyles, worldviews, technical processes and artworks of Western potters and artists who have come to study or work with ceramics in Japan.

PART II

ETHNOGRAPHY OF WESTERN POTTERS IN JAPAN

1. Western potters in Japan

1.1. Introduction

The second part of this doctoral dissertation is comprised of the description and analysis of the data obtained from the execution of semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews and questionnaires, as well as participant and non-participant observation with a total of forty foreign potters who were studying or working with ceramics in Japan at the time of this research.

This chapter begins with a presentation of the research background and methodology used in the collection, description and analysis of qualitative data obtained through ethnographic fieldwork. After illuminating on the methodological tools and limitations, as well as the parameters for the selection of case studies, I will provide a general overview of the sample by presenting quantitative data regarding the location, nationality, gender, age and background of the subjects. The analysis is divided into four parts, which correspond to four generations of Western potters in Japan according to the period of arrival, accompanied by a general description of the historical and social background that motivated them to come to study ceramics in Japan and eventually establish their personal and professional lives in the country.

The second chapter will delve into the life-story accounts of four professional potters/artists and two pottery learners in Mashiko (Tochigi prefecture), a town where potters from different regions of Japan and the world have been gathering especially since the mid-1960s, partly as a result to the transnational connections of the *mingei* movement. Thus, I will first present the geographical, historical and social-cultural features of the region, setting the background for the potters to narrate their stories, presented in the format of case-studies.

The third chapter is comprised of the analysis of the potters' life-story accounts, lifestyle, technical processes, artworks and world views, exposing the results of the ethnographic fieldwork and its significance within a broader academic discussion concerning migration, material culture, hybridization and transnationalism.

1.2. Research background

The empirical part of this work consists on the ethnographic description of the life-stories, lifestyle, technical processes, artworks and worldviews of Western potters living in Japan though qualitative data collected in two different time periods and circumstances. The preliminary fieldwork for this project was undertaken during a total of six-weeks divided between 2013 and 2014 when I started this project as a short-term visiting researcher at the Research Center for Non-Written Cultural Materials at Kanagawa University. During this time, I visited Mashiko (Tochigi prefecture), Kasama (Ibaraki prefecture) and Minakami (Gunma prefecture), where I executed in-person interviews with six potters and three museum curators, as well as online interviews and written questionnaires with eleven foreign potters who were living or had lived in Japan in recent years. The data and preliminary results of this fieldwork research were published in the *Annual Report for Non-written Cultural Materials*, volumes 10 (2014) and 11 (2015). Thus, the data obtained during this period and featured in these articles is also included here.

The second part of the research was undertaken between 2015 and 2019 in the course of my doctoral studies at Tokyo Metropolitan University. Due to time limitations, I decided to focus my fieldwork on Mashiko, which hosts the highest concentration of non-Japanese potters in Japan. During the course of my doctoral studies, I made countless visits to the small countryside town, where I deepened previous interviews and undertook new ones, while also participating in workshops, talks, exhibition and other events. I attended the Mashiko Pottery Fair twice every year, where I executed a survey with eighty-one visitors of the festival in May 2016 and November 2017. Besides interviews with a total of fourteen potters who were living or had lived in Mashiko, I interviewed two representatives of the Mashiko Ceramic Art Association, ceramic artist Satoshi Yokoo and glass artist Yoshiko Fudeya, the manager of Mashiko Toge Club, Issei Furuya, and the vice-director of Mashiko Ceramic Museum, Satoshi Yokobori, besides innumerable informal talks with Japanese potters, local residents and international visitors.

In addition to Mashiko, I also had the opportunity to visit the studios of Western potters living and working in other countryside areas of Japan, some in traditional

regions of pottery production: Minakami (Gunma), Kasama (Ibaraki), Tokoname (Aichi), Shigaraki (Shiga), Kyoto and Ayabe (Kyoto), Sasayama and Awaji (Hyogo) and Bizen (Okayama).

Besides individual pottery studios, I visited areas where foreign potters have been developing local revitalization projects through the arts and crafts: the Shiro Oni Studio, implemented and directed by American artist Kjell Hahn in the town of Fujioka (Gunma prefecture); the Kouraku kiln factory, in Arita (Saga), an Artist-in-Residence program coordinated by Brazilian ceramic artist Sebastião Pimenta (see Appendix I); and the Fieldwork project, directed by American potter John Dix in Sasayama (Hyogo prefecture).

In addition, I visited the regions of Sasama (Shizuoka) and Misato (Shimane), where Japanese potters are implementing programs that involve the collaboration of foreign artists, students and local residents: the Sasama International Ceramic Art Festival and Artist in Residence program, created and directed by Japanese potter Shozo Michikawa and currently hosting French potter Joséphine Marinho as artist in residence; and *Queridos Amigos*, a crowd-funded project created by Rikio Hashimoto in Misato (Shimane), a “home/studio-stay” for Brazilian art students to learn ceramics for the duration of three months while participating in cultural and artistic activities within the local community.

Finally, I visited other traditional pottery areas around Japan, such as Tajimi (Gifu) Seto (Aichi), Karatsu and Imari (Saga), Tsuboya and Yomitan (Okinawa), where I talked to locals in search for Western potters, visited ceramic exhibitions, historical sites and pottery villages. The displacement to some of the areas mentioned above was made with the financial support of a research grant from the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science; however, some trips were also self-funded.

The ethnographic work executed in such regions was not, however, limited to the interviews with the research subjects. It extended to visiting local geographical, historical, cultural, artistic and commercial attractions related to the pottery tradition of those places or its contemporary developments. Thus, spaces like pottery shops, ceramic galleries, art-in-residency sites, pottery and historical museums, archeological kiln sites, clay digging sites and other potters’ homes and studios were also visited. This allowed a closer look at the potters’ surrounding environments, while also digging

deeper into the workings of the Japanese ceramic art world, its history and regional ramifications. During these fieldwork trips, I gathered further information from these sites through informal meetings and interviews, adding to data collected online. In fact, in many cases, accompaniment of these local pottery-related activities was continued online. Finally, during some studio visits, I had the opportunity to get involved in pottery-making activities, as well as participate in community-building activities, which allowed the acquisition of perceptual as well as cognitive knowledge.

Besides the interviews executed in person, other potters were also interviewed made via written questionnaires and online. A total of forty Western potters who were living or had lived in Japan were interviewed in-person, online or through written questionnaires during the course of this research, which translated in more than fifty hours of recorded interviews, hundreds of photographs, a dozen of written questionnaires, many pages of fieldwork notes, loads of email exchanges, as well as countless information gathered online and from written published materials.

1.3. Methodology

The empirical part of this research is based on ethnographic fieldwork and a qualitative methodology consisting of in-depth semi-structured interviewees following the ethnosociological method of life-story (*récits de vie*) as systematized by French sociologist Daniel Bertaux (1997). This method is characterized by the execution of semi-directive qualitative interviews in which the researcher adopts the role of the conductor in the conversation. In order to give voice to the subjects, I opted to transcribe parts of their own accounts, which were later edited and reviewed by the interviewees themselves. The analysis was also made from an ethnosociological perspective that assumes the subjectivity of the narrative. The main goal was to understand how the subjects negotiate their identities as Western artists and potters living in Japan and working within a particular local tradition and history. For all interviews, I prepared a set of open questions, which aimed to understand the potters' life-story, their motivations to leave their homeland and practice ceramics in Japan, as

well as the influence of Japanese aesthetics and ceramic styles and techniques in their work.

Along with a focus on the potters' own life-story accounts and its discourse analysis, the questions were prepared with the aim of bringing light to their lifestyles, technical processes, artworks, and worldviews, allowing further insights about their personal and professional lives. In some exceptional cases, participant observation was also possible. Some of the questions included in the semi-directive questionnaire were as following:

1. Why did you come to Japan?
2. Did you have knowledge about Japanese ceramics before coming to the country?
3. What is the main difference between the ceramic art of your home country and the one of Japan?
4. What is the main difference between practicing ceramics in your home country and in Japan?
5. Which Japanese styles and techniques do you use in your ceramic work?
6. Do you think Japanese ceramics reflect Japanese culture? How so?
7. What inspires you in your work?
8. How/ where do you sell your work?
9. What are the difficulties of working with ceramics in Japan?
10. What do you think are the main difficulties of being a non-Japanese potter in Japan?
11. In which ways do you take part in your local community?

Besides the above list, follow-up questions were often made in accordance with the answers given by the interviewees.

1.4. Data sample and collection tools

The total number of interviewed subjects accounts for forty potters, twenty-five of whom have been living in Japan for more than ten years. The majority of the subjects were only interviewed once, for the median duration of two hours, but those included in the case-studies were interviewed twice or more times. Most interviews were executed at the potters' homes and studios (often located in the same site), allowing observation of their workplaces and work process, such as tools, materials, as well as the objects they produce. By entering their private spaces and visiting the regions where their studios are located, it was possible to look deeper into their lifestyle and how their work is integrated (or not) within the local traditions. In some cases, second and third-time visits were made and home-stays exceptionally allowed participant observation in the potters' studios.

Data collection was made through voice recorder, ethnographic notes and photographs, but also through informal talks and participation in events such as workshops and exhibitions. All the personally executed structured interviews were recorded, transcribed and the most relevant excerpts were selected and included in the main text. In many cases, contact with the subjects was continued online through social media websites such as Facebook and Instagram, which allowed further interaction and follow-ups on their activities. Newspaper and magazine articles, as well as the potters' websites and blogs, were used in order to build a complete descriptive portrait of the subjects, summarized in the mini-biography of each artist presented in Appendix II.

Besides the twenty potters whose studios were visited and interviewed in-person, other potters were also interviewed via online video call (three subjects), while others were not interviewed in a formal and structured manner, but have been approached through informal talks in events and exhibitions (four subjects). Finally, potters whom I was not able to meet in person (twelve subjects) also responded to a written questionnaire via email, roughly comprise by the same questions to those prepared for the semi-directive qualitative interviews. Finally, some potters were interviewed through a combination of two or more methods.

The next page includes a list with the name of all research subjects, as well as basic information such as nationality, birthdate, date of arrival in Japan, the main reason for coming to the country, their location of their studios or learning places in Japan, as well as the method used for obtaining data. The list includes: people who have permanently established their lives, family and work in Japan (twenty four subjects), the majority of which have lived in the country for more than twenty-five years (twenty subjects); people who have come to Japan to study pottery, staying for one year or less (eight subjects); people who already left the country after staying for more than one year or have plans to leave in the future (four subjects); and those who have been in Japan for more than one year and have plans to stay in the future (four subjects).

From the list presented on the next page, we can see that the majority of the interviewees came to Japan specifically to study or work with ceramics (twenty four subjects), with only a few coming to the country for other reasons, such as university exchange unrelated to ceramics (five subjects), travel around the country (four subjects), work in another field (three subjects) or personal reasons (four subjects). Yet, only a minority was first introduced to ceramics when already in the country (eight subjects). As for the age of arrival, most subjects came to Japan in their early twenties, with a few arriving in their thirties (ten subjects) and above (two subjects). In terms of nationalities, nearly half of the potters are from the United States, almost one-third from different countries of Europe, eight from South-America and one from Africa. Most of them have university degrees, mainly in the field of arts and humanities (twenty-six subjects), are married to Japanese citizens (twenty-four subjects) and almost half have now permanent visas. Some of them are not solely involved with pottery but also undertake other professional activities, such as English teaching.

It is worth noting that, while the majority of the subjects interviewed had been practicing ceramics in Japan at some time during the execution of this research, a few returned to their homeland within this period. In fact, from the forty potters interviewed, ten have left the country and only one subject intends to return to Japan to continue learning ceramics.

Table 1.1: List of Western potters interviewed

	Name	Nationality	Birth date	Arrival in Japan	Motivation to come to Japan	Location	Method of data collection
1	Randy Woolsey	Canadian	1944	1965-1975/ 1989	Visit Japan/ Open a studio	Kasama (Ibaraki)	Semi-structured interview and studio visit
2	Harvey Young	American	1945- 2015	1969- 1971/1984	Study ceramics/ Open a studio	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Semi-structured interview (via online video call)
3	Gary Moler	American	1951	1972/ 1974	University exchange/ Work	Koka (Shiga)	Semi-structured interview and studio visit
4	José Farromba	Portuguese	1943	1972	Travel, study ceramics	Mashiko/ Shiroi (Miyagi)	Unstructured interview
5	Doris Watanabe	American	1951	1974	Visit Japan and teach English	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Email questionnaire
6	Richard Milgrim	American	1955	1977/ 1979	Study ceramics and tea ceremony	Kyoto	Semi-structured interview + studio visit
7	John Wells	American	1957	1978/ 1981	Exchange student/ Work, study ceramics	Bizen (Okayama)	Semi-structured interview + studio visit
8	Tracey Glass	Canadian	1961	1979	Study Zen/ Study ceramics	Ayabe (Kyoto)	Semi-structured interview + studio visit
9	Darice Veri	American	1958	1982	Study ceramics	Mashiko/ USA	Email questionnaire
10	Steve Tootell	British	1953	1984	Teach, work with ceramics	Tokyo	Semi-structured interview
11	Richard Truckle	British	1947- 2017	1984-1986/ 1991	Teach English/ Open a studio	Tokoname (Aichi)	Semi-structured interview + studio visit
12	Andrew Gemrich	American	1967	1988/1991	University exchange/ Study ceramics	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Semi- structured interview + studio visit
13	John Dix	American	1960	1989	Open a Studio	Kobe/ Sasayama (Hyogo)	Semi- structured interview + studio visit
14	Christopher Ravenhall	British	1968	1989	Study ceramics	Bizen (Okayama)	Semi- structured interview and studio visit
15	Douglas Black	American	1967	1990	Study ceramics	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Semi- structured interview + studio visit
16	Euan Craig	Australian	1964	1990	Work with ceramics	Mashiko/ Minakami (Gunma) from 2011	Semi-structured interview + studio visit
17	Mike Martino	American	1968	1990-1997/ 2006	Learn karate and Japanese/ Work	Karatsu (Saga)	Unstructured interview
18	Sebastião Pimenta	Brazilian	1964	1991/ 2015	University exchange/ Art- in-residence coordinator	Sendai (Miyagi)/ Arita (Saga)	Semi- structured interview + studio visit
19	Regina Goto	Brazilian (<i>nissei</i>)	1956	1991	Study ceramics	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Semi- structured interviews + studio visit

20	Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo	Spanish	1957	1991	Visit Japan	Mashiko/ Awaji (Hyogo)	Email questionnaire, Semi-structured interview, studio visit
21	Kristina Mar	Portuguese	1964	1993	Study ceramics	Kyoto	Email questionnaire
22	Agnes Husz	Hungarian	1961	1993	Marriage, open a Studio	Chikuma (Nagano)	Email questionnaire + semi-structured interview (via online video call)
23	Matthew Sovjani	American	1969	1993	Study ceramics	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Semi-structured interview + studio visit
24	Kjell Hahn	American	---	2001-2004/ 2007	JET program/ Study Ceramics	Fujioka (Gunma)	Unstructured interview + studio visit
25	Swanica Ligtenberg	Dutch	1955	2006-2013	Husband's work	Kamakura (Kanagawa)	Written questionnaire
26	Derek Larsen	American	1975	2008	Work with ceramics	Kyoto	Written questionnaire
27	Mirjam Watajima	German	1983	2008/ 2012	Study ceramics	Hasami (Nagasaki)	Written questionnaire
28	Mpindi Kibudde	Ugandan	1981	2010-2015	Study ceramics	Tokyo	Written questionnaire
29	Karina Hamaguchi	Brazilian	1983	2012-2013	Scholarship in physiotherapy	Koichi	Written questionnaire
30	Kate Strachan	American	1982	2012-2018	Study Ceramics	Kamakura (Kanagawa)	Written questionnaire
31	Andrew Vlock	American	1988	2015-2016	Study ceramics	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Written questionnaire + studio visit
32	Timi Lantos	Hungarian	1985	2015 / 2016	Study ceramics	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Semi- structured interview + studio visit
33	Ariel Cecilio	Argentina	1978	2016-2017	Study ceramics	Kurabuchi-Takasaki (Gunma)	Unstructured interview
34	Ryan Cain	American	1997	2016-2017	Study ceramics	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Unstructured interview + studio visit
35	Suzanne Wang	American	1970	2016 -2017	Study ceramics	Mashiko (Tochigi)	Semi-structured interview
36	Kimie Ino	Brazilian / Japanese	1982	2012-2013/ 2017	Study ceramics	Tajimi (Gifu)	Semi-structured interview (via online video call)
37	Josephine Marinho	French	1993	2017	Study Ceramics	Sasama (Shizuoka)	Written questionnaire + studio visit
38	Douglas Barnez	Brazilian	1995	09.2017- 11.2017	Study Ceramics	Misato (Shimane)	Semi-structured interview + studio visit
39	Wellington Emmerich	Brazilian	1996	09.2017- 11.2017	Study Ceramics	Misato (Shimane)	Semi-structured interview + studio visit
40	Kazue Morita	Brazilian	1986	09.2017- 11.2017	Study Ceramics	Misato (Shimane)	Semi-structured interview + studio visit

Figure 1.1: Location of Western potters interviewed in Japan

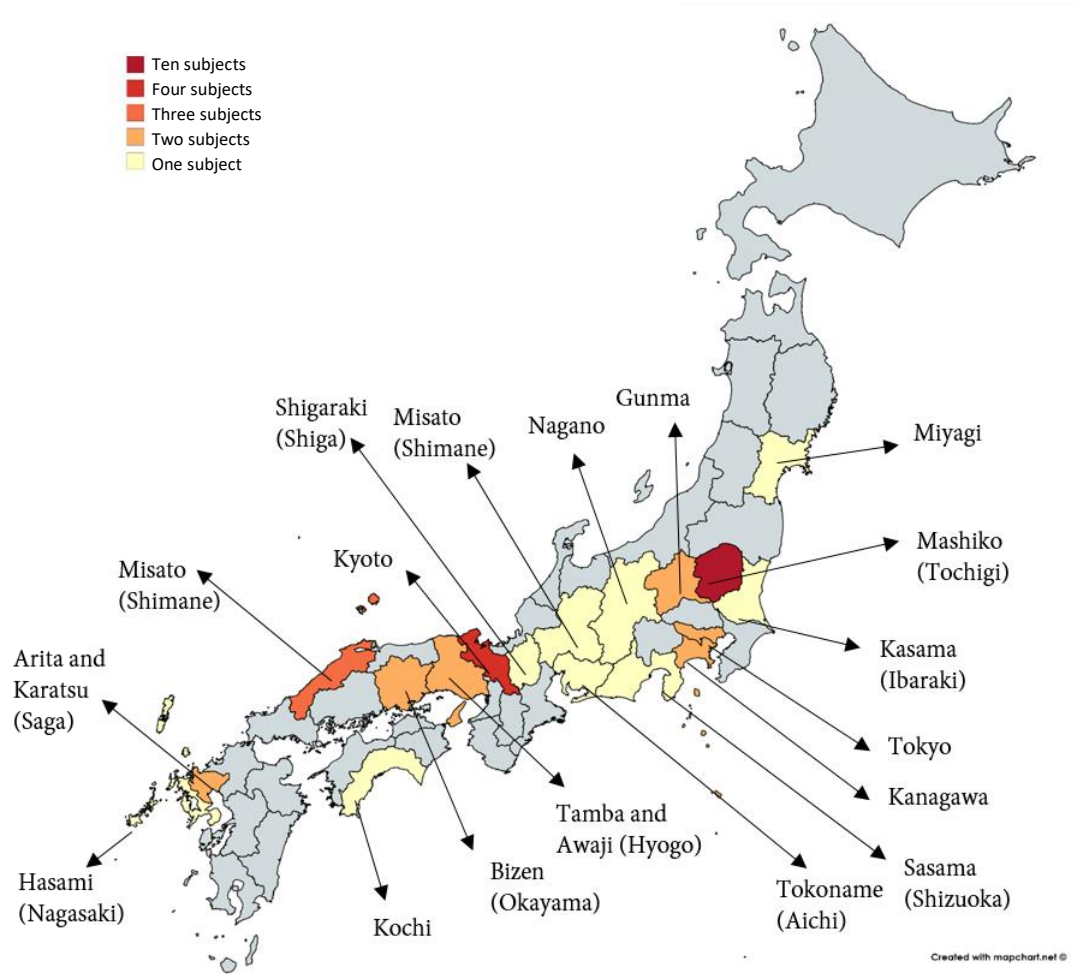


Figure 1.2: Nationalities of Western potters interviewed in Japan



1.5. Location of the subjects

From Figure 1.1, we can see that Mashiko (Tochigi prefecture) holds the highest concentration of foreign potters in Japan, for reasons that will be explored in the next section. Another area with a high concentration of non-Japanese potters is Kasama (Ibaraki prefecture), although it is only represented here by one subject. Besides being located near Tokyo (approximately 150 km and 100 km respectively), both areas have developed as pottery centers in recent decades, with Mashiko gaining popularity from the 1930s and especially in the postwar era through its connection with the *mingei* movement. As for Kasama, it developed as a center for contemporary crafts and design from the 1950s, when Ibaraki prefecture started recruiting designers and ceramic artists to encourage pottery production in the local, where an institute for material development and a large ceramic's center with exhibition and sales areas were built. In this context, both centers developed as areas open to artists from outside the region and the country, with potters working with a variety of different styles and techniques without being bound to tradition and the apprenticeship system.

In addition to these two areas where potters have been able to enjoy more artistic freedom, the so-called six old kilns of Japan have also been receiving non-Japanese potters in the past forty years, with five Western potters interviewed in Tokoname (Aichi), Shigaraki (Shiga), Tamba (Hyogo) and Bizen (Okayama) for this research. Flourishing in the medieval period, these pottery centers were first known for their production of everyday simple unglazed ware. However, Shigaraki and Bizen started developing utensils for the tea ceremony around the Muromachi era (1338-1573) influenced by the expansion of Zen Buddhism, and are now widely known for their production of tea bowls and other teaware. Despite being relatively closed to outsiders to the region, a few Western potters have been studying there by entering the traditional apprenticeship system. Some have later established their individual studios in the region where they work with the local traditional styles and techniques and sometimes participate in the regional pottery associations. Others have established their studios in these areas in spite of not having any ties with the traditional pottery social organizations, working outside the local ceramic tradition.

Besides the six medieval kilns, other well-known traditional areas of pottery production where non-Japanese potters have established their studios or learning ceramics include Karatsu and Arita (Saga), Hasami (Nagasaki), Tajimi (Gifu) and Kyoto. While the development of both Karatsu and Arita as prosperous ceramic centers is related to the introduction of Korean potters in the region after the Japanese invasion of the peninsula in the sixteenth century (thus showing that the transnational networks within the history of Japanese ceramics have a long history), the two styles reflect two different tastes. While Karatsu pottery is often related to the *wabi-sabi* aesthetics and the tea ceremony, Arita porcelain is connected to the taste of the Japanese court and European aristocracy after it started being exported to the West in the seventeenth century. Similarly, Hasami ware also developed through its connection with Korean potters and their discovery of porcelain stone in southern Japan, which translated into the production of simpler porcelain for daily use. As for Tajimi, the region is known for the production of Mino ware, which developed at the beginning of the modern period (late sixteenth century), known for the styles Shino and Oribe, highly appreciated for their use in the tea ceremony. Finally, Kyoto ceramics, known as Kyo ware, reflect the refined taste of the Japanese court that was established there for ten centuries. Kyoto ceramics have also developed connections with the world of the tea ceremony through Sen no Rikyu's patronage of *raku* in the sixteenth century, the Rinpa School through the work of Ogata Kenzan in the eighteenth century and, in the early twentieth century, the *mingei* movement thanks to the work of potter Kanjiro Kawai. In the post-war period, the region also saw the development of avant-garde and contemporary ceramic movements such as the Sodeisha and the Women's Ceramic Art Association Joryu Togeji, in 1948 and 1957 respectively. However, artists working in the above-mentioned regions do not necessarily conform to the local pottery traditions, with some subjects mixing different styles and techniques and others following a more contemporary approach.

In addition, some subjects have also established their studios in countryside areas where pottery production is historically not so conspicuous, such as Ayabe (in the north of Kyoto prefecture), Awaji Island (Hyogo), Chikuma (Nagano), Minakami (Gunma) and Shiroy (Miyagi). Most of the Western potters located in those regions have moved there for reasons not specifically related to pottery or, in the case of

students located in Misato (Shimane), Kochi and Sasama (Shizuoka) because they were offered an opportunity to study with a particular potter there. Finally, a few potters have also developed their activities in Tokyo, mostly within official art institutions.

1.6. Selection of case-studies and limitations

Due to time and space restrictions, I decided to focus the ethnographic description on the pottery town of Mashiko, where the life-story accounts of four professional potters and two pottery learners will be presented as case studies in the next chapter. Nonetheless, I summarized the information about each potter in a mini-biography of all forty artists featured in Appendix 2, accompanied by one photo of each potters' works. The ethnographic writing consists of a descriptive biography based on the subjects' personal narratives, which were reviewed and edited by the artists themselves and illustrated by photographs taken during fieldwork and obtained through the potters' websites. While the aim was to have as much diversity in terms of age, nationality and gender as possible, the sample reflects the inequalities pervasive both in the migration patterns from the West and in the world of Japanese ceramics, translated in a predominance of English-speaking male subjects.

All of the interviews were transcribed in full for the purpose of the analysis presented in chapter three. However, for reasons of page space and protection of the subjects' privacy, only selected quotes were included in the text. The original full transcripts were also not included as an appendix for the same reasons. Since the subjects are non-anonymous artists, some of the interviews include personal information and confidential details obtained through the building of a relationship of trust with the researcher. While this choice was made exclusively by me as the researcher and not through the subjects' request, I felt a responsibility towards the artists to safeguard their identity and reputation. Julia Rotenberg and Garry Alan Fine (2008) reflect on the delicate position of the ethnographer dealing with living artists in the excerpt below:

The position of the ethnographer as a potential source of publicity and esteem makes the ethnography of art distinct from most other ethnographic sites. Traditionally, ethnographers are instructed to keep the names and identities of their informants confidential. However, when one is examining a social world in which one's behaviors and products are quickly recognizable, this may require a change in approach. Further, one's informants may wish that their identities *be* proclaimed. The ethnographer becomes potentially an agent of publicity. This provides an opening for the researcher, but also can lead to bitterness should the evaluation not match the informant's self-image or desired public identity (Rothenberg & Gary Alan Fine, 2008: 36).

Thus, for the reasons mentioned above, the case-studies consist mainly of descriptive biographies based on the artists' personal accounts, which were reviewed and edited by the artists themselves. Even though the changes were minor and did not compromise the quality and fidelity of the data, this procedure functioned as a way of protecting both the artist and myself as a researcher. In this sense, the critical analysis was left for the third chapter, which focuses on my interpretation of the data, connecting the artists' identities, lifestyles and cosmologies with a broader academic discussion.

I decided to focus on the subjects who were living in Mashiko for being the region that was most easily accessible for the researcher based in Tokyo. Numerous visits to the town and encounters with Western potters and other local residents were necessary to establish a trustworthy relationship between the subjects and the researcher. Because of that, my presence was not limited to the formal interviews but extended to informal meetings in different contexts and events. Hence, part of the ethnographic data was also gathered through observation and unstructured interactions with the subjects. However, only the formally established interviews were recorded with the artists' consent and presented here as quotes. I also tried to protect the subjects' privacy and thus, sensitive information appears either as anonymous or was excluded when explicit permission from the artists was not obtained.

One of the limitations encountered during the course of this research results therefore from that necessity of building a relationship of trust with each subject,

which was especially challenging due to time and spatial constraints. Furthermore, the collection of data greatly depended on the subjects' personality and their feelings of trust for the researcher, often creating a gap in the quantity and depth of the data obtained.

The delicate position of the ethnographer that comes from using its own person as an ethnographic tool, together with an ethical responsibility that goes beyond the professional role of the researcher, was also challenging. I tried to remain truthful to both the artist as a person and professional and to myself both as a researcher and someone who has built a relationship of trust with the artists. Because of these limitations, I am aware that total objectivity and impartiality were virtually impossible. Yet, I believe the human qualities of the ethnographer, which are reflected in his or her own limitations, prejudices, preconceptions and assumptions can never be totally erased, especially in a field that strongly depends on a deep understanding of the others' humanity.

Finally, it is important to remark that the artists' narratives are also and for similar reasons not always objective, impartial and faithful to the true unfolding of the events. For that reason, the life-story descriptive biographies presented on the next chapter should be taken as a subjective account and not as an accurate description of the facts and often marked by the image that the artists want to project.

1.7. Nationalities and gender

In terms of nationalities, as we can observe in more detail from Figure 1.3, the vast majority of the subjects are from Europe (ten subjects) and the United States (sixteen subjects), with almost sixty percent being from English-speaking countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia). In this sense, Europeans from non-English speaking countries represent only twenty percent of our sample, with the rest dominated by South America, with seven subjects from Brazil¹, one from Argentina, and only one subject from the African continent who came as a

¹ This high number reflects the researcher's personal and professional connections with Brazil and the Japanese-Brazilian pottery community.

Monbukakusho Scholarship recipient. While the inclusion of South America and Africa as “West” might seem controversial, I decided to employ Stuart Hall’s expression “The West and the Rest” (1992) in reverse, thus considering anyone non-Eastern (or non-Asian) as Westerner for the purpose of this research. However, defining who is and who isn’t Asian is also problematic, since some subjects are of Japanese (four subjects) and Chinese descent (one subject), as is the case with the majority of the Brazilians subjects, a few of who have dual nationality.

From the list of subjects and the graphic below, we can observe that, in the first two generations, only six out of seventeen potters are women, with the situation reversing from 2005, when women account for nine subjects, against seven male subjects. In this sense, our sample reflects the gender inequalities within migration patterns from Western countries to Japan, which are dominated by men by two to one (Ministry of Justice, 2017). Gender issues as expressed in the potters’ personal accounts will be further explored in chapter three.

Figure 1.3: Number of subjects interviewed divided by gender

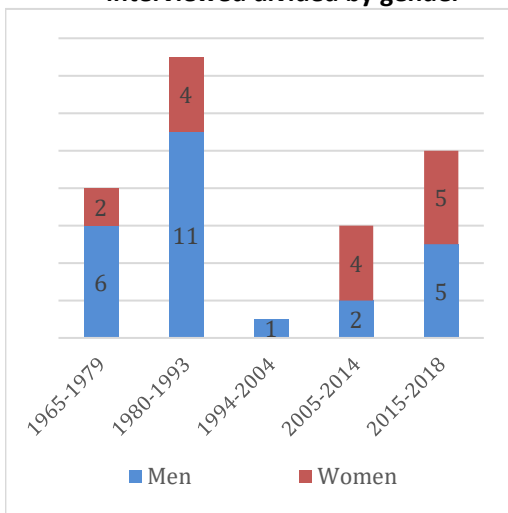
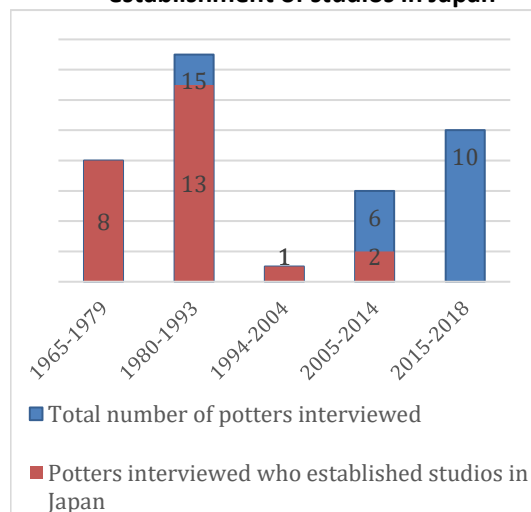


Figure 1.4: Date of arrival and establishment of studios in Japan



1.8. Period of arrival in Japan

As for the date of arrival in Japan, Figure 1.4 shows five main periods. The first features what we can call a pioneering generation, who came to Japan in the 1960s

and 1970s when immigration rates were low, traveling was expensive and the country was still growing to become an economic world power. The second period in the 1980s and early 1990s corresponds to the peak of Japan's bubble economy and the influx of foreign workers to the country, which saw an increase of Western potters establishing in the country. The third phase between 1994 and 2005, coincides with the so-called "lost decade" of economic recession, when there was a drastic reduction of Western potters' entries within our sample, with only one subject coming in this period through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program. The fourth stage between 2005 and 2014 is characterized by a slow recovery, yet only half of the new-coming potters established in the country permanently. The most recent period that overlaps with the execution of this research, when many Westerners have come to study ceramics for a period of three months up to a few years, but have either left or have yet to establish their individual studios in the country.

1.8.1. The pioneering generation

Westerners have been coming to Japan independently, attracted by its arts and culture, since the Meiji Restoration, some of whom ended up establishing in the country permanently. Well-known names include British writer and translator Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) and Portuguese writer Wenceslau de Moraes (1854-1929), both of whom had Japanese spouses and remained in Japan until their death, with the first even adopting a Japanese name. However, it was only after the Second World War that Western nationals started to come to the country at considerably higher rates. Nonetheless, even today, non-Asians still represent a very small percentage of foreign residents in Japan (18% in 2017), with nationals from the European, North American and Oceanic continents accounting for only 9.5%, according to recent statistics of the Ministry of Justice (2017).

During the arrival period of the first generation of potters in the 1960s and 1970s, Japan had already fully recovered from the Second World War and was on track to becoming one of the world's major economic powers in the following decade. In particular, the 1960s were marked by a period of avid modernization and

westernization with a growing projection of the country on the global stage, represented by the hosting of the Summer Olympics in Tokyo in 1964. However, during this period, immigration rates were still low and comprised mostly of residents from Japan's former colonies (Korea, Manchuria and Taiwan). Furthermore, until the 1970s, Japan was not an obvious travel destination. In his overview of the history of international tourism in Japan, Eguchi Nobukiyo (2010: 146) states that it was only in 1970, when the country hosted the World Exhibition in Osaka, that people from foreign countries first started visiting the archipelago *en masse*. Canadian Randy Woolsey, who arrived in the country in 1965, the earliest in our sample, remembers how expensive intercontinental traveling was at that time, thus making it a privilege of a few:

In those days nobody traveled from Canada to Europe. Just some city people did it maybe, but not like now, when everyone travels everywhere. It was expensive and you just didn't do it; you didn't think about doing it. Even immigrants that came to Canada didn't go back to Europe again. They said they would, but never did; it was too difficult (Randy Woolsey, November 2017).

But while traveling was not an obvious leisure choice or even available for most ordinary people, the 1960s and 1970s saw the generation known as baby-boomers starting to take advantage of the quickly expanding network of youth hostels to adventure into the world. This was exactly the case of Woolsey, who took a plane from Canada to Scotland and backpacked all around Europe for one year before heading to South East Asia, arriving in Japan in 1965. In fact, many of the subjects who arrived in Japan during this period were encouraged by a sense of adventure and some came with no particular plans except to travel and explore the country's culture. While many had a background in arts and a previous interest in ceramics, others only became interested in Japanese traditional crafts after arriving in the country. For example, Randy Woolsey's attraction to ceramics developed from his frequent visits to the art galleries located department stores in the neighborhood where his company was located, which he visited during his lunchtime break when working as an English teacher in Tokyo. His sudden eagerness to learn pottery led him to quit his job and

adventure alone in the Japanese countryside, despite having little knowledge of the language at that time:

I found a pottery shop in Tokyo and it belonged to [Mashiko ceramic factory] Tsukamoto. They had a shop in those days in Tokyo. So I got a friend to translate for me and ask if I could study there and they said: "Sure, okay". And so... you're young, I was only 24, I didn't even think about it, I just quit my job and went to Mashiko in the train in November; it was snowing and I had my *futon* and everything on a little train from Oyama, only one train a day. And I walked all the way to Tsukamoto, which was about four kilometers, with everything I owned and finally found Tsukamoto. I had never been there. I had no idea about the place, I'd never seen a kiln. I'd never seen a wheel, never read a book about pottery (Randy Woolsey, November 2017).

Besides the countercultural movements of the 1960s that stirred a mindset of freedom and adventure, the arrival of this first generation of potters to Japan also coincides with the Zen boom that swept Europe and the United States in the decades following the end of the Second World War. In fact, American John Wells, who first arrived in the country in 1978, has stressed that, while today many foreigners come to Japan drawn by its popular culture such as *anime* and *manga*, in those days, it was Zen that "was cool" amongst his generations' youngsters. Coming to Japan in 1984, Robert Yellin grew up in the 1960s and 1970s in closer contact with Eastern spirituality and Zen Buddhism through the influence of his eclectic family than modern European philosophy. Instead of becoming a potter, Yellin opened a ceramics gallery in Mishima (Shizuoka) in 1996, which now located in near the famous Philosopher's Path in the city of Kyoto, and was one of the first people to use the internet to disseminate knowledge about Japanese ceramics in English. From all of our subjects, Canadian Tracey Glass was the one who came to the country specifically to study Zen. In 1979, she stayed for three months practicing meditation at a Soto Zen Buddhist monastery in Nara before taking the trans-Siberian train to travel around Asia.

This deep attraction to Zen amongst the Western artistic and intellectual elite was followed by an interest in the *mingei* ideals disseminated by Hamada, Yanagi and

Leach within circles of potters, artists and art students, as we have explored in the previous chapter. Several American potters interviewed mentioned that, in fact, at that time, most of the books about ceramics available in English in the United States were about the *mingei* group. John Wells, who studied ceramics in Bizen, known for its connection to the elite world of the tea ceremony, argues that, even though the *mingei* represents the low end of Japanese ceramics, it was the most broadcasted Japanese ceramic movement in the United States. Similarly, American tea potter Richard Milgrim stated that, while there was a lot of information about the *mingei*, with many Western potters coming to Japan to study within the folk ceramics tradition, there were not many people interested in tea ceramics at that time.

After a first visit to the country, Milgrim returned to Japan for a second time in 1979 through the Midorikai, an official program created in 1970 for non-Japanese to study the tea ceremony at Urasenke, one of the main tea schools in Japan, which dates back to Sen no Rikyu's grandson lineage in the late seventeenth century. According to the Urasenke website, over five hundred people from over thirty countries have participated in the Midorikai program (Midorikai, Non-Japanese Students Division, Urasenke Gakuen Professional College of Chado, n/d).

Besides the *mingei* group, other renowned Japanese potters, such as Kitaoji Rosanjin (who was also a calligrapher, collector and restaurateurs) and Toyo Kaneshige (nominated Living National Treasure in 1955 for his techniques of Bizen ware) also traveled the West in the 1960s and 1970s, spreading their knowledge and vision of Japanese ceramics, thus encouraging Western potters to come and study ceramics in Japan. The visit of Japanese artists and craftsman to the West was expanded with the creation of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (*bunkacho*) in 1968 as an extra extra-ministerial bureau of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Together with Japan Foundation, established in 1972 with the aim of disseminating Japanese culture internationally, which currently holds overseas offices in twenty-four countries, the Japanese government has taken an active role in promoting its officially-endorsed Japanese culture abroad. By sending Japanese artists and cultural specialists overseas, it has been introducing Japanese traditional arts and culture to a foreign audience, contributing to deepening international exchanges.

Together with these, university programs to study abroad in Japan slowly started to develop in the 1970s but were still unusual in comparison to the opportunities to study in Europe. American Gary Moler, who first came to Japan as an exchange student in 1972, claimed that his university was one of the first in the United States to offer exchange programs with Japan. This period also coincides with the Japanese government support of Japanese Studies and language education abroad, with prime-minister Kakuei Tanaka providing ten million dollars for the funding of such programs in the United States in 1973 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1973). In addition, potters of this generation were also introduced to Japanese culture and ceramics through artists and intellectuals who had been in Japan during the American Occupation and the first years after Japan regained its independence in 1952. This was the case of Richard Milgrim, who had his first contact with Japan through professors who had lived in the country during some period of their lives:

I was studying ceramics and Japanese history, Japanese culture and the teachers that I had, even though it was a very small school, I had a couple of ceramics teachers who had lived in Kyoto when they were young (...). So they were very proudly influenced by Japan at an early stage in their lives. They went back and lived in America and grew up as Americans, but they always had a very strong sort of allegiance or love for Japan (...). They were very instrumental in showing me all about Japanese ceramics and I took a strong interest in it right away (Richard Milgrim, February 2017).

Anthropologist Robert J. Smith (1992: 213) has stated that, when he first offered his course on Japanese Society in 1953 at Cornell University in the United States, which had "a fairly substantial enrollment", most of the students were "attracted by exotica of any provenience; some had brushed up against Tea, Flower Arranging, and Zen; others simply had heard from friends and relatives that Japan was quite an interesting place". In fact, the American Occupation of the country also stirred up the curiosity of people who had never been there but had heard stories from their relatives and acquaintances.

In sum, arriving from the mid-1960s up to the 1970s, the subjects of this pioneering generation have now been living and working in Japan for at least four decades, which makes their time spent in Japan twice as long as the time spent in their home countries before their first arrived. While all of them have established their lives in Japan permanently, some have left the country for longer periods at a particular stage in their lives, as was the case of Randy Woosley, who returned to Canada between 1975 and 1989. Others have split their time between two countries, like Richard Milgrim, who spent thirteen years from 2000 to 2013 going back and forth between Japan and the United States.

1.8.2. The bubble generation

In the 1980s, the Japanese discourse of internationalization (*kokusaika*) took off and opportunities for foreigners to come to the country boosted exponentially with the peak of Japan's economic miracle. This moment was also marked by the beginning of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program, which officially started in 1987 through the joining of different programs from different countries. The opportunity to visit the country while earning a living teaching their native language especially benefited English-speakers, who were in high demand during this period of aspiring internationalization. Richard Truckle, who arrived in Japan in 1984 after traveling around Asia, was one of the many potters and artists of this generation who were drawn by the possibility of funding their travels and ceramic endeavors through English in Japan:

Well, it was an adventure basically. What I did was I got on a train in London, took the train to Athens, got off the train on Christmas Day at Athens, flew to Bombay, spent a couple of months traveling around India (...). Then I went to Thailand and then from Thailand to Hong Kong and then from Hong Kong into China for about a month, a month and a half around southern China and then back to Hong Kong and then I had enough money to either buy a ticket to get back to England or to fly to Japan (...). So I flew to Japan. (...) [I decided to come

to Japan] because I'd met quite a lot of people who said that they were in Japan, they were taking holidays in Japan, who were teaching English in Japan and making lots of money (Richard Truckle, February 2017).

Furthermore, getting an English teaching job was one of the few available ways for foreigners to stay in the country for longer periods. In fact, the Japan Immigration Control Law created in 1952 did not encourage immigration, making it very difficult to get a visa at that time. Moreover, getting a permanent visa was a long and complicated process in spite of how long they had been in the country, as was the case of Kyoto-based Canadian Tracey Glass, to whom it took fifteen years. Thus, many of those who came before 1989 either came as exchange students, had a work visa or entered Japan with a tourist visa that was only valid for three months. Randy Woolsey talked about his regular trips to neighboring Korea to renew his tourist visa:

I couldn't spend three years in Mashiko because of the visa. And I was in a hurry; all of the rest of the [apprentices at Tsukamoto] were my age, some a bit younger, but they were taking it easy, the Japanese. But I couldn't take it easy because I was afraid that I would run out of visa extensions. And I used to have to go all the way to Korea and I would take the local train all the way from Kasama to Shimonoseki, Kyushu and then get on a ferry boat. They had *shinkansen* [bullet train] but it cost too much money (Randy Woolsey, November 2017).

Despite this, the 1980s saw the development of transnational networks worldwide and labor shortages nationwide that led to a growing influx of migrants to the country. Amongst them were what Komai (2001:18) has called people looking for “self-actualization”, which included exchange students. In fact, boosted by the discourse of internationalization, the Japanese government launched the ‘Plan to Accept 100,000 Foreign Students’ in 1983, which encouraged many young foreigners to come and study in Japan. Furthermore, the expansion of international travel and university exchanges worldwide stimulated the visit of Japanese artists and

intellectuals to the West and Westerners to Japan and, in this context, more potters came to Japan to practice ceramics in from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s.

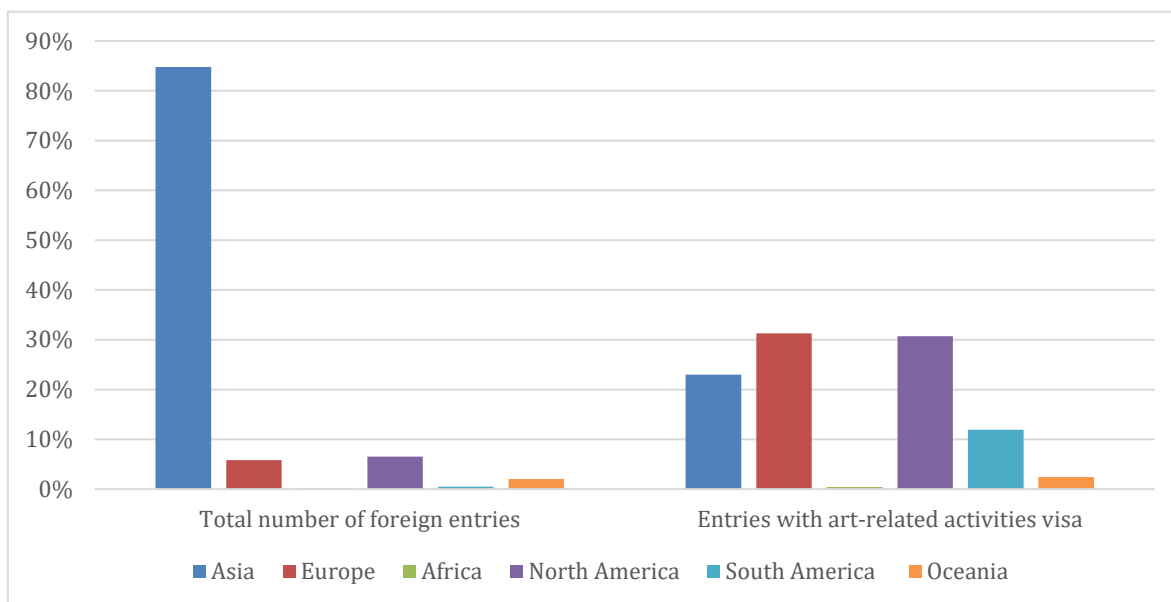
In 1989, Japan finally reformed its Immigration Control Law in response to increased flows and overstaying, which recognized ten new visa categories to facilitate the immigration of professionals and skilled workers. For our subjects, this meant the possibility of coming to the country with a one-year cultural activities visa and stop relying on the periodically renewable tourist visa or English teaching jobs. Furthermore, some subjects also came with a visa specific to the undertaking of art-related activities during this period. In fact, according to data from the Ministry of Justice, foreign entrances in Japan with this type of visa tripled between 1979 and 1989, when it reached 3,633 entries, after which is drastically decreased (see in Figure 1.5. below). However, it is worth noting that, even at its peak in 1989, entrance with art-related activities visa represented only 0.1% of all foreign entries into the country. According to data of the Ministry of Justice from 2017, while the vast majority of foreign entries in Japan are from nationals of other Asian countries (85%), with Europeans and North Americans representing only 12%, the majority of those who entered in Japan with an art-related working visa in 2017 came from Europe and the United States (62%), thus showing the racial inequalities present within the visa acquisition process (see Figure 1.6.).

Figure 1.5: Foreign entries in Japan with art-related activities visa (1952-2016)



Source: Ministry of Justice

Figure 1.6: Foreign entries in Japan with art-related activities visa (2017) - Percentage by continent of origin



Source: Ministry of Justice, 2017

This is also present in our sample, with the first generation of potters being outweighed by people from English-speaking countries, with four subjects being from the United States, two from Canada and one from Portugal. Nonetheless, the second period witnessed a diversification, with more potters coming from non-English speaking European countries such as Portugal, Spain, Hungary and also Brazil. In fact, the arrival of the second generation of potters coincides with the outburst of migrants of Japanese ascendance coming from South America. This was made possible by the new immigration law that provided long-term residence to second and third generation Japanese descendants and their spouses to engage in any activity in the country. In particular, second-generation Japanese-Brazilian Regina Goto was one of the subjects that benefited from this reform. However, even in the second period, American nationals still comprised one-third of the total of arrivals in our sample and, thus, nationals from English-speaking countries remain the majority (65%). This shows not only the historical trajectories between the two regions but, once again, racial hierarchies and inequalities in mobility and migration.

Contrary to the first generation, not all subjects from this second generation ended up establishing their lives permanently in the country. Moreover, the process of obtaining a permanent visa is often more complicated for those not married to

Japanese nationals or who are not bound by a formal work contract. While some subjects have managed to stay the country with an art-related activities visa for extended periods, they must demonstrate their artistic accomplishments and income to the immigration authorities in order to renew their visa every three years until they get permanent residency.

In fact, the vast majority of those who established themselves permanently in the country have married Japanese nationals (twenty-three out of twenty-seven subjects), thus becoming eligible to receive a spouse visa and apply for the permanent visa after a few years². This shows how foreigner residents in Japan often have to rely on their Japanese spouses for permanent settlement in the country, with foreign couples thus facing greater instability. Moreover, gender inequalities visible in the patterns of international marriage in Japan, which are still dominated by “Western husband, Japanese wife” pattern by three to one (Ministry of Justice, 2017) mean that, for women, not having a Japanese spouse can hinder permanent stay. Furthermore, while marriage to a Japanese national seems natural given the fact that the subjects are living in a country where more than ninety-eight percent of its residents are Japanese, many rely on their Japanese spouses, who in many cases are also potters, as an important source of support in their everyday lives, as pointed out by Spanish potter Jesualdo Fernandez-Bravo.

If you pay attention, there is a common fact amongst all the foreigners you met in Mashiko: all of them are married to Japanese. I believe it is impossible [for a foreigner living in Japan] to move forward by his or her own means. I don't know any potter who has done it (Jesualdo Fernandez-Bravo, February 2013, translated from Spanish).

This is partly because the majority of the subjects cannot read and write Japanese fluently, which can be a challenge when dealing with the country's bureaucracy. In fact, many have come to Japan with no previous knowledge of the language and taught themselves or have learned through osmosis after arrival. Thus,

² The number of years of residence needed to apply for a permanent visa in Japan depends on the visa status of the applicant.

while they can speak Japanese fluently enough to communicate with others in their everyday lives (with a few exceptions comprising of those who are mainly surrounded by other foreign nationals or whose partners speak their native languages), most of the subjects lack the same level of fluency in reading and writing. However, it is interesting to note how some of the subjects who have been living for the country the longest have started losing fluency in their native languages, a question that might be interesting for linguists to explore.

Reliance on Japanese spouses can also put the subjects in a fragile position in case of divorce, especially when regarding the children's custody. While not limited to international marriages, issues involving forced separation between parent and child are not uncommon in Japan due to the inexistence of joint custody under Japanese laws, a situation that has affected at least one of our subjects.

1.8.3. The "Lost Decade"

Even though the Immigration Control Law Act of 1989 was meant to encourage the entrance of high skilled workers, this period saw the inflow of low-wage laborers from Asia and Japanese descendants from South America, facilitated by the reform and thus new restrictions were quickly implemented. However, the collapse of the bubble economy in 1991 led to a stagnation period, worsened by the Kobe earthquake and the sarin gas attacks of 1995, leading to a climate of national instability and recession that lasted for at least ten years and therefore became known as "the lost decade".

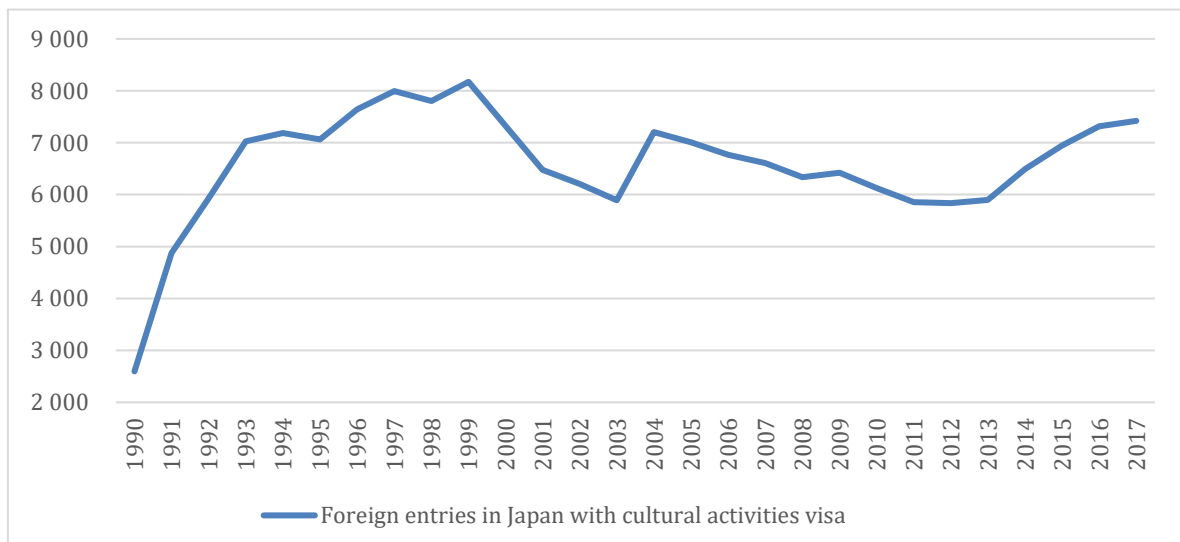
Nonetheless, even after the bubble burst, three subjects still came to the country in 1993. This might be due to the fact that the bubble collapse had a sudden and drastic effect on most corporations but did not affect potters and the general population until later, as Douglas Black explains in the quote below:

We didn't know, when they said it "burst", we didn't know because it was still going really good (...). For pottery, for me, I mean, it was going up fast (...). I did really good business. Anything I made was sold, I didn't have stuff for me to eat

on, because I sold everything (...). 1998 was when my sales first started going down. [Before then] I was in my own world. I didn't even know, like, what bubble? (Douglas Black, June 2016)

Despite the economic recession, entrances with cultural-activities visa grew exponentially until 1999, as shown in the figure below. This situation did not, however, reflect in our sample, with only one potter coming to Japan to teach English through the JET program between 1994 and 2005.

Figure 1.7: Total of foreign entries in Japan with cultural activities visa (1990-2017)



Source: Japan Ministry of Justice

1.8.4. New generation

The mid-2000s started witnessing a slow recovery, with four subjects arriving in the country between 2006 and 2009 and more people coming after 2010, as possibilities for getting a visa became more available and diversified. In particular, the expansion of the working holiday program from the 2000s provided the opportunity for people between 18 to 30 years of age to come to Japan both to travel and work in remunerated activities for up to one year. Starting in 1980 through a bilateral arrangement with Australia, the program now includes agreements with twenty countries (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Korea, France, Germany, United Kingdom,

Ireland, Denmark, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Norway, Portugal, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Spain, Argentina and Chile), the majority of which are part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), thus showing once again the inequalities existent in mobility.

Besides providing foreign nationals with the opportunity to come to study or work in Japan for a specific length of time, these programs also function as a way of the Japanese government exercising soft power through cultural diplomacy, as it encourages non-Japanese nationals to come for one year to travel or study traditional arts and culture and then promote these activities after returning to their countries. In fact, these visas are not meant to promote long-term stay and many cannot be renewed, as is the case of the working holiday visa, or do not allow paid work, such as the cultural activities visa, thus hindering extended stay.

This new generation of Western potters coming to Japan also coincides with the growing reputation of Japanese popular culture abroad and the consequent launching of the Cool Japan nation branding program by the Japanese government in 2010. As explored in the second chapter of part one, besides *manga* and *anime*, Cool Japan has drawn on traditional Japanese values and craftsmanship to convey ideas of Japaneseness and apply them to contemporary art and design. This idea of Japan as a “living past” is visible in the quote by American Kate Strachan when questioned about her motivations to come and practice ceramics in the country:

Since everyone in the ceramic community in the US was always talking about how amazing the history of Japanese ceramics was, instead of reading about the past, why don't I live it? (Kate Strachan, June 2018)

Nonetheless, for some, reality did not always meet expectations. In particular, for those who came to learn within the traditional apprenticeship system or at an individual potters' studio, everyday life can become a constant negotiation between romanticized images of Japan and on-site experiences sometimes marked by what might be perceived as exploitation, as we will see in the next chapter. Hence, in recent years, more subjects have been coming to Japan to practice ceramics outside this system by either formally enrolling at art universities and ceramic technical

institutions (four subjects) or working as assistants at *hobby* pottery schools (three subjects), where hierarchies are slightly more flexible. This also explains the increased number of women arriving in this period (56%), which doubled when compared to the previous generations (25%).

In fact, the majority of Western potters of this generation have a university background in arts and design and have come to Japan looking to perfect their technical skills, rather than motivated by a sense of adventure. Some mentioned their dissatisfaction with the art courses in the West, which focus more on theory and concept and touch very little on the practical side of making. Many are looking for a higher appreciation of craftsmanship since ceramics in the West are mostly seen as an industrial product and thus manufactured with ready-made materials and the help of machines, often not involving the participation of nature and the human hand in the process. In this sense, coming to Japan appears as a way to explore pottery beyond Western dichotomies between art and industry:

In Germany, there is almost no public interest in/ or appreciation of craftsmen. That's why most ceramicists call themselves either Designer or Artist (Mirjam Watajima, July 2018).

Furthermore, for some subjects, coming to Japan to practice ceramics appears as an opportunity to explore different techniques that are not available in their countries, one of them being high-temperature wood-firing. The possibility to come to Japan to learn pottery is enhanced by the prospect of experiencing everyday life in the Japanese countryside, as stressed by twenty-five-year-old French potter Josephine Marinho. Her dream is to buy an old traditional wooden house in Sasama to establish her own pottery studio in the future. However, many of the potters of this generation are still struggling with the process of obtaining a visa that would allow them to stay in the country for longer periods of time and develop their work.

1.9. Conclusion

Benson and Riley (2009) have defined lifestyle migration as the relocation of people within the developed world searching for a better way of life and self-realization, stressing the role of imagination, myth and landscape in the trajectories of these migrants. While the majority of the subjects did not originally envision migration, they eventually ended up in that situation. Thus, similarly to the Western lifestyle migrants in India studied by Korpela (2009), our subjects' stories of mobility can be understood as a particular case within the trend of lifestyle migration. In fact, for the majority of them, coming to Japan was meant as a transitory experience in a moment of liminality such as finishing higher education, a common practice in the West.

In this sense, while these Westerners might represent an insignificant portion of migration to Japan, their life-stories highlight important aspects of global mobility and international migration today, its increased diversity and complexity (Favell, 2014; Debbar, 2016). The blurring of boundaries is represented in their stories in which mobility is blended into migration through the experience of international travel, short-term plans and improvisation, for the majority did not come to the country with the goal of migrating, but just ended up staying. Thus, despite their heterogeneity, the trajectories of Western potters in Japan reflect a different face of migration beyond economic motivations, showing the role of cultural imaginings, sense of adventure and search for self-realization in the process, which are often overlooked. Hence, their stories show the limits of the dichotomies of low-skilled versus high-skilled migrants that dominate the analysis of migration today (Favell, 2014).

In fact, while Westerners migrants are often portrayed as privileged transnational elites, the massification of international travel resulting from globalization has made it possible for an ambitious or adventurous middle class to pursue career and education opportunities abroad (*ibid.*: 131). This type of migration dominated by lifestyle orientations and cultural motivations is still, however, poorly studied, especially when looking at in from West to Eastward direction³. Lastly, their struggles in establishing permanently in the country also expose the limitations of the

³ See Sato (2011) for a study of Japanese lifestyle migration to Australia and Debbar (2016) for European migrants in Japan.

current visa categories in accommodating this type of migrants and, in this context, their stories appear as important cases in approaching immigration policies and integration patterns, as proposed by Debnar (2011, 2016).

In the next chapter, I will delve into the life-story accounts of four Western potters and two pottery learners who arrived in the small countryside town of Mashiko motivated, in part, by the transnational trajectories of the *mingei* movement and the region's openness to outsiders. The first section looks at the pottery town in its historical and socio-artistic developments, which sets the background for the potters to narrate their stories in the second section of chapter two. Finally, in the third chapter, we will see how imaginings of Japan are reflected in the potters' discourse, technical processes, lifestyles and worldviews, showing their hybrid identities, cosmopolitan aspirations and universal features reflected in a quest for self-realization, self-fulfillment and a good life⁴.

⁴ See Manzenreiter and Holthus (ed.) for a detailed investigation about happiness and the search for a good life in Japan (2017).

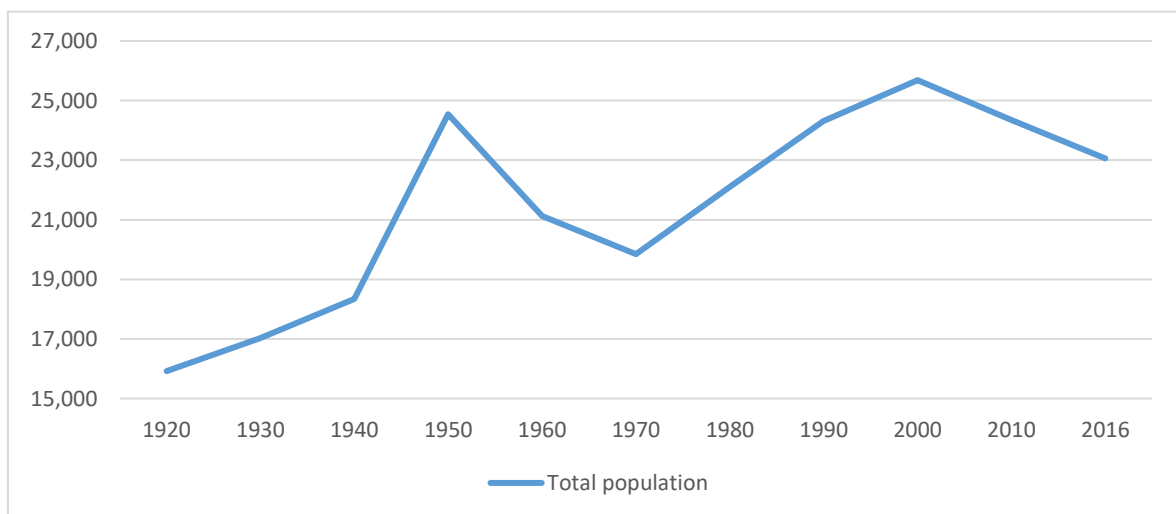
2. Life-story of Western potters in Mashiko

2.1. The place

2.1.1. Introduction

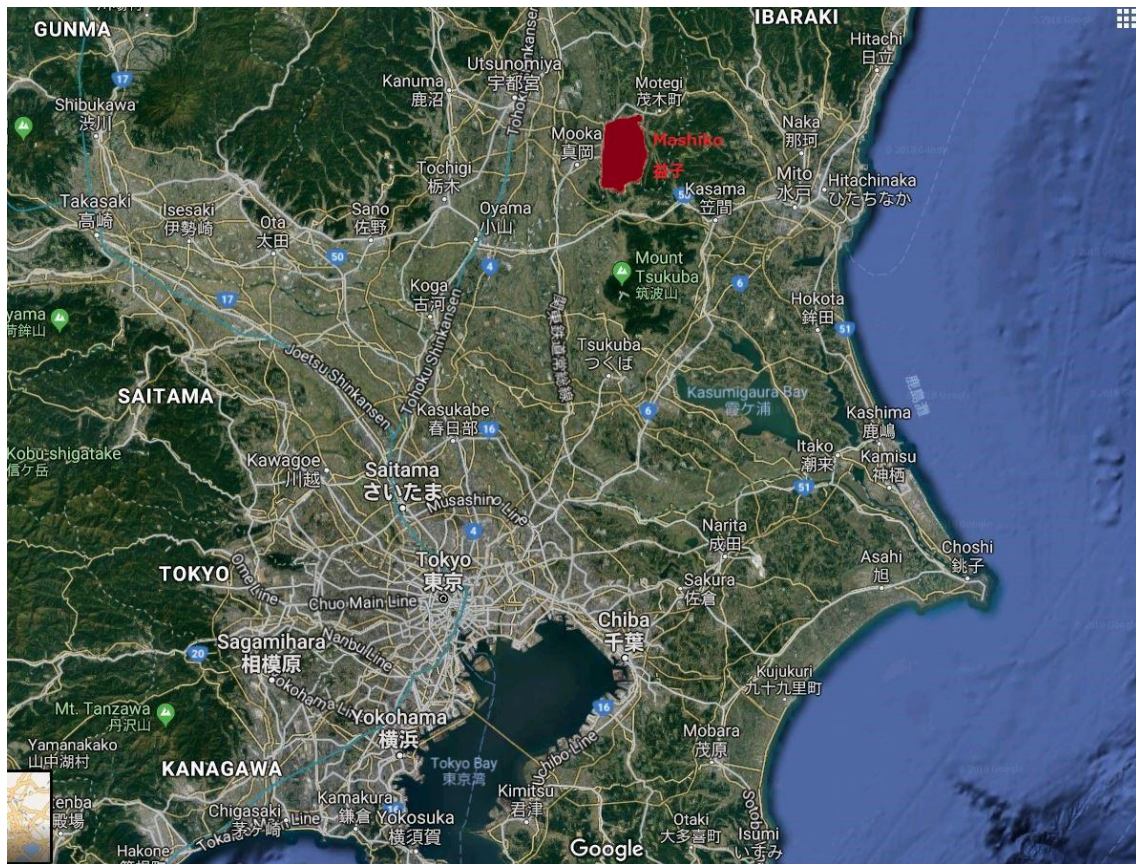
Mashiko is a small countryside town in the Haga district of Tochigi prefecture, located in the northern part of the Kanto plain about 150 km from Tokyo. The town is accessible by train through the Mooca railway from Shimodate (Ibaraki prefecture) or by a direct bus from Tokyo, the Yakimono (Pottery) Liner, which departs from Akihabara and also passes through the pottery town of Kasama, located around forty kilometers from Mashiko. The town's eighty-nine square kilometers are mainly comprised of mountain forests and farming fields, hosting a total of 22,631 people and 7,842 households as of February 2018. According to the Mashiko Town Statistics (2017), the population ratio hasn't changed much in the past few decades, with the town experiencing considerable growth up until the 1950s but decreasing by one fifth in the following two decades. After a slow recovery from the 1970s, the population has started to decrease again in the turn of the millennium, as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Total population of Mashiko by decade (1920-2016)



Source: Mashiko Town Statistics, 2017.

Figure 2.2: Location of Mashiko town in the Kanto plain from satellite



Source: Google Maps, 2018

Figure 2.3: Mashiko town's typical landscape



Source: Photo by the author.

In 1975, Mashiko had only twenty-five registered foreign residents, contrasting to 219 in 2011, most of whom are from other Asian countries, even though the last few years have seen a growth in residents from South America (Mashiko Town Statistics, 2017). However, many of those who work in Mashiko reside in the neighboring municipalities of Ichikai, Motegi and Mooca, the latter known for its Brazilian community. Despite its concentration of non-Japanese potters in comparison to other traditional pottery areas in Japan, the total number of foreign residents from the Western residents accounted for about thirty before the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, when many have left the region even if temporarily. Yet, after the disaster, some have returned to their homeland or ended up establishing in other areas of the country, as was the case of Euan Craig and Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo, whose life-story accounts will be presented in the next section of this chapter.

Despite being a rural region historically dependent on agricultural activities, Mashiko's economy is now mostly based on ceramic-related tourism. In fact, before specialization of labor in the post-war era and the *mingei* boom, potters were also farmers, working on the fields during the summer months and make pottery in the winter. But this reality has now changed. While in 1970, forty percent of Mashiko's population was still dedicated to farming, today, farmers account only for seven percent of the town's residents (Mashiko Town Statistics, 2017). And, as of 2010, almost thirty percent worked in the manufacturing industry, followed by wholesale and retail (15%).

In 2016, the Mashiko ceramic business was comprised of 236 units, against 344 in 1995, 204 of which are in manufacturing, 25 in retailing and only one in the wholesaling industry (Mashiko Pottery Statistics Survey Report, 2016). However, given the small size of the town's territory (89.40 km²), many pottery studios are also located in the surrounding municipalities of Motegi and Ichikai. According to Tsukamoto, about ninety percent of the kilns nowadays are owned by individual ceramic artists, most of whom have come from outside the city.

Confirming to the Mashiko Pottery Statistics Survey Report (2016), the majority of the operating businesses in Mashiko opened between 1976 and 1988, during the so-called *mingei* boom and the highest peak of the Japanese economy. However, only two new ceramic businesses have opened after 2008. Similarly, the number of employees in the ceramic industry has decreased almost by half, from 1,044 in 1986 to 714 in 2016.

Furthermore, sales of Mashiko pottery decreased to less than one third from 9.5 billion yen in 1998 to 2.9 billion yen in 2016. This reflects the situation of traditional craft industries nationwide, where changes in lifestyle and consumers' tastes together with lowering prices due to the flow of cheap imports, aggravated by the aging population and exodus of youngsters from rural to urban areas, has led to economic decline. However, while rural exodus has become a pressing issue in most countryside areas in Japan, Mashiko has been able to keep a steady population by compensate migration to urban areas with the continuous settlement of potters coming from others areas of Japan, attracted by the town's openness to outsiders, its pottery history and infrastructure, agreeable weather and its closeness to the capital.

Yet, even though youngsters are still coming to Mashiko to practice ceramics, with some eventually establishing their studios in the town while working part-time at non-ceramic related jobs, the use of traditional techniques and materials has been slowly decreasing. In the last few decades, the region has also witnessed the waning of the *kamamoto*, the traditional potteries comprised of a master and several workers and apprentices working with big wood-firing kilns and local materials. In fact, while in 1986 almost eighty percent of the clay used in Mashiko potteries came from within the region, in 2016 two-thirds came from outside. Nonetheless, wheel throwing is still the most common molding technique, followed by molds, hand and machine. Since 1986, the most common type of kiln used in the city has been gas (accounting for 233 units in 2016), followed by electric kiln (68 units), oil kiln (57 units), wood-fired climbing kiln (*noborigama*) (which decreased from 92 in 1986 to 40 in 2016) and wood-fired hole kiln (*anagama*) (20 units) (Mashiko Pottery Statistics Survey Report, 2016).

The town hosts a Pottery Fair twice a year in spring and fall, receiving around 600,000 tourists annually, and the Hijisai – Living with the Earth Festival once every three years. Besides seasonal events, Mashiko also receives tourists throughout the year, who go to the village to buy ceramics or just stroll around the craft galleries concentrated on its Jonazaika pottery street, near where the Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art opened in 1993 is also located.

Besides pottery, the region is also famous for *aizome* indigo dyeing, represented by the Higeta Indigo House, which has been producing since the Edo era. The town also accommodates various Buddhist temples, shrines and other cultural assets, the most

famous being the Saimyoji, built in the eighth century and designated as an Important Cultural Property of Japan. The town hosts diverse traditional folk events such as the Gion Festival, held in July 23th to 25th every year, which consists of carrying *omikoshi*, lion dance, and the traditional hand-held canon fireworks.



Figure 2.4: Higeta Aizome Kobo, Indigo Dyeing Studio Mashiko. Photo by the author.



Figure 2.5: Tezutsu hanabi (hand canon fireworks), Gion Festival. Photo by the author, August 2016.



Figure 2.6: Carrying *omikoshi* (portable shrine), Gion Festival. Photo by the author, August 2016.

2.1.2. A brief history of Mashiko ceramics

The earliest ceramics found in Mashiko date back to the prehistoric Jomon and Yayoi eras. Yet, the village flourished as a pottery center only from the end of the Edo period, when potter Otsuka Keizaburo (1828-1876), who had learned ceramics in the neighboring town of Kasama, built his kiln there in 1853, after discovering good quality clay in the region. From 1857, Mashiko kilns came under the patronage of Kurobane clan, with the *han* administration taking responsibility for the distribution of Mashiko pottery, which was transported by horse to Kinugawa river bank (in today's Mooca city), from where it then traveled by ship to Edo (today's Tokyo), where it was marketed. After 1871, with the Meiji Restoration and the abolition of feudal domains, kilns were privatized and potters from regions such as Shigaraki started moving to the region, generating a considerable increase in the number of kiln sites, which amounted for around twenty at the end of the Edo period.

With the high demand for everyday goods from Tokyo, the capital city and main market of ceramic wares in Japan, Mashiko became the largest pottery center in the Kanto area, known for the production of kitchen and domestic wares. The so-called landscape teapots (*sansuidobin*), with their under-glazed paintings of landscape, were especially popular during the Meiji era, with Mashiko ceramic painter Masu Minagawa's (1875-1960) landscape teapot winning the first prize at the First International Craft Exhibition held in Berlin in 1938. In 1903, the Mashiko Ceramics Association was created and, in 1913, the Mashiko Ceramics Training Center, known today as the Industrial Technology Center of Tochigi Prefecture, was established. The institute now works as a research center dedicated to promoting the development of ceramics and ceramic specialists in the region but has been struggling with a lack of students in the past decade.

The Great Kanto earthquake of 1923 and the subsequent destruction of everyday goods in the capital caused an outburst of demand for Mashiko ceramics, with potters from the region profiting greatly from the disaster. Production of kitchen and tableware for daily use, such as *kishadobin* (train teapots), *zakki* (recipient to put *miso*), *kame* (used for *tsukemono*) and *kamakko* (lunchboxes) continued to flourish during the Taisho and early Showa eras. While the decades of recession between the two World Wars were

hard on Mashiko potters, the region prospered from the 1950s and especially in the 1970s, during the so-called *mingei* boom, when it experienced considerable growth.

2.1.3. Mashiko and Hamada

Despite its ceramic history, Mashiko truly gained fame after Shoji Hamada (1894-1978), established his studio there in 1924. Born in Kawasaki, Kanagawa Prefecture, Hamada studied the technical and chemical aspects of ceramics at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. Not coming from a potters' family lineage and interested in becoming an artist-potter instead of a traditional craftsman (*shokunin*), Hamada moved to Kyoto to work at the city's Municipal Ceramic Laboratory together with Kawai Kanjiro, who had been his senior during his ceramic studies. There, they met philosopher Soetsu Yanagi and potter Kenkichi Tomimoto, who was familiar with the Arts and Crafts movement after having traveled to England in 1908.

In 1919, Hamada met English potter and etching artist Bernard Leach at one of his exhibitions in Tokyo and the two quickly developed a close friendship. In 1920, Hamada was invited by Leach to help build his pottery's studio in St. Ives, a seaside town located in the Cornwall peninsula in the southwest of England, about 600 kilometers west of London. While the area started off as an artists' colony in the late nineteenth century, it later became a famous summer holiday and tourist area.

Hamada stayed in St. Ives with Leach for three years, between 1920 and 1923, where he supervised the building of what is known as the first East-Asian style climbing kiln (*noborigama*) of the West. The rapid extinction of the British traditional craftsman as a result of industrialization, mechanization and urbanization led Bernard Leach to resort to groups of Japanese artists and potters brought to St. Ives for reference.

Before returning to Japan, Hamada had his first one-man exhibition in London and traveled around Europe. After returning to Japan, he spent several weeks in Okinawa and was deeply influenced by the region's pottery tradition, which inspired to want to work in the countryside with locally sourced materials. In fact, contrary to many of his artist-potters friends who established their studio potteries in urban centers, Hamada

chose the rural region of Mashiko, attracted by the simple countryside life, to develop his work.

After moving to Mashiko in 1924, Hamada borrowed a kiln from Okoshigama, now located at the Mashiko Pottery Cooperation Center. There, he worked with Totaro Sakuma (1900-1976), who, as the story goes, thought of him as a strange man with Westernized manners. In 1925, Hamada held the first of many annual one-man shows in Tokyo and in 1930, he bought a traditional farmers' residence in the neighboring town of Ichikai, where he established his home and studio, building his first wood-fired climbing kiln (*noborigama*).

In 1926, Hamada, Yanagi and Kawai officially founded the *mingei* movement during a meeting at a temple in the Buddhist pilgrimage region of Mount Koya. In 1929 and 1931, Hamada traveled to England again to exhibit at the Paterson's Gallery in London and, in 1932, he went with Leach to the United States, where he would return several times during the following decades. In 1934, Leach visited Hamada in Mashiko for the first time and they made a joint firing, receiving hundreds of visitors from Tokyo for its opening. Due to Hamada and Leach and their connection to the *mingei* movement, Mashiko became a place of peregrination for folk pottery in Japan, receiving visitors from all around Japan and the world. Some of them Hamada would host at his house, which became a gathering ground for cultural and artistic exchanges.

While there was a pottery tradition already established in Mashiko by the time Hamada opened his studio in the region, the artist-potter searched for new materials and developed new glazes and techniques, while taking inspiration from the traditional Mashiko style known for the use of local red-brown clay decorated with red and iron glaze. Furthermore, Hamada drew inspiration from other pottery traditions such as the ceramics of Chinese Sung dynasty, simple Korean folk wares, Okinawa traditional pottery and English medieval slipware, showing the transnational origins and hybridized features of what has now become the standard of the Japanese folk pottery style.

Furthermore, when Hamada established his studio in Mashiko in the 1920s, increasing industrialization together with the growing demand for pottery from urban areas, where an emergent middle-class was feeding the expansion of Japanese consumer society, was encouraging traditional workshops to turn into factories and abandon traditional local methods and materials for industrial ones. While the presence

of Hamada and his endorsement and propagation of the *mingei* philosophy eventually contributed to slowing down this process, it also led to the standardization of Mashiko pottery, with Hamada's original style being copied, produced and sold by factories in the region in high quantities at low quality standards. Thus, after the Second World War and the subsequent *mingei boom* of the 1960s and 1970s, many of Mashiko's ceramic manufacturers changed from the production of traditional goods to the making of Hamada-style folk pottery.

Nonetheless, even though Hamada was an outsider to Mashiko and the traditional Japanese pottery system (as mentioned before, he did not come from a lineage of craftsman and had not been trained in the traditional master-apprentice organization), he taught many young potters and also hired apprentices (*deshi*) and craftsman (*shokunin*) who helped with different stages of his production in a system known as *bungyou* (specialized labor division). However, he is considered one of the pioneers in the establishment of studio pottery in Japan, characterized by the small-scale production of objects by one or a small group of artists without relying on other professionals for the execution of different stages of production. This style of work contrasted with the system of the traditional pottery workshops known *kamamoto*, whose dynamics were similar to Europe's medieval craft guilds.

Thus, in his workshop in Mashiko, Hamada established a system that mixed the newly created studio pottery tradition with the *kamamoto*, where the transmission of techniques and business ownership was passed down from father to son (either biological or adopted), following the system of the *iemoto*. In this system, even though the master usually passed the business on to his eldest son, he would often hire apprentices from other families. These would be provided with accommodation, meals and training in his master's trade in exchange for labor, for a period between three and ten years. Hence, the apprentice was expected to learn the master's business and leave to set up his own individual pottery elsewhere, while the master's son would apprentice under another master and come back to take over his father's business after a few years. In fact, while Hamada's workshop was passed down to his grandson Tomoo Hamada (1961-), he taught many apprentices, including Tatsuzo Shimaoka, who would become the second Living National Treasure of Mashiko in 1996, after Hamada being awarded the title in 1955.

Despite his national and international recognition, Hamada made mostly unsigned functional wares with local clay and raw materials for glazes and grew his own vegetables in the land surrounding his studio, thus miming the traditional farmer-potters of the past. American artist and ceramic teacher Susan Peterson, who visited Hamada in Mashiko many times, writing several books about him, describes his life and work as follows:

Hamada was a scholar who brought works made by the world's anonymous craftsmen to put in museums in Japan so that his countrymen could see the "daily work" of the centuries. He emulated the life of a peasant farmer, growing much of his own foodstuff with the same care and on the same land as the clay was refined, and as the pots were made and fired. He worked in the village tradition but his wares were exhibited internationally in fine galleries. He did not sign his pots, but he did sign specially made boxes into which the pot fit if the collector paid extra for the box (Peterson, 1990: 13).

In 1942, Hamada moved to a new residence in Mashiko town, where he established a new home and studio and built several wood-fired climbing kilns. In 1977, he opened the place as a museum, which is now known as the Shoji Hamada Memorial Museum. There, visitors can tour his personal collection of pottery and other craft objects from around the world, including China, Korea, Taiwan, the Pacific Islands, Middle East, Europe and South America, both ancient and modern. In fact, Hamada was also an enthusiast of modern design and owned one of the famed lounge chairs made by American designers Charles and Ray Eames, a gift from them to Hamada and now exhibited at his Memorial Museum. In 2015, the place hosted the Shoji Hamada Noborigama Revival project, in which sixty Mashiko potters fired their works in Hamada's kiln for the first time in forty years. The project had its second edition in February 2018, which allowed for the participation of more than eighty Japanese and non-Japanese potters working in Mashiko and Kasama, firing more than 5,000 clay works.

Hamada passed away in 1978 at the age of eighty-three years old. During his lifetime, he received numerous cultural honors in Japan, the United States and Britain

and was one of the first artists to receive the title of Living National Treasure from the Japanese government. In 1968, he was awarded the Order of Culture and, in 1979, one year after his death, Mashiko style was designated as a Traditional Craft Product of Japan.



Figure 2.7: Hamada's old house turned into the Hamada Shoji Memorial Mashiko Sankokan Museum. Photo by the author.



Figure 2.8: Replica of Hamada's *noborigama* kiln at the Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art. Photo by the author.

2.1.4. Shimaoka and the acceptance of foreign apprentices

Born in Tokyo in 1919, Tatsuzo Shimaoka was the son of a rope-maker, a fact that has presumably influenced the development of his characteristic cord marked inlay (*Jomon-zogan*) technique, which granted him the title of Living National Treasure in 1996. During a visit to the Japanese Folk Crafts Museum in 1938, he came in contact with the *mingei* movement and decided to enroll in the ceramics course at the Tokyo Technical University. In 1940, he visited Hamada's studio in Mashiko for the first time,

becoming his apprentice from 1946 to 1949, after serving in Burma during the Second World War. In 1950, he joined the Tochigi Ceramic Research Centre and, in 1953, established his own pottery studio in Mashiko, next door to Hamada. Despite his initial ties with the *mingei* movement, Shimaoka signed his pieces, thus contradicting the *mingei* principal of anonymity. In fact, he withdrew from the Japan Art Association (*Kokugakai*), one of the main official organizations of the *mingei*, in 1991. He passed away in 2007 at the age of eighty-eight.

Between 1964 and 2001, Shimaoka traveled abroad countless times, giving lectures, teaching and holding exhibitions in museums and colleges all around the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Because of this, he became one of the most internationally famous contemporary Japanese potters and was perhaps more famous abroad than in Japan, acting as a cultural ambassador for Japanese ceramics all around the world. His work has been acquired by museums in Britain, the United States, Canada, Germany, Israel and China.

By virtue of his connection with Hamada and the popularity of both potters as representatives of the *mingei* movement and pioneers in the Mashiko folk pottery tradition, Shimaoka taught hundreds of students, both Japanese and foreigners, at his studio in Mashiko, over the course of three decades. His daughter, glass artist Yoshiko Fudeya, remembers growing up in the small countryside town surrounded by the young foreign artists, potters and students that were apprenticing at her father's workshop. Most of them came in the 1970s, at the height of countercultural movements that encouraged a young and adventurous Western middle-class to travel abroad. In our interview with her, Fudeya confessed that, at that time, *we were all hippies*. She amusingly recalled a particular event, in which one of Shimaoka's first foreign female students from the United States was seen swimming naked in the river by local Mashiko residents. The story was talked about all over town and has now become a well-known local anecdote that demonstrates how two very different realities came together in a small countryside Japanese town.

According to Fudeya, foreign students started coming to Mashiko around the year 1965, after meeting Shimaoka at one of his lectures or demonstrations abroad. As reported by Euan Craig, contacts between prospective foreign students and Shimaoka were also made through introductions from university professors or embassy employees,

who knew either Hamada or Shimaoka. Originally, people wanting to study in Mashiko would contact Hamada, who had gained a considerable amount of fame within the ceramics and art circles abroad, who would then introduce them to Shimaoka. In fact, Fudeya admits that one of the reasons why Shimaoka accepted so many foreign students was as a favor to Hamada. Besides wanting to study pottery, some of Shimaoka's students came to Japan for several other reasons, such as becoming a Buddhist monk, as was the case of a French national cited by Fudeya who, instead, ended up studying pottery with Shimaoka.

Besides his popularity abroad, added to the contacts made during his travels and his knowledge of the English language, Fudeya says that another important reason why so many foreigners ended up studying in Mashiko with Shimaoka was simply the fact that he was one of the few Japanese potters accepting international students at that time. In addition to sponsoring their visas, he offered accommodation and meals in exchange for work and a small monthly fee. It is said that while Japanese apprentices would usually stay with Shimaoka for three to five years, foreigners usually stayed between a few months up to a maximum of three years, due to visa limitations. The majority came from the United States, Australia, England, France, and Germany, but there were also people coming from Brazil, Peru and other parts of Europe.

Despite his international experiences, Shimaoka's teaching methods were similar to those of the traditional Japanese apprenticeship system known as *totei seido*, where apprentices live with their masters and learning is done through observation. In this system, knowledge is acquired tacitly rather than explicitly, which implies the absence of verbal communication. This demands constant focus and effort from the learner, who has to "steal" the knowledge from the master instead of passively receiving it. According to John Wells, who learned under this system during his three-year apprenticeship in Bizen (Okayama prefecture), the *totei seido* is used not only as a method to improve the apprentice's technical skills but also his character, as explained below:

The traditional idea is that the student, the artist, must have a beautiful character. If you don't have a beautiful character you cannot make beautiful things. How do you make the character beautiful? By putting the apprentice through pain (...). So every day, we worked without vacations. We had to work from about 6:30 a.m.

and the master would come at around 9:00. So I would clean for an hour and prepare his clay for another hour and then he would come out and I would turn the wheel for him (...). And then take lunch for about ten minutes while sitting at the wheel, so when he would come out we would turn [the wheel for him]. We would work until it got dark and I would clean the workshop before I left. For one year I was not allowed to touch the wheel and then, after one year, I was allowed to make pottery at night. So, in the summer, when it gets dark at about 8:30 p.m., we had to work until 8:00 or 8:30. And he was renting a house next to our little house and I lived there. I would eat something and then go back to the workshop and practice until midnight. And then go to sleep and get up the next morning, so it was a very hard and difficult time. That's the way it worked every day. It is like being someone's child really. If you are with your parents every day, you can't tell but you get some of it (John Wells, February 2017).

While the folk pottery model of apprenticeship was not as strict as the traditional system found at older pottery kiln sites such as Bizen, it was still long and followed a particular set of steps. According to John Singleton (1998: 124-125), traditional apprenticeships in the folk model (*mingei*) of pottery learning included five main stages: a first long one of "unobtrusive observation" while doing menial jobs, aiming to test the apprentice's commitment to the task of learning; a second stage of tentative trials at the wheel, usually during the apprentice's own free time; a third one where the apprentice is assigned specific jobs, mainly the repetitive making of a limited number of standardized shapes at the wheel, which would then be thrown away; a fourth stage where the apprentice was assigned a specific task in the actual production of work, which would be fired and sold under the master's name; and a fifth and final stage where the apprentice would develop a number of productive tasks at the workshop as a way to repay his master for his training.

Following the folk model of apprenticeship, pottery learning at Shimaoka's studio was made through silently watching the master's skills at work and participating in the everyday ordinary activities of the workshop. These included cleaning, kneading clay or cutting wood on a tight schedule, usually from eight in the morning to five in the afternoon (except during firings, when students would have to stay up at night feeding

the fire). It was only after finishing their work helping Shimaoka with the everyday tasks of the studio that apprentices could use the space, tools and materials to practice working at the wheel or make their own pieces without supervision. Euan Craig, an Australian potter who worked as Shimaoka's wheel thrower in 1991, describes the social organization of his pottery workshop in the following manner:

That's just the way it is, the *bungyou* (division of labor). Each person plays a specific part in the process and the *sensei* is the one that controls everything. Shimaoka Sensei described himself or his studio as an orchestra where he was the composer, the conductor and sometimes the soloist. But each person in the orchestra had a specific part to play in that symphony (Euan Craig, February 2016).

While Craig accepted and enjoyed his role within Shimaoka's "symphony", not everyone did. Fudeya recalls how some foreign students, accustomed with the spontaneity and creative experimentation encouraged at art schools, found the experience of apprenticing with Shimaoka too mundane with some ending up leaving before the end of their apprenticeships: *Some people hated it and never came back to Mashiko. Others even ran away or came to me for help* (Yoshiko Fudeya, August 2016). In fact, in his analysis of craft education in Mashiko, Singleton (1998) mentions the frequent occurrence of personality clashes between master and apprentices. Furthermore, he mentions how, "since labor is exchanged for teaching, the labor may be judged exploitation by the learner – and the teacher may be concerned by the laziness or ineptitude of the learner" (*idib.*: 125). However, for Mashiko-based potter Yoshikuni Goto, the practice of hiring apprentices in Japan is, in fact, a great opportunity for those who want to learn ceramics but cannot pay for it. Thus, the Japanese apprenticeship system, which resembles the organization of the European medieval guilds, functions as a system of exchange where services are traded without the use of money, a practicing that is regaining relevance within a growing bartering economy.

Besides the opportunity to learn Japanese ceramics with a traditional master, living in the Japanese countryside and interacting with both local Japanese potters, artists and other international students of different nationalities, was another appealing part of the experience. After finishing their studies and making enough ceramic works

to fill up a kiln, Shimaoka usually organized and sponsored a graduation exhibition at a gallery or department store, which functioned as a rite of passage to becoming recognized as an independent potter.

While not all of Shimaoka's foreign apprentices became professional potters and ceramic artists, some well-known names include: Andrew Halford, from Australia, between 1973 and 1974; Craig Miron, from the United Kingdom, between 1974 and 1975; Ruri, Japanese-American, in 1977; David McDonald, from the United States, between 1977 and 1979; Tony Marsh, American, between 1979 and 1981; Bruno Pifre, French, from 1980 to 1982; Sebastian Scheid, German, between 1984 and 1986; William Pluptre, British, in 1985; Hao Sheng, Chinese-American, between 1996 and 1998. Australian Euan Craig, whose life-story will be presented in the next section, also worked with Shimaoka in 1991. However, from the mid-1990s and especially in the 2000s, the number of foreign potters coming to study in Mashiko decreased dramatically. Yet, the last few years have seen a slow recovery, with young potters and students starting to come to practice ceramics in the region again.

Thus, following Hamada's steps, Shimaoka was one of the responsible for opening Mashiko to foreigner practitioners. Due to their cosmopolitanism and Mashiko's relatively recent history of ceramics, the town has been receiving potters from different areas of Japan and the world working with different styles and techniques. This situation contrasts with other traditional pottery kiln sites in Japan known for their closure to outsiders. Ohno-san, a Japanese potter based in Mashiko, mentioned the role of geography in the open environment of Mashiko. He mentions how old traditional kiln sites such as Bizen are located in very narrow valleys closely surrounded by mountains, which hinders relations with the outside and limits the space for the establishment of new kilns. On the contrary, Mashiko's mountainous geography is more open and less constricting. Yokoo-san, a Mashiko-based potter from Kyoto and president of the Mashiko Ceramic Art Association, also pinpoints the social organization of traditional pottery areas for its closeness:

[Mashiko] is freer, so a lot of people from all over Japan and abroad come here. Other places are hard to enter and it's hard to study there. In many places, you cannot have more than a certain number of people doing pottery because of the

mura system, like Tamba, for example, where only people from there can do pottery. This was a system created in the Edo period. Because they were small villages in the mountains, they could not grow rice so they could only make money from pottery. If there are too many people from outside who go there and stay, people from that area cannot learn or earn money. But Mashiko is new so it doesn't have that system. We have made history (Satoshi Yokoo, August 2016, translated from Japanese).

In fact, community relationships within Japanese rural regions are often dominated by the insiders versus outsiders' binary (*uchi-soto*), with the former being defined by features such as ancestorship, ownership, presence, acknowledgment and commitment to the community (Holthus & Manzenreiter, 2017). In this context, newcomers both from other regions of the country or abroad are often regarded as a threat to the *status quo*, thus inhibiting renovation and change.

Furthermore, Ohno stressed how the constant presence of foreign visitors at Hamada and Shimaoka's workshops, together with the establishment of studio potters from other regions of Japan, who are often graduates from art universities, has created a less hierarchical relationship between older and younger generations. And while potters working in Kyoto, Bizen or Shigaraki usually come from a lineage of craftsmen, Mashiko is open to anyone wanting in establishing their studios in the region, where they can work alone with creative freedom and without any ties to tradition following the system of studio crafts.

According to Douglas Black, an American potter based in Mashiko, even potters from traditional pottery families or potters who had learned within specific traditions from other regions started coming to Mashiko in the 1970s to escape family expectations and gallery hierarchies. In contrast, in Mashiko, there was not a completely structured and rigid hierarchical system preventing potters and artists not entrusted by a senior from selling their works. This is because, within the Japanese ceramic art world, new potters should be bestowed by their *sensei* in order to exhibit their works at renowned department store galleries, thus launching their careers.

Moeran (1987: 27) has thoroughly described the politics involved in department stores galleries exhibitions, which play a more vital role in a potter's professional life

than that of artists from other fields. It is through selling and winning prizes at one-man shows and competitions that a potter might eventually be put on the run for receiving the title of Living National Treasure (*ibid.*: 32). Therefore, renowned potters often try to have at least one solo exhibit at a famous department store gallery per year. John Wells, American potter based in Bizen, also stressed the role of these spaces for a potter to acquire a high reputation.

If you become well enough known then the best places [to sell] are usually the department stores and the higher cost department stores are best, because they have an art gallery and they will let you have an exhibit there. If you have exhibits at such and such department stores usual everybody knows about it and the professionals know about it and it's kind of like a ticket to get in other places (John Wells, February 2017).

While department store galleries are usually the best place for potters to exhibit, there are also hierarchies within different department stores companies and whether they are located in the capital or in the provinces (Moeran, 1987: 33). Because of this hierarchical system and strong competition that requires the constant nurturing of social relationships, some potters have chosen to stay out of these politics and move to places like Mashiko, where they could sell their works in spite of their personal connections.

Hence, because of its openness, Mashiko has attracted individual artists and potters looking for alternative lifestyles since the 1960s and 1970s, as mentioned by Euan Craig:

During the 1960s particularly and in the 1970s, there were a lot of people who were looking for an alternative to modern lifestyle and so they wanted to get out into the country and do a traditional craft and a lot of the potters in Mashiko were those kinds of people. But they didn't have many resources, they couldn't afford to hire people. So they'd do everything themselves and a lot of them didn't go through the traditional apprenticeship themselves. And, once again, these days everyone wants to be a soloist and they want it now. They don't want to go

through that long training process where they are somebody else's hands for a long time (Euan Craig, February 2016).

Randy Woolsey, who worked at the Tsukamoto factory in Mashiko and is now based in Kasama, described how the 1970s saw many people how left their white-collar jobs in the city to make ceramics in the region:

In the 1970s, it [pottery] was a very groovy thing to do. A lot of young people who didn't want to be salarymen, who wanted to live in the mountains and live freely, [came here to make ceramics]. They might not have had the talent for making pottery, but they liked the lifestyle, so there were a lot of lifestyle potters who came along. They didn't necessarily love or even like what they were doing, but it allowed them the lifestyle [that they longed for]. (Randy Woosley, November 2017).

Attesting for these accounts is Singleton's (1998) description of the three groups of potters studying in Mashiko in 1987:

(1) native sons and daughters of the local community who had grown up with pottery as a convenient career model; (2) graduates of fine arts schools, usually two- or four-year universities, who needed practical experience for entry to a pottery art career; and (3) people searching for alternative and independent lifestyles, dropouts from the corporate middle class, not associated with conventional education, industrial, corporate, or marital expectations (John Singleton, 1998: 123).

This situation can still be applied to the town's present reality, even though the second group has now dominated over the other two. Besides its openness to outsiders, another feature that has attracted potters from other regions in Japan to establish their studios in Mashiko is its convenience due to its closeness from Tokyo. For Yoshikuni Goto, Mashiko-based potter originally from Saitama, the appeal of Mashiko lies, first of all, in its closeness to the capital, and then in its infrastructure, with many stores selling raw

and ready-to-use ceramic materials not only from the region but only from all over Japan and abroad, together with a complex system of sales that include galleries, pottery shops and the Mashiko Pottery Fair, which means that potters can sell their works without having to travel to other areas. Goto also mentioned the climate, which is favorable for pottery making even throughout the winter season.

In sum, because of the factors mentioned above, Mashiko hosts not only the traditional Mashiko-style and the folk pottery workshops but has also become a gathering place for potters and artists from different regions, working with a great variety of ceramics styles and techniques, both traditional and contemporary, functional and artistic. And similar to Mashiko's famous names, Shoji Hamada, Tatsuzo Shimaoka and Gen Murata, most of them are also outsiders.

Following Hamada's lineage, Tokyo-born contemporary ceramic artist Ken Matsuzaki (1950-) has also been accepting foreign apprentices in his studio in Mashiko, where he learned his skills from Shimaoka between 1972 and 1977. Matsuzaki is also the Representative Director of the Mashiko Pottery International Association, created in 2012 to develop international exchanges with Mashiko potters. In 2016, with the collaboration of the Japanese Embassy, the Association co-organized an exhibition of five young Mashiko makers in the Goldmark gallery in the United Kingdom.

Besides Hamada, Shimaoka and Matsuzaki, other kiln places in Mashiko have also been receiving foreign apprentices in the last decades, even though on a smaller scale. One of these is the Tsukamoto kiln factory, where German potter Gerd Knapper (1945-2012) and Canadian potter Randy Woolsey (1944-), both of whom ended up establishing their own pottery studios in the neighboring city of Kasama, worked in the 1970s. Opened in 1947, Tsukamoto became famous for the production of bento boxes (*kamakko*) sold at the now extinct Yokogawa station of Shin-etsu line.

More recently, the Mashiko Ceramic Art Club (also known as Guesthouse Furuki), which has been operating as a studio where visitors can take pottery classes (*togei kyoshitsu*) and a lodging facility in an old-style Japanese house (*kominka*), has also been receiving young students from abroad on a regular basis. Starting off as the pottery workshop by now manager Issei Furuki's great-grandfather, it was transformed into a guesthouse by his grandfather more than fifty years ago. Taking advantage of the

previous existing facilities, third generation Ryouichi Furuki decided to create the Mashiko Toge Club, which has now been running for almost forty years.

Equipped with different types of kilns, including a wood-fired kiln designed by Fukushima-based potter Masakazu Kusakabe and a salt kiln made by Euan Craig, as well as several gas and electric kilns, the club often receives Japanese students from neighboring regions and the capital in a program that includes pottery making experiences and staying at an old Japanese-style house (*kominka*). Furthermore, the club is also used by young potters based in Mashiko who have yet to establish their own studios or kiln and rent the space to make their works. Finally, the Toge Club is also frequented by pottery hobbyists, who come from urban areas on weekends and holidays to stay at the old Japanese-style house and work on their pottery skills while enjoying the quiet countryside life in Mashiko.



Figure 2.9 (left): Gathering of Japanese and foreign potters. **Figure 2.10 (right):** Collective glazing of big plate by Ryan Cain. Mashiko Toge Club. Photos by the author, July 2017.

Due to the habitual presence of international and Japanese students, as well as both beginner and veteran potters based in Mashiko, Furuki is one of the few informal gathering places for potters to have multicultural and multigenerational exchanges in the countryside town today. For this reason, while not formally advertised but shared by word of mouth, The Toge Club regularly receives requests from foreigners wanting to learn or practice ceramics and experience everyday life in countryside Japan. According to manager Issei Furuki, students who have stayed at the club come from all over the world, but especially the United States, Australia, New Zealand, England and Brazil. In exchange for help as instructors during the pottery classes, volunteers receive

free accommodation and a place to practice ceramics and create works at their own pace without the supervision of a master, while receiving informal help from Furuki himself or other potters who use the space. They usually stay between a few weeks up to one year, limited by the duration period of their working holiday or cultural activities visas with which the majority comes to Japan. Research subjects who have stayed at Furuki include Americans Andrew Vlock and Ryan Cain and Hungarian Timi Lantos.

Thus, while there are still international students and young Japanese potters wanting to study ceramics in Mashiko today, there are now very few places that accept them. One of the reasons is the slow disappearance of the traditional workshops *kamamoto* and the dominant presence of individual studio potters, who often work alone in a small production and thus cannot afford to provide accommodation and meals to apprentices.

2.1.5. Mashiko Pottery Fair

As a result of its closeness to Tokyo and the relative affordability of its folk pottery, Mashiko has become one of the most popular destinations for ceramic-related tourism in eastern Japan. The town receives about 600,000 visitors every year during its Pottery Fair, which has been held since 1966. Occurring twice a year in fall and spring, it hosts about five hundred pottery stalls of sellers and creators not only from Mashiko but from all over Japan, as well other handcrafted products and locally grown vegetables.

In 2016, I performed a survey with a total of eighty visitors to the Mashiko Pottery Fair, with a sample of fifty interviewees in the spring and thirty interviewees during the fall festival. The fact that the first survey was performed on a Friday morning of the Golden Week, which was not an official holiday, is reflected in the predominance of older visitors from inside the Tochigi prefecture. According to the potters, attendees of that day, especially during its early hours, were mostly locals or workers from large companies that were allowed a bridge day between the holiday and the weekend. Thus, a second survey was performed on a Saturday afternoon, showing a higher representation of younger people as well as visitors coming from Tokyo. Four six non-Japanese nationals (four Americans, one Italian and one Russian) who were visiting the

festival were also surveyed, yet only two were tourists from abroad. Thus, taking into consideration the small sample amount and its limitations, the following results were obtained:

1. Almost half of the visitors were over fifty years of age (46%). More than one-third were in their thirties and forties (36%) and only less than one-fifth were under thirty years old (18%).
2. Almost all came from prefectures located in the Kanto area, almost one third being from Tochigi and eighteen percent from Tokyo.
3. Occupations were predominantly housewife (22%) and professional or technical worker (17%).
4. More than half had a university degree and ninety-six percent had graduated from high school.
5. The majority had come to Mashiko with their families (70%) especially to visit the Pottery Fair, which they had heard about from family or friends (52%) or on the Internet (22%).
6. The large majority were repeaters (80%) and around twenty percent had already come to the Pottery Festival more than five times.
7. Even though not all visitors had come with the intention to buy pottery (only 60% intended to buy), more than eighty percent of those who intended to buy ceramics planned to spend less than 10,000 yen. This proves true the potters' remarks of how, in recent years, visitors have started coming to the fair mostly to look around and stroll.
8. Around half of the respondents stated that they used to attend similar craft events several times a year. The majority were interested in handmade crafts and more than two-thirds (77%) stated that they had handmade pottery at home.
9. When asked why they were interested in handmade products the responses were: because it's more beautiful (33%), to value the work of the craftsmen (31%), because they have better quality (21%) or all of the above (15%). Interestingly, while in the second survey, dominated by younger visitors for urban areas, 44% answered "to value the work of the craftsmen", in the first

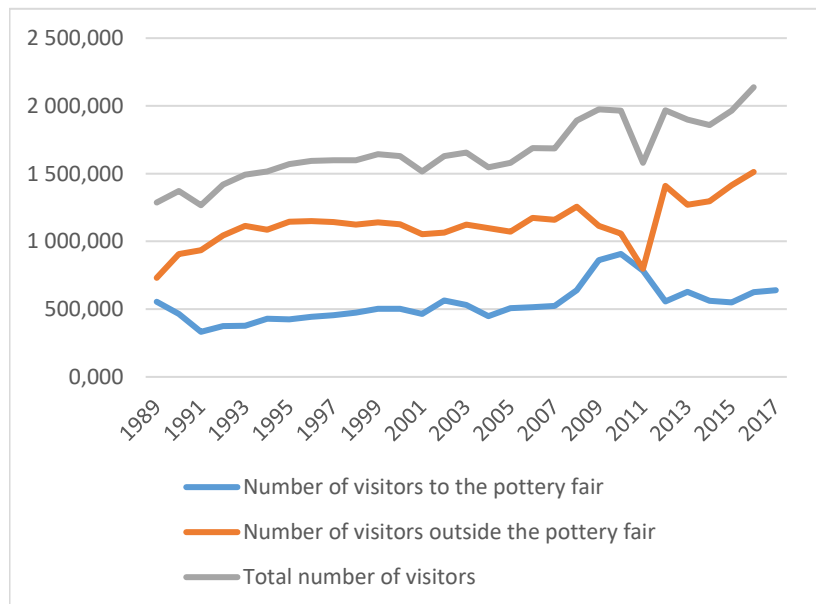
survey, prevailed by older visitors from within the Tochigi prefecture, only 18% chose that answer.

10. Sixty percent of the respondents also affirmed they often buy organic food.

As for the potters, they were aware that the majority of the visitors to the fair were not ceramic *aficionados*, especially those coming during the last weekend of the event. On the contrary, they stated that the best sale days of the fair are the first ones when ceramic collectors come to check on their favorite potters with a clear intention of buying directly from them since they can pay a price that doesn't include the gallery taxation. Potters noted how some exhibitors have a line of customers waiting at their stalls from very early hours, with some sometimes selling out on the first day. In addition, collectors know where their favorite potters are, for the stalls are usually installed in the same place every year. Thus, ceramic collectors arrive in Mashiko with a clear goal and location in mind. If a stall location changes, that might be a nuisance for both customer and potter, as one subject mentioned.

Finally, while the fair has kept a stable number of visitors in the past three decades (see Figure 2.11), with a small growth between 2005 and 2010 and a temporary decrease in 2011 as a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake, most

Figure 2.11: Mashiko annual number of visitors



Source: Mashiko Tourism Association.

potters' state that their sales have been going down. Similarly, the number of stalls has also decreased. According to the subjects, this is because people buy much less pottery nowadays, coming to the fair as a touristic experience, to stroll around the rural town rather than with the specific goal of purchasing.

People come for tourism. They might be interested in pottery, but they don't know much about it. They might be looking for a specific color or shape, but that's about it. They don't understand about the potter's throwing or glazing skills. That's not necessarily a bad thing. If it sells, the economy is moving. And the Pottery Fair it's not just pottery; it stimulates restaurants and other business too (Satoshi Yokobori, July 2017, translated from Japanese by the author)

Furthermore, the fact that the potters have to pay 10,000 yen per day just to set up their stalls in the parking spaces rented by the galleries, which translates into a cost of 100,000 per potter for the ten days of the festival, means that it is often difficult to profit from sales alone. Therefore, for many potters, the festival serves more as an opportunity to show their products and build new connections that might translate into new clients, than actually making a large profit from sales. But despite the high costs, potters from other regions as far as Kyushu and Hokkaido also come to sell their works at the fair. Known as *kamagure*, which means "nomad potter", they drive long distances to take part in pottery fairs in different regions and often sleep in the car during the events.



Figure 2.12 (top): Mashiko Pottery Fair. Photo by the author, November 2016.



Figure 2.13 (bottom): Australian potter Euan Craig at the Mashiko Pottery Fair. Photo by the author, November 2015

2.1.6. The decline of Mashiko ceramic industry

On March 11th 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake, with the epicenter 130 km away from Mashiko, hit the city, which registered a magnitude six together with aftershocks. While no one was killed, seven people were injured and 2,600 houses were damaged in addition to hundreds of pottery kilns, including forty Japanese traditional climbing kilns *noborigama*. Many potters also suffered damages to their studios and pottery pieces were broken, with damage estimated at 770 million yen, nearly one-fifth of the total annual sales, including 550 million yen needed to restore battered facilities. According to Mashiko tourism official Emi Ikeda, two-thirds of the roughly thirty foreign resident potters left, even if temporarily, after the earthquake and the subsequent nuclear accident (“Quake-hit Japan pottery town picking up pieces”, 2011).

In this situation, relief funds were created both from potters in Mashiko and abroad to help financially with the rebuilding of kilns and potteries. One of those was the Tatsuzo Shimaoka Earthquake Disaster Relief and Reconstruction Fund (TRF), created by Shimaoka’s daughter Yoshiko Fudeya, which received the donations from Shimaoka’s former disciples and acquaintances from around the world. According to its mission statement, by late May 2011, the TRF issued coupons to sixty of Mashiko’s disaster-hit potters (total amount: 3,000,000, or approximately USD \$40,000), which enabled them to purchase the materials needed to repair or rebuild kilns. While the Tatsuzo Shimaoka Earthquake Disaster Relief and Reconstruction Fund was scheduled to end in December 2011, the flow of financial support kept coming, leading to the creation of the Mashiko Ceramics Art Association (MCAA).

Officially founded on December 12th 2011, the MCAA is a non-profit organization recognized by the Tochigi prefectural government as a body designed to promote exchanges among potters and artists beyond national borders and support them in times of disaster. The income comes mainly from membership fees and donations, together with income coming from the renting of the gallery.

The goals of MCAA include: 1) create a creative environment and a business network for Mashiko’s artists; 2) develop cultural exchange projects in Japan and abroad; 3) support Mashiko potters in case of disaster; 4) reuse broken pottery and unnecessary ceramic material, instead of burying it as industrial waste.

Presided by Satoshi Yokoo and with Yoshiko Fudeya as its Vice-Chairman, MCAA now has Mashiko-based American potters Andrew Gemrich and Douglas Black as two of its seven official directors. The association headquarters include an exhibition space and shop located in the center of Mashiko, which is opened from Friday to Sunday every week. In 2016, MCAA held a joint exhibition with the Oregon Ceramic Artists' Association (OPA) at the Portland Japanese Garden in the United States and, in 2016, it co-organized the Korea Japan exchange exhibition in Icheon. In addition, MCAA has also been developing a Mashiko database project in order to identify and keep track of all potters working in Mashiko in case of catastrophe.



Figure 2.14 (top): Satoshi Yoko, president of MCAA holding a clay sculpture by Oregon-based Japanese artist Ruri. Photo by the author, November 2015.

Figure 2.15 (bottom): Social gathering at Mashiko Ceramic Art Association. Photo by the author, December 2015.

The nuclear disaster following the earthquake has also generated a visible decline in the number of visitors to Mashiko, especially of those coming from abroad. This translated into an abrupt decrease of ceramics sales in the months following the disaster. Since the area continued to experience aftershocks, people also stopped buying breakable things like pottery. Moreover, radiation has affected local raw materials used for pottery making and thus, wood logs and wood ash coming from the region had to be tested, a procedure which continued for several years after the disaster. Potters were asked by the authorities not to use wood from the region, not only for safety reasons but because if radioactivity were to be found in any pot, the reputation of the whole Mashiko ceramic industry would be at stake.

Now you can't use the wood from around here because of the radiation. You can but it's probably worse for the potter than the product, but they're scared that if

the work of one person is found to be radioactive, people would think there's a problem with Mashiko pottery and we will have a bad reputation, so the local government wants people to be very careful with the wood they use. But most people use wood from far away now, mostly from the south (Andrew Gemrich, July 2016).

However, the economic decline of Mashiko's ceramic industry had started long before the 2011 disaster. Andrew Gemrich recalls how different Mashiko Pottery Cooperation Center was when he started working there in the early nineties. He recalls it often packed with people who wanted to have a pottery making experience, especially during the summer, when there used to be twelve workers, whereas now there are only two. Many other potters also mentioned how easy it was to sell ceramics until the early nineties. Issei Furuki, who is in his thirties, manager of the Mashiko Ceramic Club, told me the stories of the "bubble years" that he has heard since he was a child. Yet, he criticizes older generations for not adjusting to the new era:

During the bubble, the economy was good and potters sold anything, but with the recession, older potters didn't change their style and their marketing methods. Young potters use social networks and know how to market their works for younger customers. (...) [At that time] there were a lot of potters and a lot of people became famous. And there were a lot of foreigners too. But it's becoming better now. Lots of young people are coming to Mashiko again. Doing pottery while doing part-time jobs. Potters don't pay a salary anymore, the system of apprenticeship also started dying because potters don't sell, thus they don't need apprentices. But young potters are doing pottery and selling by themselves (Issei Furuki, November 2016, translated from Japanese by the author).

Those who remember the bubble years from personal experience also told me their stories with a bit of nostalgia. Ceramic artist Akane Niwa and her partner Spanish potter Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo remember how easy it was to sell ceramics back then:

During the bubble, in Tokiichi [Pottery Fair], people sold everything. They sold until they had no pots left. They would put the money in a vase and had to hold it so it wouldn't fly because it was full up to the top. But this happened not because people liked pottery more than now, but because everybody had money and they thought that, with money, they had also achieved a status that wouldn't change. Those potters, who have about sixty years old now, they put their prices up high and now they're the ones who are suffering more. People put all their prices up and things sold anyways. They would fire a load of pieces and the next day they had nothing left (Akane Niwa and Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo, February 2017, translated from Japanese and Spanish by the author).

According to the accounts of several subjects, until the early nineties, shops and galleries in Mashiko would buy directly from the producers, usually going to their studios every two months and take boxes full of works, sometimes without even looking at the contents. Stores and restaurants from Tokyo would also come to the potters' kiln openings and sometimes the whole batch would sell in just one day. They say this hardly ever happens anymore, since most shops and galleries now work through consignment, keep between forty and fifty percent of the sales. The quote below describes the situation before and after the bubble, which was kept anonymous.

[In] Mashiko [the percentage] used to be sixty-forty, but nowadays is fifty-fifty. And some of them [pottery shops and galleries] used to pay cash. They wouldn't even look inside the box, I would just write it all up and then they would give me cash. So, the economy was better and galleries were in a hurry too. They knew when I'd open my kiln and they wanted to be the first gallery to get the stuff out of the kiln and they wouldn't even look. I would just give them boxes of work and they just looked at the last number and paid me in cash. But now it's almost all consignment (...). There are no more orders. Those days are gone. Most potters I know have part-time jobs now. The young potters are mass producing for very cheap. And people are lowering their prices.

American potter Douglas Black recounted how, in the 1990s, when he was just starting off his career, he would go to the galleries, show them his work and sell it on the spot without needing anyone's endorsement. This rarely happens nowadays given the general climate of recession, with most places now only accepting works in consignment and young potters having to work part-time at non-ceramic-related jobs. American Doris Watanabe also mentions that between the 1970s and the 1990s it was possible to make a living just from pottery.

If you were not especially interested in becoming "famous or successful" (I wasn't) it was not that difficult to work with ceramics in Mashiko, if you kept your prices low. I can't speak for all of Japan. I am talking about the '70s, '80s and '90s when I worked with clay. As I said before, the selling and exhibiting infrastructure is already in place, so you can make a living, though with difficulty. Eventually, I felt burned out from the work involved in producing pottery at such low prices (Doris Watanabe, February 2014, written questionnaire).

Because of this situation, a few potters have stopped leaving their pieces in consignment and opted instead to sell their works directly to the customer at exhibitions, fairs and their individual studios. However, some have pointed out the positive aspects behind the end of the economic bubble, which was dominated by materialism and low standards, as expressed in the anonymous quote below:

The public is more discerning than it used to be. During the 1980s, apparently, and during the bubble period, you could sell just about anything and people would buy just about anything. At good prices. When the bubble burst people weren't willing to pay high prices for things that weren't really worth it and so a lot of people in Mashiko who had been selling pots for quite good prices were no longer able to sell their expensive pots. And they couldn't bring their prices down. So a lot of potters went out of business. It's much harder than it used to be to make a living as a potter. It's important to make really high-quality work at a reasonable price now.

Another informant criticized potters and famous galleries for becoming “too greedy” during the bubble years, increasing their prices so much that they started to alienate even their most loyal customers:

Basically, potters cut their own throats. Some of the pride went out of it. Because anything would sell and because there was so much of it, because prices had gotten out of hand, especially in the big galleries, big-name people, it turned the customers off. It just got old. It had been very fashionable and then suddenly... For example, the big galleries in Tokyo, in those days it was department store galleries like Takashimaya or Mitsukoshi and a few private galleries like Kurodatoen in Ginza and the Green Gallery... There were some really good galleries in Tokyo, but they had been riding the wave and kept increasing the prices. In fact, the department stores were notorious for, actually, when they had a show on, if one of their old customers didn't come to see the show, they would take the pot to the customer and sort of force them to buy it, and so the customers just disappeared from the big galleries. And over the last twenty years, I have just watched galleries closing all over the place, decent galleries that had decent shows and had knowledgeable owners have just about disappeared. Its real amateurs now. I'm sorry to be so blunt, but in Tokyo, it's very hard to find a gallery where you might want to have an exhibition.

The changing tastes also seem to be one of the reasons for the decline of Mashiko ceramic industry. Some of the subjects mentioned how Japanese customers are now more interested in white and clean-looking pieces inspired by Scandinavian design, rather than the traditional dark, heavy and rough Mashiko style, which doesn't fit the lifestyle of young urban consumers, as mentioned by Brazilian Regina Goto below:

Today, Japanese people like clean, modern, design pieces. But foreigners prefer the exotic traditional Japanese style. It's like fashion, always changing. Japanese traditional style is now seen as old-fashioned. It's also too big and heavy and people don't have space in small urban apartments (...). Japanese people are tired of heavy and colorful pottery. They want something simpler, lighter and practical;

something that can be used by any class, that matches people's lifestyle, decoration, sense of fashion; something that matches everything, that you can mix with wood or glass (Regina Goto, August 2016, translated from Portuguese by the author).

Since the brand image of Mashiko as folk pottery doesn't attract Japanese consumers as much as before, younger potters are now producing simple white pieces that match the current urban trends. Yet, they are criticized by the older generations for not wanting to be trained as craftsmen, choosing instead to develop their own individual style without focusing too much on the technical skills. In fact, many open their own pottery studios as soon as they finish their arts university degrees without going through the apprenticeship system. "Everyone wants to be an artist" is a sentence said by the older generations. This is in part because they are not willing to exchange menial tasks for training. When they do, they usually stay no longer than one year, during which time they expect to learn the skills needed to become independent. Yet, for most potters, it is not worth investing in training someone who will leave just when they "finally start to become useful". Thus, it seems that intergenerational conflicts within Mashiko are a bigger problem than the strains between "insiders" and "outsiders" often seen in other traditional pottery production areas in Japan.

Due to this state of affairs, the Industrial Technology Center, a tuition-free ceramic training center located in Mashiko and supported by the Tochigi prefecture, is also struggling with a lack of students. With a two-year course focusing on the development of technical skills for the formation of ceramic specialists, its curriculum contrasts with Ibaraki prefecture's Kasama College of Ceramic Art, which has been investing in the education of ceramic artists through a two-year program that focuses both on technique and creativity, receiving ten students per year.

2.1.7. Mashiko today

As a result of Hamada and Shimaoka's national and international recognition, Mashiko is still "marketed" and consumed as the place of *mingei* folk ceramics, despite

the fact that most of Mashiko potters today are working outside any ceramic tradition, drawing from a mix of different contemporary and traditional styles and techniques. In fact, according to vice-director of Mashiko Ceramic Museum, Satoshi Yokobori, most young potters working in Mashiko have no interest in *mingei* and some have never even heard about it. Similarly, Mashiko-based potter Yoshikuni Goto has argued that "only foreigner people care about the *mingei* nowadays".

Thus, while foreign potters may come to Mashiko drawn by its *mingei* tradition, which is only three-generations-old, Japanese visitors come to Mashiko for its close access from Tokyo and its image of cheap dark-colored pottery that comes from Mashiko's pre-Hamada traditions of everyday popular ware. In fact, as mentioned by Andrew Gemrich, compared with big pottery centers such as Arita, Karatsu or Bizen, for ordinary Japanese people Mashiko style is on the lower rank of Japan's ceramic traditions and is known as "that heavy clunky brown stuff" or "grotesque". Furthermore, with the easy accessibility of both raw materials and finished products from all over the world, fewer potters are sticking to regional styles and starting to explore the endless possibilities of pottery making.

Mashiko style is dying. Geographic styles are dying. It doesn't matter where you produce your work anymore, because people from everywhere can buy it. Nowadays you can make any style anywhere, because raw materials from different areas are easily accessible, and it sells anywhere. Things are the same everywhere in Japan. People come to Mashiko because it is close, not because of Mashiko style. Japan has lost the local character (Yoshikuni Goto, August 2016, translated from Japanese by the author).

Nevertheless, local authorities still rely on the idea of *mingei* and the legacy of Hamada and Leach to promote the city, with the Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art seldom featuring exhibitions with works by contemporary Mashiko potters. Thus, even though the town congregates a wider diversity of potters, styles and techniques than most pottery centers in Japan, those at the top are still fixed on the traditional idea of *mingei*. Thus, one of the common criticisms I have heard during interviews, especially from younger potters, it's the old-fashioned mentality of those in charge, which was

described as being “stuck in time”. And while new potters have a deep knowledge of how to market their works today through the use of internet and social media, they are often ignored within the local pottery associations or have no interest in participating. Some foreign artists also condemned the politics of some of the traditional potters’ associations, which were described as “a dirty scene”, dominated by one of two people “who decide everything for the group”. And, despite the existence of different organizations with different aims, many are “rivals” and, therefore, members need to choose whom they want to ally themselves with, often at the costs of other personal and professional relationships. This is not, however, a feature exclusive to Japan or the ceramic art world.

The need for internationalization was also mentioned, with some associations now trying to develop exchanges between Mashiko potters and galleries and museums abroad. In 2012, due to their historical connections created from the relationship between Hamada and Leach, Mashiko and St Ives have signed a friendship agreement with the aim of strengthening cultural and artistic exchanges. In 2014, the Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art, with the support of the municipal government and private donations, has put in place an Artist in Residence program, which receives ceramic artists from abroad twice a year. During their stay, resident artists develop their work at the premises of the museum, in a building next to where one of Shoji Hamada’s thatched roof houses and *noborigama* kilns was relocated. They conduct lectures, workshops, open studios and other events with the aim of deepening exchanges between local and outside artists. However, Mashiko Ceramic Art Museum vice-director, Satoshi Yokobori, says that the implementation of such a program has been a difficult task. Others have criticized the lack of exchanges between international resident artists and local potters and town’s residents.

In the last few years, the local government has also invested in the creation of non-ceramic related events, such as the *Hijisai* Living with the Earth Festival, which has been held triennially since 2009 on the first harvest moon of autumn. *Hijisai* follows the trend of community art festivals that draw on the image of *satoyama* (mountain village) as a strategy for rural revitalization, which has been spreading around Japan in the last two decades, with the most famous being the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field in Niigata prefecture.

Focused on earth as its main theme, the *Hijisai* highlights the importance of the soil as a precious resource for both of Mashiko's traditional activities of agriculture and ceramics.

The festival makes use of old traditional buildings and local geographical features such as paddy rice fields for the execution of different types of traditional and contemporary artworks and events. Other events such as exhibitions, concerts, performances, seminars, workshops, markets and site-specific installations are also held for the duration of two weeks. Thus, drawing on local history, tradition, landscape, geography and folklore, the *Hijisai* seeks the promotion of Mashiko town between the nostalgic idea of *furusato* (native place) and contemporary social developments focused on sustainability, ecology and creativity. It was created by Baba Koshi (1958-2013), a Tokyo-based Saitama-born designer who used to work for the well-known Tokio Kumagai brand, traveling the world to work with fashion and interior design. Tired from city life, he decided to move to Mashiko, where he opened Starnet in 1998, an organic restaurant, café and craft shop selling locally-sourced and environmentally-friendly handmade products, located at one of Mashiko's mountain foothills.

Mashiko-based American Douglas Black, whose lifestyle will be presented in the next section, has closely worked with Koshi since their first meeting in 1992. He describes him as the most important person in Mashiko after Shoji Hamada: “he presented countryside lifestyle as something appealing



Figure 2.16: Starnet, organic local food section.
Photo by the author, November 2017.

for city people: nature, peace of mind, organic farming and handmade things”. According to Black, Baba Koshi was one of the main responsible for re-defining, representing and marketing Mashiko beyond the old-fashioned image of *mingei*. Taking advantage of a new movement of “simple living” and mixing Japanese tradition and aesthetics with modern design, he appealed to a young, urban and ecologically-conscious Japanese middle and upper-middle class to come to the countryside town. Inspired by California's San Francisco's modern style cafes, Koshi aimed for a connection

between local potters and farmers and an urban creative class of artists, designers and musicians.

The relative success of this marketing strategy is visible in the growing number of visitors coming to Mashiko outside the Pottery Fair to enjoy strolling around the rural town and relax at one of its gallery-cafes, where they organic food or specialty coffee is served in simple handmade pots. In fact, following Starnet, other galleries-cafes mixing the old and new style have opened in Mashiko in recent years, as well as antique shops based on a different business model that takes into account contemporary social developments and market trends such as the LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) and lifestyle crafts (*seikatsu koge*i), approached in the chapter three of part one.

2.2. The potters

2.2.1. Andrew Gemrich (1967-), USA

Andrew Gemrich was born in Michigan, in the Great Lakes region of the United States, in 1967. As one of the most industrialized areas of the country, it became famous for its production of steel for the car industry. Despite this, he describes the place where he grew up as a "very calm place outside the city", a kind of countryside area with farmlands, woods, rivers, and lakes. He remembers spending his summer vacations going camping and canoeing with his family in the region during his childhood. In the late 1980s, Gemrich studied English Literature at Kalamazoo University, but his interest in Asia compelled him to sign up for a Japanese language course. In 1988, he came to Japan for the first time for a one-year university exchange at Waseda University, where he did a course in Japanese traditional painting. Having already developed an interest in ceramics, he visited traditional pottery centers around the country. But it was only after coming back to the United States to finish his Bachelor in English Literature that Gemrich took pottery classes for the first time. He remembers seeing the works of Shoji Hamada in ceramic books, even though he didn't associate the name with Mashiko. He notes:

I'd seen Hamada's pots in books and so forth but I had no idea he was from Mashiko and I didn't know Mashiko. My pottery class was mostly based on making and not so much on theory so I didn't hear about Leach, Hamada or the *mingei* then (Andrew Gemrich, July 2016).

After graduating from university in 1990, he returned to Japan as an English teacher, establishing in Iwate Prefecture in 1991. There, he was introduced to a potter who would provide him with his studio for practice during his visits, when they talked while throwing pots at the wheel and it was through him that Gemrich first heard about *mingei*. Thus, in 1993, he then decided to go to Mashiko, where he worked at the Mashiko Pottery Cooperation Center as an assistant for hands-on pottery making experiences, using the space to practice ceramics in his free time. In 1994, Gemrich

apprenticed with local potter Shunji Chikaraishi for one year, after which he rented his own house and studio to start working as an independent artist. In 1997, he won the first prize in ceramics at the Hamada Shoji Award and, the following year, he built his first kiln in Mashiko, a small wood-fired box kiln, which he moved to the neighboring city of Motegi in 2004, about 8 kilometers from Mashiko city center.

While Gemrich defines his style as “Japanese but different”, he uses Japanese traditional techniques such as the Japanese kick wheel, ash glazing and iron painting. The artist tries to use local materials as much as possible, buying raw and unprocessed clay from Mashiko that he uses just like it came “straight out of the ground” and he also fires his own rice ash for glazes. He says that many of the shapes of the pots he produces are also Japanese:

I live in Japan so I make things for Japan. I’m not making nice dinner sets, like western tableware. I like Japanese pottery because there are so many things to make. You have a small dish for this, a small dish for that, whereas western things you have the plate, the big plate, the small place, the bowl, the cup, the saucer. There’s much less diversity (Andrew Gemrich, July 2016).

The daily contact with nature provided by the location of his studio in the middle of the woods translates into his pottery, not only in the use of materials but also in his themes. Describing himself as an environmentalist, the potter has recently started a series centered on the subject of the natural environment, but with a twist. Inspired by his hometown Michigan, he started painting architectural motifs such as powerline cell towers and factories in his pots, which he describes as a critique of modern industrial society and environmental destruction:

Here in Japan, there has been pottery for thousands of years and people have always painted flowers, vines... it works really well, it’s easy. But the thing I noticed, when I moved here is that I could see we could see three different cell towers here. Those things that aren’t natural and man-made had been recently jumping out on me. I’ve noticed them here and there (Andrew Gemrich, July 2016).



Figure 2.17. Mashiko kitagoya asagi clay, which the potter uses straight out of the ground. Source: Andrew J. Gemrich Weblog



Figure 2.18. Texture is one of the most important qualities I try to express in my work. I like to show the look and feel of the earth. Source: Andrew J. Gemrich Weblog



Figure 2.19. I burned rice straw ash for making glazes. Source: Andrew J. Gemrich Weblog



Figure 2.20. Glazed pieces in the kiln for firing. Source: Andrew J. Gemrich Weblog



Figure 2.21. Trimming plates. Source: Andrew J. Gemrich Weblog



Figure 2.22. Spouted bowl with rice ash and amber ash glazes. Source: Andrew J. Gemrich Weblog

For eighteen years, the artist fired his pots in a wood-fired kiln, a practice that he sees as not having a negative impact on the environment for its very small scale. However, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake caused severe damage to his kiln, which had to be torn down. He reused the bricks to build a downdraft gas kiln in 2012 with the help of volunteers from the Mashiko Potters Relief Fund. In 2015, he built a kerosene-fueled kiln, which he describes as “easier to fire in reduction¹, giving more effects of fire and also more powerful, quick and cheap”. However, he still hopes to build another wood-fired kiln in the future:

Wood-firing has a softness to it and also the fire color in the unglazed clay is different because the clay gets color from the fire. And of course, you get some of the ash and subtle changes here and there, which I think are very nice (Andrew Gemrich, July 2016).

Gemrich uses two types of local unprocessed clay (a brownish and a whitish one), which he kneads using the Japanese *kikuneri* (spiral) technique. He works mostly with a Japanese style kick wheel for functional work, as well as cast molding and slabs, and finally hand building for sculptures. In terms of decoration techniques, he uses impression, incision, underglaze, slip, inlay (*zogan*), oxide painting and wax resist (*ronuki*). His glazes are mostly made of natural materials such as wood and rice ash, feldspar, clay, oxides and iron, which he applies by pouring the liquid with a scoop (*shaku*). After the bisque firing² and glazing, the potter fires his pieces at high temperature either with gas or kerosene in his downdraft kiln at between 1230 and 1300 degree for 16 to 20 hours, using both a reductive and oxidizing atmosphere. Sometimes, he adds wood, charcoal or ash from his wood stove to give the effects of wood firing in the color of both the unglazed clay and in the glazes. He also uses *saggar* fired charcoal (*tanka*) on specific occasions.

Gemrich defines his work has greatly based on texture: “Texture is one of the most important qualities I try to express in my work. I like to show the look and feel of the

¹ As opposed to oxidation, reduction means firing the clay in a low oxygen environment inside the kiln, which allows the production of copper red and blue glazes.

² Low temperature firing of the raw but dried pots before applying glaze.

earth” (Andrew Gemrich weblog). He has held exhibitions in department stores and galleries throughout Japan. In March 2012, he held an exhibition with two other Mashiko-based American potters, Douglas Black and Chris Gaston, titled “Three Roads to Mashiko” at the Gallery Midori, in the town center. In 2016, Gemrich and Black got together again to exhibit at Yamani Gallery, this time under the name “Crossroads to Mashiko”, after Chris Gaston moved to Kyushu in 2013. In 2015 and 2018, he participated in the Shoji Hamada Noborigama Revival project, where dozens of potters from Mashiko and Kasama gathered to fire Hamada’s old kiln for the first time in years. Gemrich has been part of the board of directors of the Mashiko Ceramic Art Association since its founding in 2012.

2.2.2. Douglas Black (1967-), USA

Douglas Black was born in 1967 in Lawrence, a vibrant college town in Kansas and home to the Haskell Indian Nations University, one of the oldest intertribal university in the U.S.A. He grew up with a curiosity for Native American culture, particularly through his godfather, whom he described as “one of the most successful Native American contemporary artists in America”, with works in the White House and the Smithsonian Museum.

In high school, I read a lot of books written about American Indians and when I went into nature, for some reason, I was always thinking about what it was like 300 years ago. A lot of things in [my godfather’s] artworks I’m influenced by. In the beginning, I didn’t know, but now I can see the connection (Douglas Black, December 2015)

He [my godfather] also taps into a universal source of symbols and spiritual meanings from other cultures. I too was interested in all of this depth of human psyche and greatly influenced by Joseph Campbell, who tied myths from all cultures together. My godfather’s influence grew after that visit, it continues, and

I visit him whenever I can, although my own works begin from their own stories (added by the artist when edited, April 2018).

After entering the Columbus College of Art and Design (CCAD) in Ohio in the late 1980s, Black became interested in ceramics through Ban Kajitani, a Japanese ceramic artist and educator, working as his assistant for three years. It was during his studies in Fine Arts that Black heard about Hamada, Leach, the *mingei* movement and Mashiko for the first time, even though it was more the circumstances (or fate, as he put it) than a passion for *mingei* that brought him to the pottery town. And while acknowledging the importance of what *mingei* represents, he is also critical of the *mingei* idea as a dogma and disagrees with Yanagi's original rejection of self-expression, which he sees as "actually a function in itself".

For me, *mingei* means something that is handmade and is appreciated by people, something that they use in their lives. And I don't like much more about it other than that principle. That they use it and they enjoy it and it's handmade. That's the only from *mingei* thing that's important to me (Douglas Black, December 2015).

During his college years, Black devoured all of the ceramics books at his reach and became fascinated with the aesthetics of Japanese ceramics, especially in its appreciation of the presence of rocks and other natural materials that are often disguised in the refined English or Chinese ware. The process of Japanese traditional ceramics opened him to aspects of chemistry and geology, encouraging him to experiment "like an *otaku*, crushing rocks and see what happens when they melt". He enjoys how Japanese aesthetics value natural imperfections such as "a plate with a crack and a stone coming out of it" and the "warm feeling essential to our well-being" brought by something that was handmade. However, he says that even though he was in an art school, most of his colleagues had no interest in handmade ceramics.

During his experience as Ban Kajitani's assistant, known for his sculptural, monumental and architectural ceramics, Black had the opportunity to learn about Japanese ceramics first-hand, even though he didn't make much functional pottery during that time. Furthermore, Kajitani made use of his connections to his homeland,

inviting Japanese artists and potters to give lectures at the university. It was one of those lecturers, Ichizo Mori (1945-), a potter based in Kuwana city (Mie prefecture) and famous for his involvement with the post-war Japanese avant-garde ceramic movement Sodeisha, who invited the young artist to come to Japan. After concluding his Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1990 with a focus on glass and ceramic sculpture, Black was awarded an artist visa by the Foreign Ministry of Japan to study ceramics under Mori's supervision.

He initially stayed in Mie prefecture for six months, learning ceramics within the Japanese master-apprentice system. During this time, he was expected to train strictly as a traditional potter, making the same two shapes for six months in exchange for a low salary and two holidays a month. Disappointed by the experience, which didn't stimulate creativity and experimentation, he thought about returning to the United States. However, after talking to a friend about his situation, he was invited by his teacher to go to Kasama, where he could stay while searching for a teacher who would help him develop his aspirations as an artist-potter. Thus, after staying in Kasama for one month, he became an assistant to contemporary ceramic artist Koji Usaka, with whom he worked for one year and a half in a system that he describes as based on "friendship and partnership" rather a traditional apprenticeship:

I graduated as a glassblower, ceramic sculptor and painter so when I had the invitation to come to Japan I came not so much because I wanted to study functional ceramics but because I wanted to come to Japan. I never really made much functional ware as a student (...). My first teacher in Japan was all about production, production, production but Usaka-san was very playful in the way he made things. And I think he influenced me a lot (Douglas Black, December 2015).

Born in Kagawa prefecture in 1956, Koji Usaka established in Motegi, a neighboring city to Mashiko, in 1980. Between 1991 and 1992, Black worked with Usaka while establishing his own individual studio in an old farmhouse along a river in Motegi, where he eventually built a gas kiln after becoming independent in the summer of 1992, holding an exhibition at Gallery Toko in Mashiko. Even though his plan was to return to the United States, an unexpected meeting with designer Baba Koshi, who would later

become his producer, on the last day of his exhibition opened the path “to several years of creative adventures”.

In 1993, Black became a member of *Geoidwork*, a Tokyo based group of collaborating artists, designers and musicians produced by Baba Koshi until 1997. After exhibiting at Yusei-sha Gallery in Ebisu in 1993, he participated in the group mostly as a volunteer, creating stage art and ceramic sculptural installations and performing in concerts and other events. Between 1994 and 1996, the group did several live performances in Tokyo and Yamanashi, including a three-day ambient opera and fashion performance at Art Sphere Theater in Tennozu Island. In 1996, the group performed "Sound of Earth", a live music piece using clay music instruments and a ceramic sculptural installation made by Black at the INAX Corporation main showroom in Tokyo. The next year, a similar exhibit under the name "Sound of Mashiko" was hosted at the Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art under the curatorship of Satoshi Yokobori, in which Black made a solo performance. Known for his work as a producer for famous fashion designer Tokio Kumagai in Tokyo, Baba Koshi ended up moving to Mashiko and opening Startnet gallery in 1998, before passing away in 2013.

The first time Baba ever visited Mashiko happened to be during my first solo exhibition. He had come by chance only to meet an ikebana artist for his new gallery (...). He had been working overseas for years, flying all over the world as a fashion designer, and decided to come back to Japan to start a gallery. The day after we met he was opening his first gallery, in Ebisu. He bought a lot of my works for his gallery. We became good friends and he stayed at my apartment in Motegi and I always stayed at his place in Ebisu whenever I went to Tokyo. ´

My second solo exhibition was at his gallery, Yusei-sha, in Ebisu in 1993. We partied a lot in Tokyo and started some of many future fashion/music/performance events together, stayed on an island in Thailand, traveled together inside Japan (...). Eventually, he became attracted to my country life in Motegi and he asked me to find him an old farmhouse here so he could store a lot of his goods at cheap rent. I introduced to him an old farmhouse near my place and he liked it so much that he renovated it to become his second house.

Every weekend for a few years he came here and we had many, many times around the *irori* [sunken fireplace]. He became tired of Tokyo and decided to get out, so he began looking for land in Mashiko to move his gallery. He started building Starnet in 1997 and it opened in 1998 when he moved here. (Douglas Black, March 2018 via Facebook message).

Since 1992, Douglas Black has shown his work in solo exhibitions in Mashiko, Tokyo and other regions of Japan, as well as group exhibitions abroad, including Korea, Singapore, Thailand, England, France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy and the United States. In 2008, he exhibited his works together with Andrew Gemrich and Christopher M. Gaston in a show titled *Three Roads to Mashiko*, at Yamani Gallery Midori, being the first foreigners to show at that gallery in Mashiko. The exhibit was repeated annually until 2014. In 2016, after Gaston moved to Kyushu, Black and Gemrich exhibited again together at Yamani Gallery under the title *Crossroads Mashiko*. In 2012, Black traveled to Korea for the first time to partake in the Mungyeong Teabowl Festival, to which he returned for three years. In the same year, he participated in the Namiseom (Nami Island) International Ceramic Festival, at a “micro-nation” within Korea, called Namihara Republic, “an environmental oasis for tourists, made of recycling projects and nature’s harmony that hosts many cultural and artistic events”.

Mungyeong is an important ceramic area that helped revive traditional Korean ceramic techniques after the war. It also has a huge stone wall that was the farthest the Japanese soldiers came when they invaded [Korea] during the [so-called] Pottery Wars four hundred years ago (addition when edited by the artist, April 2018).

In 2013, he returned to Korea to participate in Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale and traveled to Thailand for the 6th International Ceramic Exhibition at Silpakorn University. During these events, he had a chance to connect with other artists from Asia and other parts of the world.

I went and I had fun, not just because of being in Korea, but all the other artists. I got really good stimulation and inspiration and feeling like I'm connected to a global family. That's why I wanted to do it again and I started looking for ways to go again (...). I had a really good time with Koreans. And I met like my brother, my Korean brother, we are similar. And the other artists that are like all from Asia, Thailand, Malaysia, India (...). So anyway, I started moving around from the people that I met in Korea (Douglas Black, July 2017).

Through the contacts and networks he made in Korea, Black was able to introduce and co-organize an exchange project between Incheon and Mashiko potters in 2014, through the sponsorship of the Mashiko Ceramic Art Association (MCAA), where he has been volunteering as a member of the board of directors since January 2016. The Korea/Japan exchange project is now biannual, alternating the host country. In 2016, he organized for twenty Mashiko potters to exhibit in Incheon at the Cerapia Ceramic Museum, the largest ceramic museum in Korea, with twenty-five Korean potters. For this event, fifteen potters traveled from Mashiko to Incheon, eight of them for a one-week homestay. And, in October 2018, twenty Korean potters traveled to Mashiko to exhibit with twenty-five Mashiko potters at the Mashiko Ceramic Museum. The motivation for organizing these projects comes, in part, from his desire to promote Mashiko as a place of international cultural and artistic exchanges. Douglas Black's artworks are included in the collections of the Mungyeong Museum, in Korea and the Keramikmuseum Westerwald, in Germany. In 2015, he was made a founding committee member for the new "International Ceramix Festival" on Jeju Island, Korea, where he participated in its first festival in 2017.

In 2010, Black was invited to participate in the Niki Club Art Biotop Artist-in-Residence program, where he stayed for three months in late 2013 and early 2014 developing sculptural works and installations based on the animist idea of natural spirits, inspired by both Native American culture and Japanese Shinto religion. Located at the foot of Mount Nasu in Tochigi prefecture, in an area famous for its forest waterfalls and hot springs, Art Biotop includes a gallery, cafe, guesthouse and glass and pottery art studio where visitors can "stay casually and enjoy art activities amid a rich natural

environment" (Art Biotop, n/d). In the area surrounding the Artist-in-Residence, Black found the headwaters of Naka River that runs near his house.

I felt like I was going back 23 years to all these ideas I had a long time ago. When I first went up there, during the first days I just got in the car and drove up to the mountains and I found the source of this river. This river comes from Nasu. I went all the way up into the stream where it's coming from, taking walks... Anyways, I made my theme like I was going back to the source, my source too (...). And living on the river, down below... I think one of the reasons why I'm in Japan is because of this place here (Douglas Black, June 2016).

Mixing different media such as ceramics, glass and driftwood found in the river, he created defending warrior-like figures, such as the protector spirit of the future of the river and forms reminiscing spear points and arrowheads, a shape that he says is always in his heart. Through his work, Black feels he is "connecting to ancient spirits, to things people have done forever, ten thousand years or so".

Black's home and studio, appropriately called bRIVERb, is located on the hillside of Naka River in what the artist describes as a "warm-hearted agricultural community" about ten kilometers from the center of Motegi town and 20 kilometers from Mashiko. Before he started building his current place in 1994, Black lived in an abandoned old-style traditional Japanese house by the river, a few meters down from his current location, after being moved by the beauty of nature in the area during a visit to a friend's place.

When I first came to visit here, my teachers' friend told me there was an empty house, and when I walked down the river I was just... I remember thinking "If I live here, this is going to really change my life". And then I looked at the house and it was a one-hundred-year-old house falling apart. It had a straw-thatched roof (*warabuki*). You'd wake up and it was all in the mist and the river and all that, with the stream... There used to be a stream that went next to the house. Just all the nature and how the Japanese house was all open up, the doors on both sides and sitting there... It was a really good experience. It was like camping living there, it

was like camping because there was no bath. I heated up water in a pan and put it in an old-style washing machine. And it was like minus five degrees... When it rained in the summer, I stood out in the yard and washed like this or jumped in the river (Douglas Black, December 2015).

Esteemed by the locals and envied by outside visitors for his Japanese rural lifestyle, Black often takes part in his community's activities, such as cleaning the weeds on the side of the road or even helping out with the harvesting, and other informal gatherings of his neighborhood of farmers and urban migrants. In 2007, they built an open-air wood-fired community bath *rotenburo* by the river, which destroyed in the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

Located a couple of minutes' walk from Naka river and with a scenic view to the valley, Black self-built his house, gallery and studio over the course of several years using recycled materials from abandoned houses and fallen trees from nearby mountains. He was inspired by 1970s California's *hippie*-style houses to create a place to relax, enjoy and create an atmosphere "futuristic but nostalgic", as described in the 79th volume of ドゥーパ！ DIY Magazine, where his home was featured in an edition released in December 2010. Black also has a vegetable garden and recently built a pizza kiln. In May 2016, his celadon³ work was also featured in volume 55 of Discover Japan Magazine. While is not uncommon for potters to build not only their own tools, kilns, studios and homes, Black describes this as part of his identity, where his lifestyle and artworks have developed as something holistic: "I and my lifestyle are part of the story of the pieces I make, it resonates. It's a total product".

In 2015, Black participated in the third edition of the *Hijisai* – Living with the Earth Festival created by Baba Koshi, which takes place every three years during the harvest full moon in Mashiko. He created a twenty-five meter spatial solar installation in a rice field using ceramics and other materials featuring a 3.5-meter totem-like and small alien-looking figures. The work is based on the idea of earth not only from the point of view of soil, essential for pottery and agriculture, and ground (foundation, stability) but also as a place in which we all, humans and nature coexist "Under One Sky".

³ An iron-based glazed originated in China and characterized by green, grey and grey-blue colors.

In ancient times, before even civilization, humanity lived under the same sky, on this planet called Earth, directly connected, as if in communion with nature. As beings that live on this Earth, our origin is the simple base that is nature and humanity, that waypoint connecting ancient times and the future, humanity's course, that is what this represents. Modern times have strayed far from the center, remember your origin, and be grounded. And when you can gaze at it with wide eyes in its entirety, humanity will be in harmony with nature, forming a single ring that surpasses race and culture, I believe that it will continue into a new and nostalgic future (“Under One Sky” installation brochure, Hijisai 2015, translated from Japanese).

In 2015 and 2018, Black joined in the Hamada Shoji *noborigama* project, a commemorative and collaborative firing with almost one hundred potters from Mashiko and Kasama. In 2017, his work titled “Cosmic Egg” was awarded the Grand Prize at International Sunrise Art Exhibition that took place in Tokyo, reflecting how the universe-related themes are pervasive throughout his work. In the same year, he was awarded the Grand Prize by the Vallauris Institute of the Arts in France and, as a result, stayed at Institute for one month in July 2018. He also had a solo exhibition at the Terra Rossa Ceramic Museum in Salernes, France, in August 2018, where he taught a five-day workshop.

Besides sculptures and installations, Black has a functional branch of work in which he also expresses his creativity and uniqueness. Motivated by his interest in food and *washoku* (Japanese-style cuisine), he started creating simple tableware pieces using Japanese traditional glazes.

I like eating, so I fell in love with the way things are presented in Japan, it shows much more appreciation and gratitude. People are appreciating the ware and what's in it at the same time so it's a much more healthy experience of enjoyment. And there are so many different plates in Japan that whatever I made could be used for something, so I was always playful when I make things, even when I made simple things. (Douglas Black, December 2015).

It is this conscious and playful appreciation of enjoying our food that I love. In the beginning, I made many simple, unglazed pottery for *washoku*. I felt simple was best... But as this became more popular/revival I shifted into making more original styled works as a creator. I love both (Added by the artist, April 2018).

However, in 2008, he dived into a new more playful and colorful series, which he called Polka Dot Skies. Sprinkling transparent blue glaze made from the ashes of wild cherry tree on black clay, the pieces are decorated with gold overglaze enamel and drawings of mysterious symbols and sometimes UFOs, creating a cosmic and spacey atmosphere. Thus, while functional ware has some criteria to stay functional, Black likes to explore the infinite possibilities of clays and glazes, making use of Japanese traditional techniques and styles such as *shino*, *celadon* and *setoguro* made by *hikidashi*⁴, a technique that reveals "extraordinary effects that have a depth and beauty of those embodied in nature". However, the artist also stretches this styles beyond their traditional way, adapting them to his own personal expression to create something that has "a Japanese feeling but is different from something a Japanese person would make". Furthermore, the habit of using different plates in Japan and the importance given to the presentation of food on those plates allows him to play with different aesthetics and materials. Those simple, daily pleasures present in the "playful presentation of food" and its consumption are what he hopes to convey to the users of his work, who are mostly middle-class urbanites who appreciate the playfulness and the warm feeling of handmade in his work.

I make a living mostly from functional pottery and most of my customers are normal people that I meet so it must be functional (...). Most people who buy my work are not from Mashiko but use my work at their houses and resonate with the feeling I put out. They buy something and they use it and they enjoy it and when they have guests they also get compliments and they are able to talk about this person who made it. They know who made it and that makes them happy to have a story behind the piece (Douglas Black, December 2015).

⁴ *Hikidashi* is technique that consists of pulling the pieces directly from high temperature, and is more durable than the low fired *raku*.

Black also likes to play when it comes to making works for the very traditional tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) or flower arrangement (*ikebana*) events. Believing young tea masters are not that interested in "the old, rigid, elite ways" anymore and being a tea practitioner himself, Black not only makes traditional tea bowls but he also takes the traditional styles and designs and makes them "more fun". In 2009 he collaborated with *ikebana* master Toizumi Nichimasa in the making of a three-meter installation to use as an *ikebana* vase in which a big branch of a blooming cherry tree was presented.

Besides the *sakura* ash glaze he uses in his Polka Dot Skies series, Black also creates other glazes from rocks and wood ashes. He likes to explore different results through the mixing of different types of clays from different regions, such as stoneware from Shigaraki, porcelain from Mino, and unrefined raw clay from Seto. While valuing the *mingei* ideal of working with natural local materials, he also likes exploring different possibilities which would not have been available one hundred years ago:

For me I tried that, I dug clay here and used the Motegi clay and local materials but I'm more interested in the infinite possibilities of the medium of clay and trying different things. I romanticized the idea of all local materials but I'm more interested in exploring the adventure of ceramics, trying different things because it can only happen now, it wasn't able to be done 100 or 200 years ago. I'm not going to import tons of materials from overseas, I don't want to do that but everything, potatoes or chili peppers... everything has come from somewhere else. The composition of ceramics is infinite, like the universal forces, so I look at it like that. It's very interesting combining different elements and seeing what you can make (Douglas Black, December 2015).

Black uses an electric wheel, where he enjoys loosely throwing bowls and "making whatever comes up" in an immersed mindset that he sees as close to a meditative state. He recalls when he participated in a meditation workshop for the first time twenty years ago, in Kyoto. There, he meditated for ten hours a day and was required to keep a vow of silence for the duration of two-weeks:



Figure 2.23. Douglas Black neighboring river in Motegi. Source: *Douglas Black Art*.



Figure 2.24. Motegi community bath. Source: *Douglas Black Art*.



Figure 2.25. Douglas Black self-built house. Source: *Douglas Black Art*.



Figure 2.26. *Under One Sky* installation at the Hijisai Festival, 2015. Source: *Douglas Black Art*.



Figure 2.27. Douglas Black studio. Source: *Douglas Black Art*.



Figure 2.28. *Polka Dot Skies* sake set with sakura ash glaze and gold overglaze. Source: *Douglas Black Art*.



Figure 2.29. *Hikidashi* tea bowl. Source: *Douglas Black Art*.



Figure 2.30. *Hikidashi firing.*
Photo by the author.



Figure 2.31. *Tea cup.*
Source: *Douglas Black Art.*

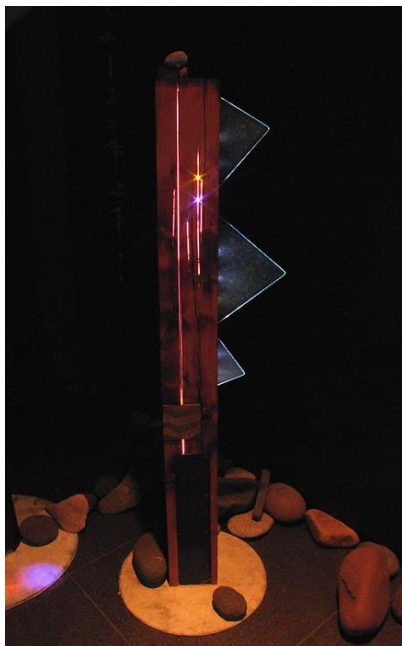


Figure 2.32. *Space Totem 1,* old farmhouse beam, fused antique glass, metal, stone, ceramic and LED lighting, Gallery COM 2008. Source: *Douglas Black Art.*



Figure 2.33. *Spirit Lifter.*
Source: *Douglas Black Art.*



Figure 2.34. *Extraordinary.*
Source: *Douglas Black Art.*



Figure 2.35. *Pink Planet.*
Source: *Douglas Black Art.*



Figure 2.36.
Painting the Future
Source: *Douglas Black Art.*

After the ten days, people came outside and you could talk, the head guy there, who was in the room meditating (...), came straight to me and he asked me where I studied meditation, but that was my first time ever. And I told him what I did and he was like: "ah, so you're always meditating in your work" (Douglas Black, June 2016).

For Black, exploring the possibilities of the materials is not limited to clay. Trained as a glass blower, the artist likes to work with different mediums, such as glass, wood, metal or stone, stressing how each material has its own expression. In 2014, he gave a mix-media workshop called "Nature is the Universal Language" in Nasu:

The material, well, it has a shape, but it has a feeling too, right? Like a vibration. It says something. It's a symbol of something. Metal is a symbol of the industrial world, now. Whereas glass is a symbol of some lens for the future. Each material is a symbol and has a language. When you put these things together, depending on their shapes, they speak through this kind of universal language. Ceramic has a feeling to it or wood or stone or glass or metal. That's what I really like to play around with (Douglas Black, June 2016).

Black fires his pieces at high-temperature in his self-built gas kiln, usually for the duration of ten hours. When using over-glazed enamels, he re-fires his pieces at a lower temperature.

The most common is like ten hours. My kiln is not all made of bricks. It is made of ceramic fiber, so it heats fast. At high temperature, I go slower but in the beginning, I go fast, depending on what's in there. If I have a big work, sometimes I fire for twenty hours, twenty-four hours, because in the beginning, you have to go slowly. But right now, with my glazing techniques, I don't fire extra-long for glazes. There's no need. My Mashiko teacher always fired in eight hours and that's how I learned this. Some glazing styles are different, you have to go slow, like *shino* (Douglas Black, July 2017).

Black signs his pieces with a stamp that features a drawing of an ancient symbol meaning cell division and expanding energy:

It is a symbol for cell division that I made from a photograph in a pregnancy book showing the first cell division. Coincidentally, it is also similar to an ancient energy symbol, sacred geometry – see Vesica Piscis, which is more mathematically symmetrical than the organic cell division. I see it as both (added by the artist when edited, April 2018).

Thus, while Black likes the *mingei* idea of the anonymous craftsman, he admits that it has no bearing on his work. Furthermore, even though he works alone without any assistance, he doesn't consider himself a studio potter in terms of mass-production. Instead of making one repeated shape all day every day, he prefers to explore different possibilities.

For many years, Black has sold his works in galleries and exhibited in department stores, but he doesn't do that often anymore. One of the reasons is the high percentage of the sales and the fact that pieces are almost always left on consignment. Thus, nowadays Black sells his works mostly directly to the customers in his studio or during exhibitions. He also occasionally takes orders from restaurants and has pieces at the local *soba* (buckwheat noodles) restaurant in his neighborhood. He has also been participating in the Mashiko Pottery Festival every year twice a year since 1991, making it his fifty-third fair in 2018. In recent years he has also started selling his works abroad.

Black' work is mostly inspired by nature and the beauty of our mystery, as he calls it, as well as in extraordinary phenomena or things that cannot be explained. He sees nature as a source of harmony, peace of mind and grounding and something essential in his life.

So I like to say “the beautiful mystery”. Some things are naturally beautiful and I don't know my own criteria for that, but I have a certain vibration that I catch that tells me it's beautiful. Some people say that beauty and beautiful things are illusions, but there's a certain harmony in some things that make them beautiful.

I'm more interested in expressing beauty than like... political art (...). There are enough things in the world that I don't want to see. So if I do art, I'd rather make a grounding space or something that has charm, something that you don't know why it's beautiful or interesting to you, but it is. And this charm of the beautiful mystery is important. So I'm not interested in making more loud distractions or anything. I would rather make grounding spaces and things like that (Douglas Black, December 2015).

The beautiful mystery that inspires his work is visible in the cosmic themes, energy symbols and his use of colors and patterns that give a connection to both the earth and the universe, the past and the future. Interested in quantum physics and spirituality, he defines his sculptural works as "grounded but rooted in dreams":

My inspirations are found within nature and the beauty of our mystery. Our expression in clay is as infinite as the universe of its composition. The ceramic palette is fascinating. Not long ago, a spacey colored polka dot from the ash glaze of the wild cherry blossom tree was discovered on black clay. A new series, 'Polka Dot Skies', began... We are all dots connecting the universe (Douglas Black in *Artist statement*).

2.2.3. Euan Craig (1964-), Australia

Euan Craig was born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1964. At the age of 12, he moved to Bendigo, a city with a ceramic tradition that goes back 150 years. At the age of 14, already knowing that he wanted to become a potter, he worked part-time jobs at several ceramic studios. He then got his Bachelor degree in Arts and Ceramics Design at Latrobe University, Bendigo in 1985 and established Castle Donnington Pottery in Swan Hill the next year, which he ran for four years before coming to Japan. Craig recounts how he decided to become a potter at as early as age 14:

There were a lot of reasons why I chose pottery as a career. I didn't choose pottery because I liked pottery. I chose pottery because I wrote a list of all the things that I wanted from a career and from life (...). A career that exercised me and my body, something in which I used my hands, something that used my brain, something which was about science and art and philosophy. Something which I would not retire from, but continue throughout my life. Something that was a challenge and would interest me all of my life. So all of these things I listed up and compared with a list of possible careers. Now I had been doing pottery at school, in art classes and the town I lived in had a 150-years history of pottery. So pottery as a profession wasn't it a ridiculous idea. And so I looked at the list of possible careers and crossed off all the ones that didn't meet my criteria and the only one left was pottery (Euan Craig, February 2016).

After making this decision in 1978, he started reading about ceramics. It was at this time that he first heard about the *mingei* movement through Bernard Leach's "A Potter's Book" and, from then on, the *mingei* idea became important to him. During college, he learned about Japanese ceramics and was influenced by the work of Mashiko potter Seto Hiroshi (1914-1994), who had taught at the university the year before Craig enrolled, where had built a Japanese traditional wood-fired kiln *anagama* that Craig had the opportunity to fire. In fact, the post-war period was marked by a deepening of artistic and cultural exchanges between Japan and Australia, with Australians going to Japan to learn ceramics in Japan during the American occupation and Japanese potters coming to teach ceramics in Australia, which peaked in the 1970s. Craig also recalls how this decade was marked by a strong movement of self-sufficiency informed by the *hippie* and other countercultural movements, which encouraging many young people to go back to nature and choose a career out of the mainstream, triggering a handicrafts boom which included pottery.

Despite having grown up in the city, Craig developed a strong bond with nature, partially as a result of the regular visits to his aunt's farm, where he learned "where food comes from, how to grow it, shooting rabbits and then turning that into a meal". His parents also enjoyed hobbies like leather carving, spinning, weaving and knitting, and through those experiences, he gained a deep knowledge about where things came from

and how they were made. In fact, until this day, he keeps a sweater made from the wool of one of his aunt's sheep, who went by the name of Herbie, hand-knitted by his mother and given to him at age 15. Craig emphasized how these experiences helped him realize his place in nature, in the world and the value of objects and their materials. The choice of becoming a potter thus came through this awareness, fueling a desire to live a natural lifestyle while doing something that promoted self-development and fulfilled a responsibility towards nature and the greater community. In fact, he laments how, in modern society, people have lost their roots with the earth.

People lost their contact with the earth, with nature (...). There was a point that, of the population in the world, the majority have always lived in the cities and they think that that is the real world, instead of living in the country and being in contact with nature. The artificial environment they live in is normal. They judge flavors by artificial standards, they judge the quality of things by artificial measures. They don't know how to strike a match, light a fire. But I think there's a lot of people feeling that there's something missing in them (Euan Craig, February 2016).

After finishing university, he set up his own studio, which grew rapidly. However, instead of expanding the business, he decided to accept a friend's invitation to join him in Mashiko, arriving in Japan in 1990 with a cultural activities visa. There, he started working at a small pottery factory as a wheel production manager, an experience that he describes as more useful for learning the Japanese language than ceramics. He was then introduced to National Living Treasure Tatsuzo Shimaoka, who coincidentally was looking to hire a wheel thrower for his studio.

For one year, Craig worked in the traditional master-apprentice system, which, he noted, required a lot of humility as well as an active and curious approach to learning. He mentioned how, even though he had already been doing ceramics for twelve years, he had to learn how to make pots the "Shimaoka way", a process that was based on observation, inquiry and trial and error.

When I first started at Shimaoka's, I had already been a potter for twelve years. And yet, when I first started making his pots, he said: "make 200 of these *yunomi*"

and so I made the first batch and he came along and said "this one and this one and this one are okay. All the rest of them, re-wedge and start again". So I did. And I analyzed what was wrong and right because, in the Japanese traditional way of teaching, the teacher doesn't teach, the *deshi* [apprentices] learns. And so he didn't tell me what was wrong with the other ones. He said "This one is okay and this is not OK" and I had to work out myself what was wrong and what was right because that's part of the learning process (Euan Craig, February 2016).

Living in an apartment just a few feet from Shimaoka's studio, he received enough money to buy food and pay the rent. His daily work schedule started at 7:30 in the morning, when the apprentices would work on the garden for half an hour before the workers came at 8:00. They worked in the studio until 17:00, with breaks for morning tea at 10:00, lunch at 12:00 and afternoon tea at 15:00. It was only after they finished the various tasks involved in the production of Shimaoka's work that apprentices were allowed to make their own pieces or practice in the studio. However, for Craig, being with Shimaoka meant an opportunity to observe, learn and work with the traditional Japanese pottery techniques used at the master's studio. He turned pots on the foot wheel, practiced the Japanese way of kneading the clay, *kikumomi* (spiral wedging) and *ashimomi* (foot wedging), learned a type of decoration called *Jomon zogan* (cord marked inlay) made with a handmade cord rope, typical of Shimaoka's work, and operated a wood-fired climbing kiln (*noborigama*). Craig recalls the master's studio as a traditional place made with old-style Japanese architecture, where a water-well and a wood stove were also used. After working there for one year, he was recognized as a *deshi* (apprentice) and, having received the necessary skills to graduate, was given a tea bowl made and signed by Shimaoka as his graduation gift. After temporarily returning to Australia, Craig came back to Japan and established his own independent studio in the town of Mashiko in 1994.

An enthusiast of the aesthetics of wood-firing, which values the role of nature in the process, visible in the marks of flames and the color patterns created by ashes from the wood on the pieces, and aware of the environmental costs of fossil fuels, Craig decided his own wood-firing kiln. However, the traditional wood climbing kiln *noborigama* was not convenient for a potter working alone like him and there wasn't a

type of kiln that matched his requirements. So, using other kiln designs as a base, he developed his own kiln style that he calls “euangama”, which he managed to fire after two failed attempts. Also, he developed a firing technique that allows him to save both time and materials, which consists of firing the pots raw, without the usual low-temperature bisque-firing, directly until a high temperature of 1320°C, in a total of 15 hours.

As a professional potter making my living from pottery, I needed a kiln which was a good size, but one that could be fired by one person in one day. So I did a lot of research, I designed a kiln and built it and it was a complete failure. So I knocked it down and redesigned it and rebuilt it and it was a complete failure. Third time lucky. And I came up with a kiln which is basically the same design as what I'm using now. Most potters would bisque-fire their pots and then take them out of the kiln and then glaze them, restack them and re-fire them. I did that once in this kiln. I only had the wood kiln, I didn't have an electric kiln and so, when I did the biscuit firing, when I pulled the pots out and they had ash on them, and I had to brush the ash off before I could glaze them. And I thought: “what a waste! I want ash on the pots!” So I decided I didn't want to bisque and unstack and then restack and then glaze-fire. I want to just do one firing. So I started to change the way I made my pots and glaze them so I could glaze my pots raw without bisque firing them and then I only have to stack the kiln once and unstack it once (Euan Craig, February 2016).

Craig built his first “euangama” in Mashiko in 1994 and, since then, seven other kilns based on the same designed were built in Mashiko. Concerned about the environmental impact of using new wood, Craig fires with recycled wood from boxes used to transport tobacco leaves from America and Canada to Japan, which are free of chemicals.

I started off using the offcuts from sawmills (...). I didn't want to use the best wood. I didn't want to have to cut trees down specifically to fire my kiln. So I was trying to use the offcuts from... first from timber mills and then from the building

industry (...). But then they changed the laws of industrial waste here in Japan. So all of that industrial waste had to go through a recycled shop and I found a company that had a recycle license that was recycling the wood from the wooden boxes for tobacco that was being brought from overseas to Japan and cutting it up and making bundles of wood. It was very cheap and it was recycled timber and so I used that and I've used that for ten years (Euan Craig, February 2016).

In 2011, Craig's house, studio and kiln suffered severe damage during the Great East Japan Earthquake, forcing him and his family of five to relocate to Minakami, his wife's hometown, after living in Mashiko for over twenty years. Located in Gunma prefecture, about 150 km west of Mashiko and 150 km northwest of Tokyo, Minakami is known for its mountain landscape headed by Mount Tanigawa, hot springs and adventure and nature tourism. After taking refuge with his wife's relatives, they bought an abandoned 150-year-old farmhouse where the family used to grow silkworms, the traditional activity of the region. The house is located in an area of Minakami known as "Takumi no Sato" (Village of Skills), a 330 hectares arts and crafts village located at a twenty-minute drive from Jomo-Kogen bullet-train station of the Joetsu line. Established in 1970's as a tourist site envisioning the revitalization of the old rural village centered on sericulture, Takumi no Sato has now 350 traditional houses where tourists, who account roughly for 500,000 people a year, can enjoy local food and traditional handicrafts while appreciating the beautiful landscape of mountains, rice paddies and other farmland. Hands-on making experiences include wood-carving, *washi* paper, bamboo and pottery, even though there is no particular pottery tradition in the region.

During several months, Craig worked on repairing the old house with the help of friends and family, while keeping the traditional features such as the dark wooden floor, paper sliding screen doors (*shoji*), wood stove and charcoal brazier (*irori*). His studio, located inside the house, also retains some of the features of a traditional potter's studio: earthen floor (*doma*), bamboo drying shelves, manual slab roller, wooden flywheel and an old hand kick wheel that belonged to Shoji Hamada, a present from Hamada's grandson. Outside, he built a one cubic meter "euangama", which he first fired in 2012.

However, the consequences of the earthquake were not limited to the destruction of his house. One of Craig's biggest concerns has been finding natural local materials that were not affected by the radiation, particularly wood.

When the earthquake and the nuclear disaster happened, there were a lot of nuclear materials spread in the forest in Japan. And so the Japanese native timber, a lot of it was contaminated. Which would then, if you use it to fire pots, contaminate your pots (...). When you burn the wood it will concentrate to 200 times the amount (...). So in order to make sure the amount of radiation in the ash you've got to test the wood first. That can be done at the Forestry Department now because they're trying to make a map of where the radiation is in Japan. Now five years on, a lot of the radiation has reduced but it's getting further and deeper into the wood. What was just on the surface, on the bark, it is being spread in the wood. So any wood I use would have to be tested (...). So that's what I'm trying to do now, trying to find local wood that's safe and eventually I'd like to grow my own wood to supply our own needs (Euan Craig, February 2016).

Besides the concern for radiation-safe materials and the impact on the environment, Craig is also looking to start producing something that reflects the character of the region he is now part of, what he calls a "sense of terroir, *genius loci* (spirit of the place in Latin)", following one of the *mingei's* standards.

One of the things about *mingei* is that sense of locality. When I came to this area, it wasn't a plan, it was an emergency. So when I first came here, first I had to get into a situation where I could start producing pots. So I was getting most of the materials from Mashiko, but I am now trying to research the local materials to try and start making something which is peculiar to this area. The first thing, instead of getting my firewood from Mashiko, was to get my firewood locally. The problem after the earthquake, because of the radioactive materials, was getting safe wood. Now I'm using wood from near here and it's safe. And I'm gathering the ashes from the wood that I'm burning to use it as ash glazes. And because I use three different wood stoves, the one in the studio, the one for the bath and the one for the lounge

room, I can burn three different sorts of wood and gather three different sorts of ashes just from our normal stove. I'm starting to use the ash from rice husks. Those sorts of ashes are pretty much the same as it would be in Mashiko glazes. However, I'm also starting to research the use of local feldspars (...). Because I'm part of this community now. So what I'm working on now is using those materials to develop a new porcelain body, to make new glazes and create something which is specific to this area, which has the terroir of this area (Euan Craig, January 2017).

The relocation from Mashiko to Minakami has also affected his production level, which is now at one third that it was before. Normally, Craig would make around 400 pots a month and fire them once a month, which would make about 5000 pots a year. But the harsh winter of Gunma prefecture and the search for new materials, together with the time spent renovating the old house, has slowed down his schedule. In December 2012, he had his first exhibition after the earthquake at Ebiya Gallery, an antique shop in Nihonbashi, Tokyo, where he has been exhibiting solo since 1993. Opened in 1673 in Kyoto as an official purveyor of handicrafts to the Imperial House, the business moved to Tokyo with the emperor after the Meiji Restoration, becoming an antique business that also exhibits works from contemporary artists three generations ago. Every year, once a year, Craig stays at the gallery during the entire period of his exhibition, usually two weeks, which also includes a tea ceremony event performed by a tea master using his tea bowls.

Craig uses a mixture of porcelain and stoneware from Mino and Shigaraki, which, he stated, provides him with a clay body that is more durable and easier to work at the wheel while also giving a beautiful response to the wood after fired. Working with the Japanese traditional spiral wedging (*kikumoni*) allows him to knead an entire piece of clay ready to go on the wheel, instead of having to knead for each individual pot. Craig also draws projects of the pieces before throwing them on the traditional Japanese kick wheel, which he then uses and redesigns as needed. He sometimes works with an electric wheel for making larger and cylindrical vessels. He makes all of his pots at the wheel and doesn't work with any other forming methods, such as slabbing or molding.

I don't do any slab work, I don't do any molds. I don't do any coil building. Not that I can't, just that I don't. I like to focus on the wheel. I like the interaction between the universal forces and humanity. Coil building, slab building tend to be too conscious, self-conscious and I like the spontaneity of the wheel. The clay wants to be a pot. The clay is amorphous and wants to align itself with the universal forces that work on them. One of those forces is our consciousness and the clay wants to be on center, clay wants to be a pot. You've just got to hold your hand in the right place and the clay will be exactly where your hand isn't (Euan Craig, February 2016).

For decoration, the potter works with chattering (*tobikana*), cord marked inlay (*Jomon zogan*) that he learned from Shimaoka, and occasionally slip decoration and stamps. He glazes his pieces with his own homemade traditional Japanese glazes, mostly *tenmoku* and *celadon*, both iron glazes with feldspar base, using a technique called wax resist. He also wraps some of his pieces in *igusa*, the straw from *tatami* mats, which burns during the firing creating different and more or less unexpected effects. Towards the end of the firing, he sometimes adds a small amount of soda ash, which gives the pieces an orange flash. The ash glazing also happens inside the kiln, from the ashes of the wood as it fires. Because of his process, Craig states that his work happens in collaboration with nature.

Everything about my pots is a simple expression of the process. Nature is like that. Nature is beautiful because it's very simple, it follows very simple logical rules and it is the process through which those things are made that makes them beautiful. As a result, not as an objective (Euan Craig, January 2017).

The concern for a production process that is environmentally sustainable is also visible in his use of refuse, such as egg shells, bones, straw, rice husks, wood ash or anything that comes out of the family's daily life: "if we can use that to create something beautiful and permanent, then it's environmentally responsible, which is very important for this day and age; it's taking traditional techniques and bringing them to a context which is contemporary". Hereafter, besides planting his own trees for wood-firing and

his own rice for rice husks, he also wants to be completely self-sufficient energy-wise by using solar panels, an investment he plans to make in the future.

Besides exhibiting in galleries in Japan and overseas, Craig sells his work directly to the public from his studio and has recently started selling overseas through the internet at his own online gallery: “having the internet, having access to the world means the world has access to me as well. It means that I can work in the mountains and still sell my work overseas”. He also frequently receives orders from restaurants and participates in signature dinners where he collaborates with chefs, giving the customers “the most beautiful and rich dining experience” with vessels “that will bring out the best in the food”. Craig makes pieces both for use in traditional Japanese and Western-style cuisine, which have different features. Asked about the differences between vessels used in Japanese and Western-style meals, he answered:

It comes from whether you use chopsticks or knife and fork first of all. Japanese food, when people eat with chopsticks, they lift the food off the plate, so a plate can have more texture on it, throwing rings, bumps... Whereas if you use a knife and fork you have to have a smooth surface on the plate. And you have to think about how the pots are being used. So, for example, a Japanese plate can be curved, once again because you're lifting the food off with the *hashi*. A Western plate has to have a wider base and be flat because if you try to use a knife and fork on a curved plate it's going to tip it over. Vessels, for example, *yunomi* for drinking green tea would not have a handle because you only fill up to two thirds, but they have a high foot so that the foot doesn't get hot and you hold it from the top and the bottom, whereas in the West you fill up your coffee mug with hot coffee, you cannot hold the base itself so you have to have a handle. So depending on the way that you use the vessel, the sort of food is going to be served in it, it's nice to have different features (Euan Craig, February 2016).

Craig also participates in pottery festivals, but since the earthquake he has only been attending the Mashiko Pottery Fair that happens twice a year. He gets considerable media coverage, having been featured on Japan Times and several documentaries by NHK world and Japan Tokyo Terebi. Besides his work as a potter, Craig also writes articles

for international pottery magazines and has a very active blog on the internet. His customer base consists of “people from all sorts of walks of life and all ages”, from “young couples who are just starting out on their journey in life” to “older people who are enjoying their retirement”, but most are based in metropolitan areas such as Tokyo: “by having my pots on their table have got a little bit of country”:

The thing which probably is common to them all is a concern for the quality of life. Of course, they have to have a certain amount of financial freedom to be able to purchase handcrafted objects but they'd rather have quality of life using handcrafted objects and living a life which is rich every day rather than having a volume of things (Euan Craig, February 2016).

While admitting to being a Japanophile (Japan lover), Craig states that his work is about “nature, and humanity and nature; it's about local materials; it's about the interaction of food and lifestyle with art; it's about human beings and their commonality”. Because of that, he makes functional work with natural materials meant to be used in the everyday life of regular people. He stated that one of the reasons he stopped making sculptures a few years ago was the fact that they were “very culturally specific”, communicating different things to different people from different cultures.

I wanted to communicate the same message to everybody and therefore to find a common ground to all people and so functional work expresses ideas about beauty and life which everybody, regardless of culture or creed or education, can understand. In the same way that everyone can look at a sunset and know it's beautiful (Euan Craig, February 2016).

So the work that I do, the lifestyle I live, isn't just about Japanese culture. It's about living as much of a humanistic lifestyle as I can. Using the wisdom not only from Japanese culture but also from Australia and Western culture (Euan Craig, January 2017).

Craig doesn't like to be categorized as an artist, but rather calls himself a potter, even though he supports the conception of pottery as an art form. In fact, he doesn't agree with the modern definition of art that excludes functional objects and allocates art onto a pedestal, far from the everyday life of everyday people.

I think that functional art has all the qualities that conceptual art or fine art or sculpture has: form and surface and it can communicate ideas about life and about social issues. But it has the added dimension of being on the table, in your hand, useful and part of everyday life. So I don't think art should be something which is just behind the glass in a museum and you go there once a year and have a look at (Euan Craig, February 2016).

He is also a member of the Japan Mingei Association, partaking in their group exhibitions and other special events. In fact, he has stated that one of the main reasons he came to Japan was because of his interest in the *mingei* movement and the *mingei* philosophy. In an article published in Japan Times, he gave the following declaration: "I knew nothing about Japan. I didn't actually come to Japan — I came to Mashiko. Mashiko just happened to be in Japan"⁵. Therefore, he considers his work to be *mingei*, arguing that it follows the main conditions that Yanagi Soetsu defined more than half a century ago: simplicity, function, used in the daily life of common people, produced in large quantities, inexpensive, handmade, produced according to traditional techniques and designs and produced by anonymous artisans without self-consciousness and individualistic intent. He comments on the last condition in the quote below:

I have actually spoken about the idea that people who buy this now don't always know about me now. In a hundred years' time, somebody will find this in somebody's attic and they will sit down on the veranda with a cup of coffee, put their lips on it and go "Ahhhh!". They won't know me, they won't know anything about how it was made, but the pot will communicate with them directly. And in

⁵ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2014/03/07/our-lives/early-joys-trials-put-potter-on-path-to-the-simple-life/#.Wsc3t4iuxPY>

that sense, this artwork, this piece of pottery, is made to communicate on an anonymous level (Euan Craig, January 2017).

While he doesn't produce his work in a cooperative fashion, he believes that a lot of traditional craftsmen throughout history have worked alone, thus disagreeing with Yanagi in that condition. Like many other *mingei* artists such as Shimaoka himself, Craig does sign his work, stating that is his way of taking responsibility for his product. While his interest in *mingei* was what brought him to Japan, he believes that the *mingei* philosophy is not specific to Japanese culture, reflecting universal ideas about the human condition.

Mingei is about human lifestyle, about humans being humans, not being part of the industrial complex. It's about the importance of handmade objects in everyday life. And the beauty of these as artworks. Just things that people used to take for granted in traditional societies. And the beauty that those objects had because they were made not for egotistical reasons but from necessity as part of a natural lifestyle (...). If you go to the Hamada Museum, for example, there are Spanish olive oil bottles and jars from Germany and sculptures from the American Indians or from the Middle-East. So there are all sorts of things from different cultures, these objects which were born of traditional societies, functional objects which are beautiful because of the *younobi*, the art of function (Euan Craig, February 2016).

Furthermore, he believes in the vital role of *mingei* in contemporary society, not as a way of keeping old traditions alive, since the *mingei* is "actually quite recent as far as traditions go", but as a way of building a "healthy society". He believes people are now more conscious about the products they consume and are starting to demand handcrafted objects and locally-produced environmentally-responsible goods, produced by highly-skilled people who were paid a fair wage to produce something good with natural materials.

Wholesome art for a wholesome lifestyle has to be made from a wholesome lifestyle itself. Which is why Hamada Shoji, in his complex in Mashiko which is now the museum, what is now a garden in the middle of the museum used to be a vegetable garden and there were chickens running around there and they were a self-sufficient little unit (...). And from that healthy self-sufficient environmentally sustainable lifestyle sprung beautiful artworks which reached other people's lives. That's what's needed now in this society, in this world, instead of garments being made by people miles away, by somebody we don't know, out of toxic materials. Things that are made in a healthy, wholesome environment, the making process has to be as healthy as the product itself (Euan Craig, February 2016).

Similarly, Craig is stern in his criticism of industrialization, modernization and the logic of capitalism.

I think modern society, capitalism has made the world even more artificial and it's in the interests of the people who are in control of the money and the industries to keep it that way (...). And it's undermining democracy. *Mingei* is a contraction of *minshuteki koge*i, democratic art. And it's dehumanizing, this modern industrial lifestyle, where human beings become cogs in a greater machine. And we don't have a choice. We have the illusion of choice (...). Nature doesn't make things the same. No two individual humans are the same. No two leaves on a tree are the same. No two shells on the beach are the same. And there's this sameness which is being produced by industry and by modern society, this conformity which is dehumanizing. And I think now more than ever, people need to have handmade individual things to keep in touch with their humanity (...). So I think there's a real need for *mingei* now and not just as protecting the tradition, but as something which is about understanding human beings as part of the natural world (Euan Craig, January 2017).

In synchrony with his philosophical beliefs, Craig also strives to be an active member of his community, a role he willingly took as a way to “take responsibility for the education of your own children and for the greater community”. Besides being on



Figure 2.37. Euan Craig at the potter's wheel.
Source: *Euan The Potter*



Figure 2.38. Rice straw glazing and firing. Source: *Euan The Potter*



Figure 2.39. Coffee cups before firing.
Source: *Euan The Potter*



Figure 2.40. Tools.
Source: *Euan The Potter*



Figure 2.41. Gallery and studio.
Source: *Euan The Potter*



Figure 2.42. Rice bowl.
Source: *Euan The Potter*



Figure 2.43. Plate from Shoji Hamada Noborigama Revival Firing Project 2015. Source: *Euan The Potter*



Figure 2.44. Sake set.
Source: *Euan The Potter*



Figure 2.45. Homemade meal with handmade pots.
Source: *Euan The Potter*.



Figure 2.46. Rice husks.
Source: *Euan The Potter*.



Figure 2.47. Wood firing. Source: *Euan The Potter*.



Figure 2.48. Post-wood firing. Source: *Euan The Potter*.

the executive committee of the Parent-Teachers Association at his eldest son's senior high school located in the neighboring city of Numata, he also volunteers his services to the local high school and primary school, where he teaches pottery and Japanese tradition once a year. Furthermore, as the head of his household, he will be on the neighborhood council committee (*jichikai*) as the representative of the *kumi*, the ten household unit in which his neighborhood is divided into.

Being a foreigner actively participating in the projects and decision-making of his small countryside community doesn't seem to be a challenge for Craig, who speaks, reads and writes Japanese fluently. He states that once people get to know him they quickly accept him as "one of them", calling him "our Euan", rather than seeing him as an outsider. In fact, during our interviews, his wife Mika recounted a situation that happened at one of their children's school: *the first thing the kids said when they saw Euan was "Ah, foreigner!", but one of our children's friend's said: "No, that's not a foreigner, that's Sean's father!"*.

Integrating his practical approach to pottery, craftsmanship and life, Craig's view of nature, spirituality and his place in the world is also very much pragmatic, although spiced with an amount of poetic freedom about the universal forces of nature that guide him and his work.

The clay, being an amorphous material, wants to align itself with the forces at work upon it. It wants to be balanced. The reason why the Earth is a sphere or why things travel in orbits is because the matter of the universe is trying to align itself with the forces that are at work upon it. And so, when I throw on the wheel, the pots are making themselves. I am giving them direction, I'm not in total control. I am recognizing the forces of nature and I am allowing them to take control. I'm adding to it. When I fire the pots in the kiln, I purposely am not taking control. I am sharing the process with natural forces (...). And so, by allowing the clay to look like clay and wood-fire to look like wood-fire, by allowing the materials to be the materials, I'm acknowledging the process that has come before me. I think I create these, which are then an expression of how I interacted with those materials and that becomes a (...) concrete expression of my understanding of myself and nature. And so far as we do know, potentially this will last for 10,000 years. (...). For

example, if you read Shakespeare's plays, the things that people are saying and doing and feeling are exactly the same as the things that people say and feel now (...). And I think that in 10,000 years-time (...) these works will speak to people about the things which are important about being human. I've used and touched and have been moved by pots that were made by people in China five hundred years ago, pots that were made by the Jomon people thousands of years ago. There's beauty which touches me directly from makers from ancient times. And their response is in this work as well. And the influence of my wife and my children. The influence of this house I live in, the influence of the environment, and the influence of language as well. It's all in the pots as a new and unique expression of how I feel about myself and my relationship with nature (Euan Craig, January 2017).

2.2.4. Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo

Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo was born in 1957 in Daimiel, Ciudad-Real, in the center of Spain, about 180 km from Madrid. He studied Law at the Complutense University of Madrid between 1974 and 1979 and from 1981 to 1985 he worked as a commercial director at a company in Equatorial Guinea. He then returned to Spain in 1986, where he developed different artistic and commercial projects, before coming to Japan for the first time in 1991 at the age of 33 years old.

Fernández-Bravo came to Japan as a tourist, traveling the country and familiarizing himself with Japanese culture, which he became fascinated with. In particular, he became interested in ceramics and *kyudo* (Japanese archery), which propelled him to stay in the country to study those arts. Interested in the traditional Japanese aesthetics, he started studying stoneware ceramics with potter Ryosai Hoshino (Fukuoka, 1939-), who made rustic *anagama* wood-fired Shigaraki-style ceramics in Chigasaki (Kanagawa). However, he then turned to porcelain, studying under Hitomi Itabashi (Tokyo, 1948-), an active contemporary ceramic artist and professor based in Tokyo and Kanazawa.

I started ceramics because it caught my attention, how Japanese people see ceramics, what vessels they use and the general closeness they have with ceramics,

something I had never seen in Spain. In Spain, you take a white plate and put lots of meat, fish or salad but you don't see the plate. (...) And there are two types of plates: big a small (...). Japanese food has a lot of variety, there are a lot of dishes and each dish is used for a different thing and you can match various styles, harmonizing the sobriety of the traditional with the contemporary (Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo, February 2017).

Between 1992 and 1998, Fernández-Bravo studied ceramics part-time with Itabashi while working as a Spanish teacher at a language school in Kichijoji, where he met his wife Akane Niwa, who had just graduated from Tama Art University. In 2000, he decided to quit his job to become an independent potter and opened the studio "Lubarte" together with Niwa, who was already in Mashiko doing a pottery apprenticeship. They established their studio in the city of Nasu-Karasuyama, Tochigi prefecture, about 30 km from Mashiko, where they built a small wood-fired cubic kiln based on friend and potter Euan Craig's kiln design.

After the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake and worried about the aftermath of the nuclear disaster, Fernández-Bravo and Niwa immediately moved with their one-year-old son to Awaji Island, Hyogo Prefecture, where her family lives. Splitting their time between the two studios, 700 km apart, they spent two years renovating a building that had previously belonged to an antique shop, where they established their new studio and gallery in the southern central part of the island, which they opened in 2014.

The time spent reestablishing their home and studio, together with searching for new materials and contacts for galleries and customers in the region has had an impact on their work, which suffered a two-year interregnum. Furthermore, while Awaji island has a history of pottery tradition, it is not a big pottery center like Mashiko, where potters can buy materials from everywhere in the world in one of the dozens of supply shops available in the city. Similarly, while being only about 70 km from Kobe and 100 km from Osaka, the biggest urban area in the Kansai region, Awaji receives mostly seasonal tourists attracted by the beautiful beaches and tranquility of the region.

However, despite the adversities, Fernández-Bravo and Niwa have reestablished their studio with a spacious gallery for visitors, where they built a one-cubic-meter wood-fired kiln, which they fire with recycled wood for the duration of fifteen hours.



Figure 2.49. Lubarte Gallery. Photo by the author.



Figure 2.50. Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo and his kiln.
Photo by the author.



Figure 2.51. Studio. Photo by the author.



Figure 2.52. Cup.
Source: *Lubarte Blogspot*.



Figure 2.53. Plate. Photo by the author.



Figure 2.54. Goblet.
Source: *Lubarte Blogspot*

They also have an electric kiln used to fire specific pieces but, while Fernández-Bravo states it is possible to mimic the effects of wood-fire in an electric kiln by adding ashes and other materials, he still prefers working directly with wood.

Fernández-Bravo uses clay from Awaji, Tokoname and translucent bone ash porcelain, which he forms by using homemade plaster molds through a modern technique called *ikomi* (clay casting), which allows the production of thin and complicated curved shapes impossible to produce on the potter's wheel. He then decorates the pieces with his own homemade glaze recipes, such as green and blue celadon, and paints them with abstract delicate strokes using different materials.

In terms of influences, Fernández-Bravo describes himself as an admirer of the traditional sophisticated porcelain styles of Mino and Kyoto and an enthusiast of Japanese contemporary ceramic artists such as Kazuo Yagi and Suzuki Osamu, who formed the post-war avant-garde ceramic group Sodeisha.

While he states that his work makes use of mostly universal pottery techniques, he stresses that he has only done pottery in Japan, taught by Japanese teachers, and thus is influenced by Japanese tradition both in his style and shapes. However, the fact that he came to Japan at the age of 33 years old, after spending most of his youth in Spain and some years in Africa, has had a strong influence on his identity and mindset, which he admits is very “European” and very different from Japanese or other Western foreigners.

Fernández-Bravo has exhibited his work in cities around Japan and participated in ceramic competitions such as the Mino International Ceramic Competition (2005 and 2008), Izushi Porcelain Triennale (2006). He has won the Grand Prize at Nissin Foods Contemporary Ceramic Art Exhibition in 1994, only two years after starting studying ceramics. His inspiration comes mostly from the natural environment that surrounds him. In his artist statement, he lays down the concept behind his work:

Basically, I look for harmony, sobriety and beauty in my work. I live in the center of nature, because of that perhaps I get influence in some works. The translucent beauty and whiteness of porcelain never stop fascinating me. I try to preserve this beautiful whiteness and at the same time enhance it when I add colors (Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo, “Jesualdo Concept”, n/d).

2.3. The pottery learners

2.3.1. Suzanne Wang (1970-), USA

Suzanne Wang was born in Taiwan in 1970 but grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area of California, in the USA, later becoming an American citizen. She started learning ceramics at the age of 15, focusing on sculpture and entered an interdisciplinary arts course at San Francisco University in the early 1990s. At the age of 21, following her growing interest in cinema and film set design, she quit ceramics and changed her major to Drama, followed by a Master of Fine Arts in Scene Design for Film and Theater at New York University. She worked in the industry for ten years, before moving to China, where she lived for four years working in the field of product development. After returning to the United States, she moved to rural Connecticut, where she worked for a tea company and bought teaware. It was then that she really started to become interested in pottery again, resuming her pottery classes and moving to Hawaii in 2010, where she attended ceramic courses at the local community college. She then established a small pottery studio with an electric kiln on the Big Island of Hawaii, north of Hilo, on the Hamakua coast, inheriting all the raw materials from a neighbor: “things just fell into my lap, so I feel I am destined to pursue pottery.”

Wang started thinking more seriously about becoming a professional potter after attending a workshop by Mashiko potter Ken Matsuzaki in 2013 when she learned standard Japanese techniques like slabs and coil building and throwing. She was amazed by the skill and tools of Japanese ceramics, which were a novelty to her since she was only taught Western ceramic style and had focused mainly on sculpture and hand building so far. When Matsuzaki returned to Hawaii a year later to give another workshop at Donkey Mill Art Center, she worked as his assistant for one week. Through the experience, she had the opportunity to spend quality time with the Japanese master at the studio and closely learn first-hand about Japanese ceramics and culture. Inspired by Matsuzaki's work, she asked if he would accept her as his intern in Mashiko for three months and after a first scoff at the idea, he finally asked her to send a formal apprenticeship proposal application to study under him for one year.

I was interested in teaware but had very little understanding of wood-firing (...). I really like *wabi-sabi* aesthetics and I loved Japanese hand building. There's an organic quality to Japanese pottery that's different from other Asian pottery. It has a lot of soul and an intimate connection with nature (Suzanne Wang, July 2017).

Wang first came to Japan for two weeks in 2015 to visit Matsuzaki's studio, during which time she helped with the last days of his *noborigama* firing. After returning to Hawaii, she came back for her apprenticeship one year later, in July 2016, with a cultural visa and a small grant for rent, food and utilities sponsored by the Mashiko Pottery International Association, headed by Matsuzaki. Starting with menial tasks such as groundskeeping, cleaning the studio, splitting and stacking wood, she soon went onto making work with his plaster and styrofoam molds and helping with the loading and unloading of his kilns. Matsuzaki taught her to throw on the traditional Japanese kick wheel, which she had no experience with prior. Under the supervision of Matsuzaki's main apprentice, she also assisted with glazing and everyday activities of the studio. Since Matsuzaki had already arranged for her an exhibition at Shinjuku Keio Department store, where he exhibits annually, for the end of her apprenticeship in July 2017, he gave her the last five months of her apprenticeship to focus on creating her own collection of Oribe ware using his clays, glazes and firings methods. Over 250 pieces were shown for the Keio exhibition.

For one year, Wang lived in a small apartment in Mashiko, commuting to the studio every day by bicycle. Interested in perfecting her technical skills and experiencing the way of life of a Japanese potter, she partook in the daily life of a traditional pottery studio, where there was a Japanese apprentice and several kilns. She was fascinated by the profound and rigorous experience of firing in a traditional *noborigama* wood kiln for the duration of several days, comparing it with a Native-American ceremony she used to attend in New York, which is performed at a sweat-lodge:

Wood-firing has a cleansing experience to it. Have you ever been to a sweat lodge? It's a Native-American purification ceremony. I used to attend these frequently in upstate New York. Wood-firing feels similar to that in the sense that you're so close to the fire and you're keeping the kiln alive (...). So there's a connection



Figure 2.55. Suzanne Wang training at the potter's wheel in Mashiko.
Source: *Suzanne Wang Instagram*.



Figure 2.56. Clay treatment process in Mashiko. Source: *Suzanne Wang Instagram*.



Figure 2.57. Making *kyusu*, Japanese side angled pots. Source: *Suzanne Wang Instagram*.

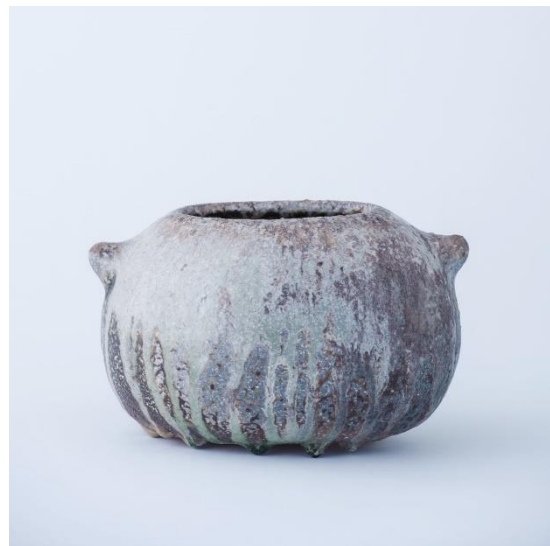


Figure 2.58. *Birth Series*.
Source: *Suzanne Wang website*.



Figure 2.59. Oribe glazed pieces. Source: *Suzanne Wang website*.

between the fire and all the work that's been made ... You're in control and you're totally not in control. It's more like a collaboration. It's a very strange experience because you can feel this tremendous energy cooking, and so much is also at stake. Once you've got the temperature up, you have to maintain it. You must keep this creature alive so it can produce beautiful work for you (Suzanne Wang, July 2017).

Another correlation with the Native-American culture realized by Wang was the Japanese tacit style of learning based mostly on non-verbal communication, observation, trial and error and repetition.

I studied Indian-American philosophy and there are two terms that resonated with me while in Japan. One is called "coyote teachings" and this way of teaching is all about learning only by observation. The teacher will do something and if you're paying attention, you will learn the correct way. That learning method is very deep but it requires the student to be very astute. People have grown very reliant on verbal communication these days. But animals don't need that. The coyote mother will do and the pups learn. So animals learn by watching (...). And the other thing about Native American culture is the idea of "dirt time", which means real-time experience. One must do something over and over and over to really learn. People think they can learn something by reading or watching videos or attending a workshop, but in-depth learning comes simply from repetition (Suzanne Wang, July 2017).

Besides the learning system and the wood-firing, Wang finds several other connections between Japanese culture and Native American as well as Hawaiian indigenous culture, which strongly values the connection to the land and nature. However, one of the big differences she noted between American and Japanese potters is the relationship with the materials:

The difference [between American ceramic culture and Japanese ceramic culture] is that Japanese potters, the "purists", understand clay in its basic level and even dig for it. Many American potters that I've met buy commercial clay. Aside from

the indigenous cultures, the US doesn't have a long history of high-fire ceramics like Japan, and we only really started wood-firing in the 20th century. Also, Hawaii doesn't have good high-fire clay, so I would like to visit places like Washington and the Carolinas to see how potters work there. They're probably more closely connected to the material. But from my short experience with pottery, myself and many of the Western potters that I have come in contact with, have less knowledge in the workings of the raw materials and tend to buy or alter commercial clay. It kind of makes sense because we are so spread out geographically, and modern industry was already in place when ceramics started being mass produced. Whereas Japan has such deep traditions in the craft, spanning back so many centuries (Suzanne Wang, July 2017).

Wang has returned to Hawaii after exhibiting at Shinjuku Keio Department store in July 2017 and has been doing pottery there since, inspired by the “natural surroundings and multi-cultural society” in “a land full of interesting shapes and organisms (...), merging old and new, or folk art sensibilities with the contemporary” (“Suzanne Wang About”, n/d).

2.3.2. Timi Lantos (1985-), Hungary

Timi Lantos was born in 1985 in Kecskemét, Hungary, a small countryside town of just 11,504 inhabitants. She started doing ceramic at the age of 15, after entering the ceramic department of Kandó Kálmán Vocational School of Art, Kecskemét, in 2000. It was then that she experienced her first wood-firing and started becoming interested in Japan and the aesthetics of the tea ceremony.

In 2006, Lantos entered the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest, where she worked mostly with porcelain molding, slip casting and hand building. There, she experienced ceramic making mostly in the industrial environment of factory production, having the opportunity of firing a wood kiln once per year. In 2011, she graduated as a porcelain designer with an art project titled De|construction, which consisted of tall and delicate porcelain network structures that resemble plants, corals

and seaweeds as an analogy for society, human relations and the layers of time in built structures. She then proceeded with her studies in the area of mold porcelain building, enrolling in a doctoral course in 2013.

In 2011, Lantos participated in a smokeless kiln building workshop with Japanese potter Masakazu Kusakabe (1946-) at the International Ceramic Studio in Kecskemét and, the following year, she partook in his workshop about glazes for wood-firing. Describing her work style as “very Japanese”, Kusakabe invited her to come to his studio in Miharu, Fukushima prefecture, where she worked as his assistant for three months.

After returning to Hungary, she decided she wanted to come back to Japan to develop her pottery throwing skills and learn more about Japanese ceramic techniques and ceramic culture. She chose Japan because of the “high aesthetic sense of Japanese people and the long pottery history of the country”. Interested in the “Japanese approach to making things”, she states that the main difference between the European and Japanese ceramic making process lies in the familiarity that Japanese potters have with the material. They also follow very strict rules as a way of enjoying creative freedom through “a deep understanding of the firing process, the material and how it works”, while in Europe people are often more focused on the creative aspects rather than of the technical part.

Another difference is that they like very much to touch the object. We have handles, so... They have very close contact with the material. Before I came here I always used the clay from the factory and somehow I felt bad because it's not so honest, I just go to the shop and pick up the clay and make my things... And then I came here and I started to work with this local clay. I was so stressed because it contains so much sand... And I like very much even things... This is just a life philosophy (...). So the most important thing I learned is that the clay teaches me to understand the material and let it form itself. You know what I mean? (Timi Lantos, November 2016).

Lantos came to Japan again in May 2016 with a cultural visa and a scholarship from Kanbe Foundation, which selects two young potters every year for support. She was then introduced by Masakazu Kusakabe to the Mashiko Ceramic Club, where she



Figure 2.60. Training at the potter's wheel.
Source: *Timi Lantos Instagram*.



Figure 2.61. Helping Ito-san with soda firing. Source: *Timi Lantos Instagram*.



Figure 2.62. Blue plate with iron dots.
Source: *Timi Lantos Instagram*.



Figure 2.63. Mug. Source: *Timi Lantos Instagram*.



Figure 2.64.
De|construction
Porcelain
Sculptural
installations.
Source: *Timi Lantos Tumblr*.

works from nine to five assisting pottery-learners in exchange for accommodation and a studio to practice in her free time. Besides often receiving volunteers from abroad, the club is used by young potters in Mashiko, who rent the studio and one of its many kilns to produce their own works, stimulating informal exchanges and the creation of bonds between young local potters and non-Japanese practitioners, a rare opportunity in traditional pottery areas in Japan.

Lantos held her first solo exhibition titled *At the border of movements* in 2016 at Gallery Museion No. 1, Budapest and a second one at Mashiko Ceramic Art Association in 2017 under the title *Constellations*. She is currently experimenting with Shino and Oribe styles, celadon glazes and white slip, while focusing on her throwing skills and production of tableware. She has also participated at the Mashiko Pottery Fair with her own stall in the fall of 2017.

3. Identities, traditions and histories from a cosmopolitan perspective

3.1. Introduction

From the analysis of the in-depth qualitative interviews and written questionnaires with a total of forty Western potters in Japan, we can highlight different aspects of Japanese culture and its imaginings. By being a product of the milieu they are created and consumed, Japanese ceramics are marked by cultural recipes and ideologies, mirroring Japanese society and its changes in aesthetic sensibilities, tastes and lifestyles. Their institutional arrangements also reveal the politics of knowledge and representation, often permeated by the Western ideology of Orientalism and Japanese cultural nationalism. Reflecting feelings of nostalgia for a premodern past and anxieties about the present, these cultural narratives and imaginaries have attracted Westerners yearning for something beyond the normative standards of Western modernity in the exotic Other.

However, as Chakrabarty (1998: 225) puts it, “ideas acquire materiality through the history of bodily practices”. Moreover, the transference of knowledge also implies its re-evaluation and re-interpretation at the light of local histories and personal subjectivities and, in this process, acquired meanings can transcend and subvert original intentions. As active social agents, Japanese ceramics, its processes, techniques and materials, have impacted on Western artists beyond the simple materialization of preconceived images and intentions, affecting their senses, emotions and identities. It is through their bodily experiences in a particular life-world, that is, the social and natural environment of their everyday lives, marked by the transnational process of migration and sociocultural adaptation, that images of Japan are embodied, negotiated, appropriated and reinvented. Thus, as a source of inspiration, creative stimulus and self-invention, the spiritual and aesthetic values tied to Japanese ceramics echoes not only the historical, social and political trajectories of Japanese culture, but also reflects anxieties about the present, utopian projects for the future and a search for alternatives ways of being in the world.

3.2. Imagining Japanese ceramics

The imaging of Japan as a Mecca of craftsman and spirituality appears as a significant factor in understanding the potters' transnational trajectories and personal and professional identities. Deriving from wider cultural narratives explored in part one, Western representations of Japan and the values ascribed to its culture can express a search for authenticity, simplicity, purity and originality. Since more than half of the subjects came to the country specifically to practice ceramics, specific features of Japanese pottery were often mentioned as important motivations for their stories of mobility.

The subjects' accounts frequently focused on the contrast between Japan's ceramics' culture and that of their home countries, drawing on their personal experiences between the two realities. While Japan was usually presented in opposition to the West, parallels with other non-Western realities were also made, reflecting an interest in alternative cosmologies and beliefs beyond Eurocentric views of humanity and nature. In this sense, rather than an escape driven by a dissatisfaction with the West, the subjects' motivations to come to Japan point to a search for alternative realities and experiences beyond the Western sphere.

The focus on the issue of cultural *difference* is also a result of the following questions: *What is the main difference between the ceramics of your home country and the one of Japan? What is the main difference between working/ learning ceramics in your home country and in Japan?* Thus, instead of denying the Other, I aimed at investigating cultural difference in its historical, social and political trajectories, while simultaneously establish a global dialogue that undermines essentialist ideas about identity, culture and belonging by showing its fluid, dynamic and hybrid character. For this, I employed the cosmopolitan methodology proposed by Sugimoto (2018) presented in chapter one (part one), which allows for multiversal analytical approaches while simultaneously traversing disciplinary boundaries.

The shared answers given by the subjects to the above questions provided us with important insights about the impact of images of Japan in the potters' personal and professional identities, lifestyles and worldviews. Overall, the subjects' answers can be resumed to a set of common themes, which were pervasive throughout the potters'

accounts independently of age, nationality or gender, with slight variations. These were: the acceptance of functional ceramics as a high form art in Japan, contrary to the West; the importance and respect that Japanese people give to handmade pottery; the central role of ceramics in the daily life of the Japanese; the close relationship between pottery, food and season in Japan; the preference for the use of local and natural raw materials by Japanese potters; the acceptance of the role of nature in the process of making ceramics in Japan; and a preference for the aesthetics of simplicity and imperfection. The differences between ceramics culture in Japan and in the West as highlighted by the potters are summarized in the table below.

Table 3.1: What distinguishes Japanese ceramics?

Japan	The West
High Art	Low Art
Craft	Art or Design
Functional	Sculptural
Naturalness	Artificiality
Multisensory	Visual
Imperfection and simplicity	(A different standard of) Perfection
Focus on technique	Focus on concept
Focus on the process	Focus on the result
Part of everyday life	Irrelevant to everyday life
Deep tradition/ long history	No tradition/ no history (or their annihilation)
Knowledgeable audience	Uncultivated audience

Before delving into the analysis of the potters' accounts, I will clarify what the interviewed subjects meant when they referred generally to Japanese ceramics. Similar to the expression "Japanese traditional crafts" (see chapter two of part one), so the expression "Japanese ceramics" can mean a great variety of objects made from clay in different regions of Japan and eventually abroad by using a multiplicity of materials, tools and techniques within a time window that spans for more than ten thousand years. In fact, subjects were well aware of the heterogeneity and diversity of Japanese pottery culture, as exemplified in the quote by American pottery Darice Veri (1958-) below:

Japan also values what each region of the country has to offer as far as local taste and culture goes rather than seeing itself as one homogenous pottery culture (Dari Veri, February 2014, written questionnaire).

However, when asked what distinguishes Japanese ceramics, subjects' often resorted to what we can call the "classical Japanese pot" for reference: a handmade, high-fired ceramic object used in everyday life or in ritualized occasions such as the tea ceremony, reflecting a quintessential ideal of beauty and perfection through its connection with Zen aestheticism¹. Bizen-based British potter Christopher Ravenhall (1968-) compares the standards of the classical Japanese ceramic vessel to a Western below:

There is a different idea of perfection, so something being completely thin and incredibly light and very symmetrical would be a western classical pot whereas the Japanese classical pot would be based on more natural forms (Christopher Ravenhall, February 2017).

Historically speaking, Japanese traditional ceramics can be divided into three different classes of objects, which reflect the tastes and lifestyles of different sectors of Japanese society. First, folk ceramics (later appropriated, redefined and promoted by the *mingei* movement in the early twentieth century), produced in high quantities to be used in the everyday lives of Japan's lower classes. Second, tea ceramics, connected to the world of the tea ceremony and reflecting the taste of Japanese warrior elites of the early-modern period, later rediscovered and reevaluated by art movements of the Taisho and early Showa periods (such as the Momoyama revival and again the *mingei* movement). While often expressing the individuality of the potter and thus generally seen as artistic, tea ceramics also appropriated and redefined the objects made by lower classes, as well as the simple Korean wares, within the aesthetic ideals of Zen, which came to signify a "quintessential Japanese beauty". Lastly, porcelain represents the

¹ Artist and author Leonard Koren, author of *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers* (1994), has compared the impact of Zen aesthetics ideals on Japanese culture to the influence of classical Greek standards of beauty and perfection in Western civilization.

refined and sophisticated taste of the Japanese aristocratic class. While Japanese porcelain captivated European royalty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, encouraging its promotion by the Meiji government as a symbol of exceptional craftsmanship and a tool for asserting national identity, it is not seen today as representing a native ideal of “Japaneseness”.

Murielle Hladik (2010) has explored the trajectories that led to a change in the taste of Western ceramic collectors and *aficionados* in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century when a preference for the symmetry and perfection of porcelain was replaced by a predilection for the values of discontinuity, fragmentation and imperfection. Anchored in the tea ceremony, these aesthetic ideals were propagated in the West by Kakuzo Okakura through his *The Book of Tea* (1906), which remains one of the most seminal books about Japanese aesthetic culture until today. For Hladik (2010), the desire for this new aesthetic was rooted on “a *sensitive substrate* elaborated and introduced by new visual experiments of avant-garde groups”, reflected in an interest for the renewal of handicraft work expressed, for example, in the development of the Arts and Crafts movement in England in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this context, Japanese ceramics associated with the tea ceremony “were a decisive element in this new appreciation for the rough, unfinished and imperfect, allowing a radical renewal of artistic expression” and a “fundamental step towards the construction of modernity” (*ibid.*: 203-205).

The political, institutional and transnational trajectories of the tea ceremony and Zen have thus led the ceramic tea bowl to become the Japanese quintessential object, as stressed by Hungarian ceramist artist Agnes Husz (1961-) below:

I think the tea ceremony bowl is the best sample of the Japanese ceramics. A tea bowl is one of a kind. It's special, it has a story, it has a great honor and it's somehow beautiful but not perfect at all, like a human being. Japanese society requires citizens to be all the same, not higher, not lower, not bigger and not smaller. So a tea bowl can give a feeling of being different (Agnes Husz, February 2014, written questionnaire, edited by the author).



Figure 3.1. *The Tea Lover's Handbook* at Tracey Glass home and studio, Ayabe. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.2. John Dix tea bowl (*chawan*) and pitcher (*mizusashi*), Sasayama. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.3. Ryan Cain making a tea bowl by hand, Mashiko. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.4. Euan Craig *mingei* Western style tea set, Ebiya Gallery, Tokyo. Photo by the author



Figure 3.5. Richard Milgrim's scroll with the kanji name given by Urasenke master Sen Genshitsu. Photo by the author



Figure 3.6. Richard Milgrim Shino tea bowl with Japanese green tea *matcha*, Kyoto. Photo by the author.

Furthermore, as approached on part one, the aesthetic values of the tea ceremony were appropriated by philosopher Soetsu Yanagi within his *mingei* theory and translated in the exaltation of the beauty found in mundane everyday objects made by anonymous craftsmen. In fact, since the majority of the subjects' have practiced ceramics in Mashiko, the "mecca" of folk ceramics, many of the distinctive traits of Japanese ceramics mentioned by the subjects correspond to some of the conditions of folk craft as defined by Yanagi (2005): simplicity, functionality, used in daily life, handmade and use of natural and locally available materials. Spanish potter Jesualdo Fernandez-Bravo (1957-), who works almost exclusively with porcelain, has stressed the power of fascination that the ideas of *mingei* still exert in the imagination of Western ceramic artists:

Everybody talks about Mashiko and the *mingei*. Foreigners think that Japanese pottery is Mashiko pottery (...). Mashiko was key for the knowledge about Japanese ceramics going beyond Japan but there's more to Japanese ceramics than that (Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo, February 2017).

Through the combination of Yanagi's "Buddhist aesthetics" with the proselytism of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada, together with Daisetsu Suzuki's promotion of his modern ideas of Zen abroad, Western images of *mingei*, the tea ceremony and Zen aesthetics have become intertwined. This also contributed to transforming the image of the Japanese craftsman into a mystical, egoless and spiritual being, an antidote to inauthentic modernity (Waal, 1997) or the personification of the "Oriental Guru", which greatly impacted on the idea of the modern artist (Winther-Tamaki, 2001, 2010). The image of the Japanese craftsman as the impersonation of modern ideas of Zen spirituality is echoed in the quote by Dutch potter Swanica Ligtenberg (1955-):

Just being with Japanese potters gives a serene feeling, makes you quiet and open up and more susceptible to the environment. It is a Zen country. (Swanica Ligtenberg, February 2014, written questionnaire).

In this context, the act of throwing pottery on the potter's wheel, together with the calligraphic-style brushwork, especially at the hands of Shoji Hamada during his silent and seemingly mystical ceramic demonstrations abroad, was associated to a deeply immersive state similar to that accomplished through meditation. This experience was narrated by a few of our subjects, in particular in Douglas Black's life-story presented in the previous chapter. The connection between the repetitive act of making and meditation was also mentioned by American Andrew Vlock (1988-):

I stumbled upon ceramics as a way to try and pursue a craft/art form. I liked how it aligned with many principles that I had been reading about regarding meditation and finding presentness through repetitive effort (Andrew Vlock, March 2017, written questionnaire).

This state achieved through meditation and repetitive practice is expressed in the Buddhist concept of *mushin* (no-mind). According to Odin (2001: 153), the idea of *mushin* started to be used in relation to arts in the medieval period and was systematized as a mental attitude of artistic detachment required for both the creation and enjoyment of beauty in relation to Zen aestheticism mainly at the hands of Daisetsu Suzuki. On the other hand, Yanagi applied the concept of *mushin* to morality when defining true beauty as that which is born from unconsciousness and selflessness. While this absolutely clashed with the self-centered image of the modern artist, it has influenced its standpoint. In fact, the association of the idea of no-mind and the notion of intuition (*chokkan*) to the image of the Oriental potter has contributed to the development of American avant-garde ceramics through its focus on spontaneity expression, as approached on part one (chapter three). For Bizen potter American John Wells (1957-), the Momoyama tea wares, which represent the quintessential Zen ideals of beauty and perfection, are "even more modern than American modern art":

It's like action painting or something like that. The material is important and the way it is thrown, the action, is important. But the Momoyama tea wares are even deeper than that. Not only the action, the making, the look and the material, but also the touch and use. It's even deeper (Gary Moler, February 2017).

Indeed, by being highly aestheticized practices, Zen arts such as the tea ceremony and, by extension, pottery are largely based on sensory experiences, thus showing the importance of perceptual knowledge beyond motor and cognitive skills in cultural practice (Marchand, 2010; Ingold, 2015). For philosopher Robert E. Carter (2008), even though pottery is not designated as a *do* (as in *sado*, “way of the tea”, *shodo*, “way of the brush”, and other arts of self-cultivation as defined by the author), it is often treated like one, with its training functioning as a path for the transformation of the self and thus connected to ethics. Furthermore, similar to other Zen arts, the appreciation of pottery, especially within the world of the tea ceremony, implies the exploration of sensorial experiences beyond the Western focus on sight. American potter Kate Strachan (1982-) describes the allure to Japanese ceramics as driven by a desire to rediscover a closer relationship with touch.

A lot of potters talk about the sense of how a pot feels in one’s hands (...). Because the US and European’s tableware is not of one which we would constantly hold a bowl in one hand, while juggling a utensil in the other, our senses are not trained as those who might. Therefore, the Japanese use of ware led me to want to heighten my understanding of touch (Kate Strachan, March 2018, written questionnaire).

Seeing clay as historical and universal nexus, Douglas Black (1976-) compares the satisfaction of touching Earth to gardening while other potters made comparisons between pottery making and agriculture. The importance given to multi-sensory experiences – haptic, olfactory and even auditory - in the production and appreciation of ceramics was also stressed by Wells (1957-):

When you touch the skin of a newborn baby, you get some feeling. Well, the ceramics should have that too (...). If it’s a *chawan* or a teacup, the *kuchizukuri* (rim of a cup) is very important. Your lips are very sensitive, so the sensation you get when that is touching your lips and when the liquid is flowing over that [it’s important]. So, not just looking, but also all of your senses. And weight is important and the feel of the clay is important and the way it looks from far away

and way it looks close (...). If it is drinking sake with *tokkuri* (Japanese rice wine flask) and *guinomi* (sake cup), the length and width of the neck will determine it has a nice sound: *toku toku toku* [onomatopoeia]. Kaneshige Toyo had written that even when he hears that sound he starts to feel drunk (John Wells, February 2017).

The intimate relationship between food and pottery was also mentioned as a defining characteristic of Japanese ceramics:

Japan has the advantage of having a long and varied pottery tradition/history. It is also a food culture and the way food is thought about, prepared and served is closely aligned with the pottery it is presented upon. This can be liberating or it can be a limitation (Darice Veri, February 2014, written questionnaire).

Clammer (1992, 1997, 2000, 2001) has stressed the need to consider the importance of aesthetic sensitivity in mundane activities beyond “conventionally” artistic forms in the social analysis of Japan. Particularly through its close connection with the everyday act of eating and drinking, ceramics appear as a valuable object in understanding the aesthetic sensibilities embroiled both in production and consumption of culture. In fact, the potters’ accounts frequently stressed the role of the body, senses and emotions in their relationship to Japanese ceramics, thus highlighting the importance of the bodily and earthly relationship with materiality in cultural practice.

Thus, in order to understand the attraction of Western artists to Japanese ceramics, we need to go beyond Cartesian dualist parameters of rationality and recognize the place of the body, emotions, senses and subjectivities in the creation of relationships between objects and people and their impact on cultural and social practice. In the next sections, I will suggest that the attraction of Western artists to Japanese ceramics can be understood within a search for aesthetic and spiritual values that go beyond modern Western dominant views of man and nature, reflecting a search for self-realization, happiness and well-being through the contact with the material world provided by pottery making.

3.3. Thinking through making

The feeling of “being free from mind-attachment” conveyed by the Buddhist notion of *mushin* (no-mind) mentioned by some subjects resonates with Csikszentmihalyi (1990) concept of “flow”, a mental state characterized of being so deeply immersed into something that the body moves with no direct consciousness (Price & Hawkins, 2018: 9), which stimulates creativity, fulfillment and enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; 1996). Far from exclusive to the transcendental Buddhist practice, this state of mind-body unit within the process of making can be understood as a reflection of an embodied skill and thus ubiquitous to craftsmanship.

Defining craftsmanship in a broader sense, as an enduring basic human impulse reflected in the desire to do a job well for its own sake, sociologist Richard Sennett (2008) has criticized the modern separation between making and thinking. Arguing that all skills begin as bodily practices, he stresses the importance of repetition, rhythm and routine in the development of any type of craft, from pottery to computer programming, emphasizing the role of imagination in technical understandings (Sennett, 2008: 9). Hence, the interplay between tacit knowledge and explicit consciousness, visible in a high level of skill, would be reflected in a unit between head and hand, that is to say when making and thinking become interconnected.

In her investigation of the transmission of body techniques from mothers to daughters in the context of pottery making in southwest Ethiopia, Morie Kaneko (2018: 117) draws on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), which considers the transmission of techniques as a result of the interaction with others, thus creating “communities of practice”, reflected in groups based on an apprenticeship-like system. Thus, by participating in a traditional Japanese craft apprenticeship, pottery learners end up embodying the skills of pottery making not only through observation, imitation, practice and repetition but also through their daily interactions with others. In this sense, “Japaneseness” can be understood not as a genetic inheritance but as a cultural and bodily practice acquired in the fabric of everyday life. The notion of embodied skill also finds a parallel in Marcel Mauss’s (1979) notion of “body techniques” and Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* (1997), which see the body as a place of culture.



Figure 3.7. Brazilian Kazue Morita practice throwing on the wheel Japanese style, from a lump on clay, Misato. Photo by the author



Figure 3.8. Students from Brazil learning about glazes from potter Rikio Hashimoto, Misato. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.9. American Ryan Cain training on the potter wheel during his free time at the Mashiko Ceramic Club. Photo by the author



Figure 3.10. Douglas Black working in his studio in Motegi. Photo by the author

Drawing on the above concepts, anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011: 21-22) has defined making as “an embodied relationship with something outside of ourselves”, beyond the limits of the human body. In this context, the author argues that studies about the process of making should be understood beyond the issue of technique, power or control. Accordingly, the process of making is as much constrained by the limits of the body as by the materials and environment in which the body is working. Thus, as a cultural and social practice, ceramics should be understood within the culture and society they are consumed and produced. However, by involving the manipulation of materials in the natural world in which humans and objects are inserted, objects also need to be understood within the ecological environment they come to life, as suggested by Tokoro and Kawai (2018). Following a recent trend in material culture studies, the authors argue that, in order to understand the interactions between humans, things and their “life-world”, we need to re-examine “the ontological question of continuity and distinction between humans and non-human things” born from an anthropocentric and Eurocentric modernist view that has long dominated academia (ibid.: 19). Hence, by tearing down the dichotomy between subject and object, we can understand the attraction and interaction of Western potters with Japanese ceramics beyond the essentialist discourse of Japaneseness.

Following this understanding of the relationships established between humans and things, Tim Ingold (2013) sees making not as a project, in which maker has a preconceived idea and applies it to a material, which takes the intended form. Instead, the author sees making as a process of growth in which the maker is placed “from the outset as a participant in amongst a world of active materials” (Ingold, 2013: 21):

These materials are what he has to work with, and in the process of making he ‘joins forces’ with them, bringing them together or splitting them apart, synthesizing and distilling, in anticipation of what might emerge. The maker’s ambitions, in this understanding, are altogether more humble than those implied by the hylomorphic model. Far from standing aloof, imposing his designs on a world that is ready and waiting to receive them, the most he can do is to intervene in worldly processes that are already going on, and which give rise to the forms of the living world that we see all around us – in plants and animals, in waves of

water, snow and sand, in rocks and clouds – adding his own impetus to the forces and energies in play (*op. cit.*).

The idea of “joining forces” with the material and leaving part of the process to natural control was thus ubiquitous to the account of the subjects, amongst them Shigaraki-based American Gary Moler (1951-):

When you work with the universe and you are just borrowing the forces, you are working with the forces or channeling these forces or helping these forces go along. So in my point of view, pottery has a lot in common with agriculture, you sort of help things along. So for example, this one piece, you nurtured it along. There are certain things you can do at certain stages. If you want a certain texture you could try to trim it right away... You get a totally different effect in things you can do differently if you wait a week or if you dry it slowly and you don't stop watching it until it's actually bone dry, completely dry and ready to get in the kiln. And, even before that, you dry it in the sun and you nurture it, take care of it, for the final week. But once it's in the kiln, it's out of your hands anymore. You can't touch it. There's nothing you can do. And you're working in real time, you're making real-time decisions, it's just like life. But whatever you do, time just moves on. You may realize you made a mistake, that's six hours gone and you can never do the same thing twice, you can never go back either, you just have to go on. So gradually it's sort of like purifying yourself (...). But it puts you in perspective. Understanding where you are in the universe and what your role is (Gary Moler, February 2017).

In fact, the understanding of the interdependence between mind, body, material and the environment advocated by recent theories of materiality and material agency has also been prevalent in Japanese cosmologies born from Shintoism and Buddhism, which have influenced the Japanese native social theory beyond the *Nihonjinron*, as pointed by Clammer (2001: 59-60). While some makers might have difficulty putting into words the bodily processes involved in their practice, Australian *mingei* potter Euan Craig is not one of those. In a *TED Talk* given at Tsukuba University in 2017, which is

partially transcribed below, Craig describes how the process of making is constrained by the intrinsic character of the materials he works with. He narrates his first experience of pottery making and his latter understanding of the material properties of clay:

When I was a child, the first time I saw a potter making pots was like magic. I watched him take a lump of clay and throw it on the wheel. Then, from the moment his hands touched the turning surface of the clay it was as if it came to life (...). It was as if the clay were dancing to the movements of his hands. As if he was a force of nature and the clay was being drawn into the shape of his imagination, as grass grows towards the sunlight (...). That was the magic which I expected to happen when I had the opportunity to actually do pottery at Junior High School. But, sadly, there was no magic. There was just mud (...). It took me years to understand what I was doing wrong. You see, the problem wasn't the clay (...). When I was trying to learn how to make pots, it was this very ability to affect the material world that was getting in my way. The problem was me. I was trying to bend the clay to my will, and ignoring the fact that there were other forces already at work. Gravity, momentum, centripetal force, as well as the inherent properties of the clay itself. It took me years to understand that my role as a potter was to stay still and wait for the clay to align itself to the forces at work on it, and guide it into the shape of my imagination (...). I learned that beauty was the result of a process which was in harmony with natural forces, not something imposed on a material without acknowledgment or respect for the character of the material itself (Euan Craig, *Force of Nature*, TEDxTsukuba, 2017).

While Sennett has called this relationship of the craftsman with his materials “material conscious”, Japanese art historian Kenji Kaneko developed the concept of “Craftical Formation” to define the way new ideas are conceived through the relationship with the materials. The author stresses the role of the intrinsic nature of the materials and the techniques employed for its manipulation in the making process, arguing that it is through the artist’s “engagement with the inherent potential of the medium” that one can distinguish craft from fine art (Kaneko, 2002: 29). The value given to the understanding and acceptance of the character of the materials used in the

process of making ceramics is expressed in the preference for the use of local raw clays, minerals and other natural ingredients, instead of ready-made supplies from the industry, as translated in the quote below:

I make my own clay. I pick the clay and I sort the clay. I think you have to do that or it's not really your own work if you let somebody else make those decisions for you (...). It's like rice farmers taking their own seeds (Gary Moler, February 2017).

This value that is given to the use of natural materials, their manipulation processes and the display of those materials and processes in the final result was often mentioned by the potters, including Mirjam Watajima (1983-) and American John Wells (1957-) below:

In Japan, there is historically a strong connection between ceramics and nature. Expressing the specific character of the material, accepting impurities and leaving some aesthetic choices to the fire are common ideas of Japanese potters (Mirjam Watajima, July 2018, written questionnaire).

Kaneshige Toyo², when they invented the pugmill, the clay mixer machine, he bought one because he liked new things. And he used it to mix the clay and he used it just one time and he said: "This kills the clay." And he never used it again. Traditionally, it is wedged by foot. So the Kaneshige kiln is still all wedged by a foot. I've got clay here that I've got to wedge by foot. And that gives a different character to the clay. So that's not an accident, because I am choosing to wedge it by foot rather than by mixer. And this is the clay [shows clay] and it is separated, you can see it has very fine parts and more rocky parts, so that will be separated. And that's how we can get what they call *tsuchiaji*, the character of the clay (John Wells, February 2017).

² Bizen-based potter nominated Living National Treasure in 1956 and one of the main figures in the Momoyama revival ceramic movement of the 1930s.

As approached on chapter three (part one), while the idea of harmony between man and nature as something unique to Japanese culture has been appropriated by the Nihonjinron, Japanese non-dualistic views are rooted in animist beliefs and religious and philosophical traditions of Taoism, Shintoism and Buddhism, which have contributed to the creation of an aesthetics of appreciation of nature. These native cosmologies were later appropriated by Zen aestheticism and expressed, for example, in the concept of *wabi-sabi*, later institutionalized as a quintessentially ideal of beauty within the making of Japanese cultural identity. Closely interrelated to the aesthetics of the tea ceremony, the notion of *wabi* describes the taste for the simple, imperfect and accidental beauty born from nature, and *sabi* refers the appreciation of the physical signs of the passage of time in an object (Itoh, 1993). While understandings of these concepts as essential, atemporal and uniquely Japanese must be challenged, modern ideas of Zen aesthetic concepts such as that of *wabi-sabi* have impacted on Western art, design and even lifestyle, taking the term far from its original meanings (see Koren, 1994; Juniper, 2011; Cooper, 2013).

The acceptance of the natural processes involved in the process of pottery making, especially high-temperature wood-fired ceramics, is reflected in the account by American Gary Moler (1951-) below:

It's taken more than a week to do this [piece] and it's taken maybe ten thousand times of firing, throwing in the wood, layer and another layer... And so many hundreds of hours. It's the same thing when you see beautiful moss growing on a rock. That just didn't happen overnight, you just don't buy some moss and put it there. If it's it took like ten, twenty, thirty, forty years to come up like this, it's awesome (...). It has the element of time, it has so much more depth. And also in the *anagama*, it's the same forces that are in Nature, you get the energy it comes from the sun, it places inside wood (...). So you have all of these forces, these natural forces in this little small universe, this small microcosm that's the kiln, playing out there. And the possibilities are endless, infinite (Gary Moler, February 2017).

This intrinsic relationship with nature and the materials is also reflected in the idea of craftsmanship, which has become intertwined with Western images of Japanese traditional arts and culture.

3.4. (Hi)stories of craftsmanship

Together with native cosmologies, the engagement with traditional techniques and natural processes and materials by Japanese artists and craftsmen results from specific historical and institutional trajectories that took place in the modern period, guaranteeing their preservation and continuity. Besides the official promotion of traditional crafts, domestically and abroad, by the Meiji government, early Showa era saw the development of art-craft movements, which focused on exploring specific historical traditions as means to achieve individual creative expression, such as the Momoyama revival and the *mingei*. Furthermore, late industrialization, together with a European nostalgia for its own lost traditions, contributed to the revalorization of craftwork as a symbol of the country in the context of Japanese nationalism, resulting in its official endorsement.

According to Kaneko (2007), the development of studio crafts in Japan contrasts greatly to what happened in the West, especially in Britain, where they originally emerged. Appearing as a response to the lowering standards of products caused by growing mechanization, along with a moral and social concern for the nature of human labor, they evolved at the hands of artists, designers and intellectuals, most who had been trained at fine arts schools. Yet, the rapid disappearance of the traditional craftsman as a result of industrialization, urbanization and the dismantlement of the communitarian system of manual production represented by the medieval craft guilds made it difficult for artists to establish a dialogue with the traditional craftsmen and learn their techniques and materials. Thus, Western studio potters of early twentieth century developed their work mostly in regions absent from a long history of craft production, adopting the materials of the industry or looking East for reference, as was the case of Bernard Leach in St. Ives (Kaneko, 2007). Thus, deprived of their own history,

Western artists and potters have long searched elsewhere for inspiration, as expressed in the quotes by American potters Andrew Vlock (1988-) and Derek Larsen (1975-):

Japanese potters are lucky to be able to pull from a deep wealthy history to create their craft. In the U.S., ceramics artists don't have the same tradition to pull from, so they play a less defined roll in peoples' lives (Andrew Vlock, April 2017, written questionnaire).

The primary difference is that the Japanese have great respect for old things and tradition. Pottery is sacred, and the craft is passed down over time. In America, the folk tradition is endangered with only a few potters in North Carolina (Derek Larsen, April 2017, written questionnaire).

In fact, the annihilation of traditional craft practices was even more severe in the Americas, where the genocide of the indigenous populations led to the almost complete annihilation of traditional knowledge and its social organizations. This was similar to what happened in other non-Western realities that suffered from Western imperialism. In his investigation of Japanese aesthetics from an African perspective focusing on the field of architecture, Felix Kaputu (2010) stresses how the Western colonial expansion in Africa obstructed African creativity by blocking cultural exchanges and negotiations. Imposing Western values, it put an end to the African traditional lifestyle, "annihilating every possible local resistance for a complete submission" (*ibid.*: 360). Contrastingly, Japanese architecture was able to negotiate with the West and eventually even inform and inspire modern Western developments in architecture and design. In this sense, specific trajectories allowed the transfer of architectural knowledge to shift from a West-East direction at the beginning of the Meiji era to an East-West one, thus transforming Japan in the cultural reference in the field as argued by Beate Loffler (2015).

Similarly, the specific historical, social and political trajectories explored in part one have led Japan to become a reference in the field of crafts and ceramics, with its "powerful institutions, strong market, high technical proficiency, and long complex history" contrastingly greatly with the situation in the West (Winther-Tamaki, 2001: 68).

The awareness of this trajectories is particularly present in the accounts of American potters such as that of Kate Strachan (1982-) below:

America's history isn't long, and with the industrial revolution, the arts and crafts of America were gone forever. So, the appreciation for handcrafted work with the inspiration of nature was lost (Kate Strachan, June 2018, written questionnaire).

Contemporary interest in Japanese ceramics thus recalls some of the aspirations and anxieties about modernity that encouraged the development of Western art movements in the late nineteenth century, one example being the British Arts and Crafts. These idealized the craftsman as "a paragon whose skill and spiritual connection to his chosen medium resulted in objects of inevitable beauty" (Sigur, 2008: 19). On the contrary, machine-made meant ugliness and social alienation, "a loss of pride in the community and in one's work" (*op. cit.*). Thus, as Campbell (2005: 25) argues, through the influence of Karl Marx and Thorstein Veblen's ideas, who saw craftsmanship as the quintessential human activity, ennobling and humanizing, "craft activity became the very symbol of the premodern age". Hence, the work of the craftsman was seen as a model for the relationship between labor and community, a symbol of humanity against the dehumanizing mass-produced mechanized factory work. Furthermore, by becoming mechanically reproducible, craftwork lost its uniqueness and authenticity or *aura*, to draw on Walter Benjamin's (2008) concept.

Thus, by separating design from manufacture, the factory division of labor transformed the former into an "inalienable, humane, authentic and creative work" and the latter into a "purely mechanical, unfulfilling and alienating labor" (Campbell, 2005: 25). This left the potter to become either an artist or designer, as pointed out by German Mirjam Watajima (1982-). Furthermore, with "art" seen as having a higher conspicuous value than "craft" in the West, potters making functional ware are not as respected as those who make sculptural or conceptual works with clay, as highlighted by Kyoto-based America tea potter Richard Milgrim (1955-).

Yet, specific trajectories have led to a particular flourishing of crafts in Japan and, because of this, they have served as powerful tools in the affirmation of national and cultural identity. According to Kikuchi (2015: 91-92), while the transposition of

Western concepts and art institutions created a series of issues, Japanese crafts enjoy today a high reputation in the Japanese art world. Seen as a form of highly specialized professional art comprised of a variety of different mediums and expressions, their boundaries are blurred with fine art and design, and their makers are usually conscious of their position as artists. On the contrary, the Western modern system of arts has placed crafts at the bottom, relegating them to the role of *hobby* or DIY (do-it-yourself). This alienated craftsmen from avant-garde developments in the art field and artists alienated themselves from the world of craft (*op. cit.*). Synthesizing craft historian Glen Adamson's argument, Kikuchi (2015: 89) writes that the relegation of crafts to a 'supplemental position' lies on its "association with function, decoration, material, hand, skills, pastoral countryside, amateurism, femininity, and ethnicity". For this reason, in the West, functional ceramics are still not seen as belonging in the realm of art and, as such, are perceived as of lesser value. This is visible in the quote by American Doris Watanabe (1951-):

Japanese ceramics are, for the most part, more functional than American ceramics, and there is a closer adherence to traditional shapes and techniques. American ceramic artists are more concerned with expressing their individual ideas and concepts, and less concerned with functionality per se. Japanese artists make a vessel with the user in mind. Is the handle easy to hold? Does the rim of a cup feel good to drink from? Does a teapot pour easily? Does a plate complement the food and make it look more delicious? In the United States, functional pottery is considered a lesser art since it confines itself to the bounds of functionality rather than giving full expression to the artist's concepts. This is not the case in Japan (Doris Watanabe, February 2014, written questionnaire).

By separating thinking from making and art from function, the Western system of arts placed the artist in a pedestal, in the role of genius, as a gifted person who made works from a place of creativity and imagination. On the other hand, the craftsman came to be seen as that who performs a technical and thus mindless activity, which does not require any particular talent. This is reflected in the situation of art education in the West, with learning institutions often lacking material, equipment and infrastructure for

pottery making, as pointed by Brazilian student Douglas Barnez (1995-). Furthermore, by prioritizing theory and concept over the development of skill and technique, the high-level art education focuses mainly on “thinking about making” rather than “thinking through making”, showing once again the hierarchies of knowledge.

And despite several Western art movements since the late nineteenth century having sought a reevaluation of handmade craftwork, this preconception has last until today, with intellectual abilities being seen as superior to physical ones. Consequently, those who work with activities involving any form of physical or technical skills are often depreciated. In this sense, the allure of Japan can be also be related to a recovery of pride in handwork and a desire to being appreciated for it, as reflected in the quote by British potter Richard Truckle (1947-2017) below:

On a personal level is the fact that in England people say to you, “What do you do?” You say I’m a potter. And they go “Hmm this is a strange person, treat them carefully” (...) It’s not respected. If you choose to be a potter you’re a bit out of the center (...). Whereas in Japan, pottery is a central part of the culture and you as a potter you’re a well-respected person (Richard Truckle, February 2017).

And because of the government’s support and promotion, which allows for the proliferation of ceramic exhibitions all around Japan, the Japanese public is more educated about ceramics than the regular Western audience. This is reflected in the acceptance of potters as highly appreciated professional, ergo making it easier to make a living from ceramics in Japan than in many other places in the world. These issues have been pointed, amongst others, by American potter Derek Larsen (1975-):

The Japanese consumer buys more pottery that the American. I feel it is almost impossible to be a potter and survive economically in America, almost all potters there teach full time. (...) The fact that in Japan you have a greater chance at selling your product makes life easier (Derek Larsen, April 2017, written questionnaire).

Hence, the attraction of Western potters to Japanese ceramics can be also be related to a desire to recover pride in handwork and being appreciated for it, thus

informing their stories of mobility to Japan. Perceived as a Mecca of craftsmanship to Western eyes, Japan has attracted potters and artists wanting to deepen an understanding of the materials, processes and further develop their skills while having access to a repository of old and new techniques. In this context, specific technological developments that took place in East Asia and which have been passed down for generations also seem an important factor in understanding the effect of Japanese ceramics on Western potters.

3.5. The enchantment of technology

As we saw on the previous section, the close relationship of the potters with their materials translates an embodied skill, which in turn reflects a mastery in the techniques used in the transubstantiation of nature into pottery by human intervention. In this sense, I propose that the allure of Japanese ceramics can also be understood through Alfred Gell's theory of enchantment (1992), which sees art as a component of technology and its product as a result of an arrangement of techniques. Accordingly, the art object would personify the technical processes in which the artist is skilled, thus explaining its power of fascination and its efficacy as social agents:

The power of art objects stems from the technical processes they objectively embody: the technology of enchantment is found on the enchantment of technology. The enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form (Gell, 1992: 44).

As the technology of firing clay until it reaches a solid state, pottery making shares a set of common procedures worldwide. These usually consist of collecting the clay and eventually treat it to remove any impurities, followed by forming into a variety of shapes and finally fire it at a temperature above around 500-600 degrees Celsius, when the clay reaches an irreversible solid state. While each region has developed variations to each of these proceedings, which may include many other steps in between, Japanese pottery

can be distinguished by specific features that it has in common with other East Asian ceramics.

Many of the features of Japanese ceramics that distinguish it from the Western tradition have, in fact, originated in China and Korea, the most significant being the process of slowly firing clay at high temperatures, known as stoneware. Originating in China at around 14.000 BC, this technology reached Japan in the Kofun period (250-538) with the arrival of the *anagama* kiln via Korea. Contrastingly, in the West, stoneware only started being habitually produced at around the sixteenth century. By firing the clay at the high temperature of 1200 degrees Celsius, ceramics achieve a vitreous state that is similar to glass, thus creating harder, nonporous and overall more durable pieces. In this process, which would take up to several days in the old *anagama* kilns, a mechanism known as natural ash glazing occurs. This consists of the fly ashes and soluble salts and mineral from the wood depositing in the surface of the pieces, creating unexpected designs and colorations called *yohen*.

In this sense, high-temperature wood-firing and natural ash glazing as the main features that have attracted Western potters to Japan, show the power of fascination of the art objects and their technical processes. As Brazilian ceramic student Douglas Barnez (1995-) put it, “it’s like magic, like alchemy”. In this sense, the value and moral significance of the work of art reside in the fact that these technical processes are seen as being constructed magically, what Gell (1992) calls the enchantment of technology.

Yet, Bizen-based American potter John Wells (1957-) highlights that the so-called “accidents” that happen inside the kiln are a result of high technical skill and actually “very planned”. Made to look unintentional and natural, they are born of very precise and controlled steps, thus revealing once again the technology of enchantment behind the pottery making process. And while Well admits that these accidents can happen involuntarily at some stage in a potter’s life, they usually require a lot of knowledge and experience in order to be repeated. Therefore, the idea of nature as part of the process of making ceramics through a collaboration with man is also part of the “story” of the piece, as stressed by Wells. By creating a kind of mythology that feeds romanticism it triggers emotional responses such as feelings of nostalgia that can raise an artworks’ symbolic values, thus fulfilling the role of pecuniary respectability from the standpoint of the consumer.

Nonetheless, for Ugandan potter Mpindi Kibudde (1981-), the opportunity to resort to a variety of techniques unavailable in his country was one of the features that attracted him to study ceramics in Japan. As a doctoral student at the Tokyo University of Arts, his project focused on investigating the processes of high-temperature wood-firing and *raku* and combine that knowledge with Ugandan techniques:

I chose Japan because it still has a lot of traditional cultural aspects that are related to pottery and are still used to date (...). In Japan, you got the chance to experiment with the various techniques you learn as compared to Uganda where you are limited by materials and to certain techniques (Mpindi Kibudde, February 2013, written questionnaire).

In this regard, tradition works as a “library of techniques”, as put by Gary Moler. Furthermore, while Japanese tradition was built upon technologies and practices brought from China and Korea, it also acquired local features, which have changed over time and according to the region. In fact, while most of the Western potter’s interviewed work with a variety of techniques from different regions of Japan and the world, others work almost exclusively within the pottery tradition of the region they are located, particularly those who have studied and established their studios in the so-called old medieval kilns. Hence yet another attractive feature of Japanese ceramics is the wide variety of local styles in techniques available in the archipelago:

In Japan pottery is very geographically oriented: “this pot is from Mashiko, this pot is from Karatsu, etc.”; whereas in the US they look at a pot and think: “this pot is a good pot”, but it doesn’t have to be because this pot is from that place (...). In the US there are very few places where there is still a community of potters, North Carolina is one of those few. There used to be Dutch and German handmade pottery in Pennsylvania and New York but those died out after the industrial revolution (Andrew Gemrich, July 2016).



Figure 3.11.
American John
Dix's *anagama*, in
Sasayama. Photo
by the author



Figure 3.12.
Gary Moler's
anagama in
Shiga. Photo by
the author



Figure 3.13.
American John
Wells and his
anagama in
Bizen. Photo by
the author



Figure 3.14. John Wells' raw clay deposit, Bizen. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.15. Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo chamotte clay, Awaji. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.16. Regina Goto plaster molds, Mashiko. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.17. Douglas Black glazing process, Motegi. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.18. Euan Craig's home cooked curry lunch served on his handmade pots, Minakami. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.19. Jesualdo Fernandez-Bravo porcelain plate used in a local restaurant in Awaji. Photo by the author.

Potters based in on traditional potter manufacturing regions also tend to use strictly local raw materials, which they treat and sometimes even collect themselves. In this sense, the use and transformation of natural materials seem to contribute to the power of fascination of Japanese ceramics. According to Gell (1992: 54), “the value of works of art is conditioned by the fact that it is difficult to get from the materials which they are composed to the finished product”. Even if visually identically, if made of plastic, they would not have the same efficacy. Shigaraki-based American potter Gary Moler (1951-) stresses the difference between using ready-made clay or natural raw materials in the quote below:

When I was a student in the States, clay looked like concrete. It's a powder. You'll make the mix it in a machine and it has the exact same amount of feeling as concrete. You get a totally different feeling if you pick it yourself. It's organic, you know everything about it. You know where it came from. (...). It's alive (Gary Moler).

Besides clay, many potters also prefer to prepare their own glazes, a vitreous coat applied on the surface of the ceramics that fuses into the pieces after firing. Ceramic glazes used by the majority of the subjects are made from a variety of minerals, most commonly feldspar, or ashes (known as *haiyu*) from different kinds of wood, straw and other combustible materials at hand, including refuse from everyday life such as egg shells. The process of glazing gives both impermeability and a variety of coloring effects to the surface of the pieces. Since they are fired at higher temperatures, colors are less vibrant but also non-toxic, contrary to most metal-based low-fired glazes. Because of this, they have a more natural appearance, as mentioned by Milgrim (1955-):

The glazes that I use for the most part are pretty simple you know just feldspars and ash, iron, copper, elements and materials that you know are pretty much direct from nature. So the colors that they produce are similar to colors that you find in nature (Richard Milgrim, February 2017).

Japanese-style glazes used by the potters include *ameyu* (amber-color glaze), *seiji* (also called celadon, a jade green-color glaze originated in China) and *tenmoku* (iron glaze, also from China). Other traditional glazes which names also correspond to famous pottery styles originally made to be used in the tea ceremony include Oribe and Shino, from the Mino region (Tajimi prefecture), Setoguro (literally, black Seto) and Ki-Seto (yellow Set), both from the pottery region of Seto (Gifu prefecture) as the name indicates.

As for clay forming techniques used by the subjects, they vary from hand-building, slabs, plaster molds and slip casting, but the most commonly used is the potter's wheel, especially for the production of tableware. While the majority of potters use a motor-driven electric wheel, some still resort to the traditional Japanese kick-wheel (*ke-rokuro*), which requires a lot of strength and hand-feet coordination. Usually made by wood and some even built by the potters themselves, advantages of the kick wheel include lower maintenance, high durability, not relying on electricity for power and closer contact with the material. Furthermore, throwing on a kick-wheel result in less symmetric pieces, which conform to the taste of the tea ceremony.

Another distinctive feature of Japanese pottery is the fact that the shaping of the pot on the potter's wheel is done by the right hand, which happens by turning the wheel on a clockwise direction, contrary to the West. The direction of the rotation of the potter's wheel varies from potter to potter, often depending on whether he or she has been trained in Japan or in the West. When I asked about the implication of this difference, the potters stated that, by rotating the wheel in a clockwise direction, one is able to work with the dominant hand (in the case of the potter being right-handed) on the inside of the pot, thus shaping the form from the inside.

For American Andrew Vlock (1988-), the reason for this practice is that it conforms to the Taoism ideal of "the inside shape is the true/useful form". However, authors Frank and Janet Hamer (2004: 384), argue that the "clockwise wheel evolved from the use of a flywheel as wheel-head which was motivated by a hand-held stick located in notches near the edge". Furthermore, some regions of Japan, mostly those who have had greater Korean influence, are known for their shaping of the pot in an anti-clockwise direction, similar to the West. Thus, it is unclear whether the reason is philosophical, aesthetical, historical or even technical. Yet another feature of East Asian pottery that contrasts with

the West is that the throwing is done from a hump of clay, instead of individually, as stressed by French potter Josephine Marinho (1993-).

Similarly to the clays, glazes and wheels, some potters also make their own tools, usually from bamboo and different types of wood. Traditional Japanese pottery tools adopted by the potters include *shippiki* (cutting wire used to separate the formed pot from the hump of clay), *egote* (wheel-throwing rib used to shape the inside of narrow shapes), *gyubera* (known as cow's tongue, used to shape the inside of the pot), *takebera* (bamboo knife, used for trimming, carving and sgraffito), *tombo* (dragon fly gauge, used for measuring width and depth of pots), amongst others. Tool making is also a feature frequently associated with the practice of traditional crafts. For Sennett (2008: 213) it is through the use of tools that the craftsman not only gains control of his or her skill and improves it but also shape the imagination.

Besides glazing, traditional Japanese decoration techniques employed by the potters include: *jomon-zogan* (cord marked inlay), *tobikana* (chattering), *hakeme* (brush strokes), *ronuki* (wax resist), *kasuri-mon* (chipped glaze pattern), *hidasuki* (fire marks usually from rice straw), *nagashigake* (dripping glaze), *mishima* (slip inlay), *tetsue* (iron oxide painting), *shitae* and *iro-e* (underglaze and overglaze, used especially on porcelain). For those working with porcelain, underglazing and overglazing techniques are also used. Furthermore, natural ash glazing (*yohen*) can be achieved during wood firing, a process known as *yakishime* (high-fired unglazed stoneware), typically from the regions of the so-called six medieval kilns.

Yet, while most subjects are interested in the aesthetics of wood-firing, only a few potters work with the Japanese *anagama* and *nobrigama* kilns. Ubiquitous to in the traditional *kamamoto* workshops where potters were often assisted by professional wood-firers, these kilns can reach twenty-five meters, eleven firing chambers and take from a minimum of twenty-four hours up to twelve days to fire, which demands constant supervision. But since most potters work alone, the majority now owns gas-fueled kilns usually self-built. Finally, some potters operate small single-chamber wood-fired kilns.

Another traditional Japanese firing techniques employed by the potters include *raku* and *hikidashi*³, both of which have also been recently revived. In fact, the fad of wood-fired ceramics in a recent phenomenon both in the West but also in Japan. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, *anagama* kilns started being replaced by the larger, more productive and predictable *noborigama* kilns introduced from Korea. In the Meiji period (1868-1912), with the invention of modern kilns, the *noborigama* also experienced a decline, which was even more drastic in the post-war, when gas and electric kilns became readily available. However, the Momoyama craze of early Showa era (1926-1989) brought a revival of the techniques used for the making of Momoyama tea wares and, in 1933, National Treasure Toyozo Arakawa (1894-1985) a half underground *anagama* in the Mino region (Gifu prefecture).

Two other potters who played a vital role in the *anagama* revival from the late 1960s were Shigaraki-based potter Yasushisa Koyama (1936-) and Michio Furutani (1946-2001), the later responsible for the building and reconstruction of more than thirty *anagama* kilns around Japan. Overseas interest in Japanese wood-firing methods, which grew from the 1970s and especially from the 1990s, also contributed to the reappraisal of wood-firing in Japan. In this sense, Western potters in Japan have also been contributing to the perpetuation of *anagama* and *noborigama* firing tradition:

Anagama is the most primitive kiln, but it's also the most personal. You can make it small, you can make it big and you can make it fit your work (...). But, in the seventies, *anagama* was really unusual [in Japan], there were maybe one or two people [using it in Shigaraki]. *Noborigama* was still everywhere. They were the ones used for big production (Gary Moler, February 2017).

[I built a *noborigama* because] I guess that was what I knew and it was part of the romance for me. I think it was, maybe, the first wood-kiln built in Kasama since the

³ Similar to *raku*, which is done in a low temperature firing, *hikidashi* consists of pulling out the incandescent pieces from the kiln during a high-temperature firing and cooling it rapidly by air or water submersion, which gives the surface vibrant coloring effects. It is typical of a style of tea wares produced in Mino region during the Momoyama period, known as *Setoguro*.

Second World War. There were old *noborigama* here from a long time ago (...) (Randy Woolsey, November 2017).

In sum, the majority of the subjects work with a mixture of Japanese traditional styles, processes and techniques and diverse cultural and artistic references from around the world. However, some work exclusively within the pottery tradition of the region they have established, thus producing Bizen ware or Shigaraki ware, for example. Thus, by working with techniques and concepts identified as “uniquely” Japanese, their stories bring light to the process of transmission of traditional local knowledge in a globalized and interconnected world, challenging fixed ideas about national and cultural identity and belonging.

3.6. Negotiating traditions and identities

While sometimes of patronizing tone, the discourse of the role of Westerners in the revival of Japanese traditions is not new. It is commonly seen when describing the legacy of famous Japanophiles such as Ernst Fenollosa, Lafcadio Hearn or even Bernard Leach, whom all contributed to the reevaluation of certain aspects of Japanese culture when the emergence of new tastes and lifestyles seemed to have endangered traditional cultural practices. The role of “outsiders” in the reappraisal of Japanese tradition is reflected in the statements by Canadian Tracey Glass (1968-) and Australian Euan Craig (1964-) below:

In the nineties, before there was a movement to come back to the countryside (...), we were trying to tell them “you got to realize what’s valuable; these old farms are valuable, these old *shotengai* (old markets) are valuable. So we would talk a lot about that, in different clubs, like the rotary club and other little groups would want us to talk about our impression of what’s Japan worth (Tracey Glass, November 2017).

I have a lot of attention drawn to me because I'm a foreigner doing effectively traditional *mingei* pottery in Japan (...). Coming from the outside and looking at Japanese tradition and Japanese lifestyle, I appreciate a lot of the things that Japanese people don't realize about their own traditions, because they are too close to them. Coming from the outside, it's fresh air for me. I have so many Japanese people who come here and look at the way I live and say "Ohhh, *natsukashii* (nostalgic)!", "Oh, *akogare* (admirable)!", "Oh, I wish I could live this way!" (Euan Craig, January 2017).

Yet, while Japanophilia has often been shaped by power relations and Orientalist assumptions towards the East, Western nationals in Japan are not immune to being themselves exoticized. Millie Creighton (1997) has explored the images surrounding foreigners in Japan, particularly white Westerners, who represent the "other" (*soto*) through the oppositional contrast to ideas of Japaneseness (*uchi*). By using "otherness" in the construction of the "self", foreigners in Japan "are transformed into images of fantasy and exoticism, they are rendered *misemono*, spectacles, or 'things to look at' (*ibid.*: 215). Accordingly, Western nationals speaking fluent Japanese or pursuing "traditional" Japanese activities are considered an exception to the rule of "otherness".

In this context, Westerns living in rural areas, dwelling in old traditional wooden houses and doing activities seen as "peculiarly" Japanese are particularly regarded as exotic. In fact, Japanese television programs commonly feature Western residents living "traditional" Japanese lifestyles as something extraordinary and admirable, partly because Japanese culture and language are still regarded as unique and incomprehensible for non-Japanese. And while in Europe no Japanese person will likely ever be complimented for their skillful use of cutlery, Westerns in Japan more often than not incite feelings of admiration when using chopsticks, as exemplified in the anonymous quote below:

People are often surprised I can use chopsticks. I have been in Japan for nine years, of course I can. There is an image of foreigners that we are all tourists, and cannot understand Japan, there is an element of racism. You can speak Japanese, eat Japanese, live in Japan for twenty years and own your own business, but you will

always be a *gaijin*. In the gallery exhibitions I have had over the past nine years I have heard and been told some crazy things: “you must have Japanese hands and heart”, “you do not have Japanese blood so you do not make Japanese pots” or “you could sell these pots more easily if you had a name in Kanji”. I ignore them all, and move on the next customer who is respectful, polite and understands how hard I have worked to achieve my goals.

Hence, in spite most potters interviewed being white and thus seen as privileged migrants at the top of the racial hierarchy, they are not immune to discrimination, even if subtle and unintentional. Furthermore, while working with traditional Japanese techniques may spawn admiration, often patronizing, it can also trigger negative feelings within more traditional sectors of Japanese society, particularly when it comes to the ceramic art world. This situation was mentioned by tea potter Richard Milgrim (1955-), who lives and works in Kyoto and whose work has been endorsed by Urasenke tea school Grandmaster Sen Genshitsu. Nonetheless, he recounts how a lack of knowledge or ability in his own field of expertise is often taken for granted for being and looking non-Japanese:

You certainly do have a lot of people who, for instance, think that the tea ceremony is unique to Japan and, therefore, if you're not Japanese how could you possibly understand it. They don't know my history, they don't know what I've done, what I've studied (...) [but] their tendency is to see a non-Japanese face and make a judgment. They don't assume that you can speak; they don't assume that you know the culture, they don't assume that you have the understanding that they have because they're born and raised here. It's an awkward situation a lot of times because people take it for granted that you don't know when you do (Richard Milgrim, February 2017).

In this sense, knowledge about Japanese culture might also fill the role of cultural capital that facilitates the subjects' integration into Japanese society and into the art world of Japanese ceramics, giving them legitimacy and social status as non-Japanese nationals working with traditional Japanese ceramic techniques. Yet, the potters'

accounts illustrate how the ideology of homogeneity still predominates in Japanese society, in which foreign residents are not often seen as active participative members. Hence, even though most potters have lived in Japan for over twenty years and have built their families and professional lives here, many are still seen as outsiders in particular circles, as Douglas Black (1967-) mentions below:

Another thing is a certain position as a foreigner that you can, you have limits. There are certain limits in Japan. So no matter how successful I am, there's a certain limit of my opinions (...) that are frustrating (Douglas Black, December 2015).

Nevertheless, being seen as an outsider can also have a few positive aspects, which arise from the fact that one is not expected to know or follow specific social and cultural rules, which might particularly benefit foreign women, as expressed in the following quote by Dutch potter Swanica Ligtenberg (1955-):

As a *gaijin* you can make many mistakes. You are exempt and they accept that and find it already very good when you make an effort to understand them and trying to speak their language. But for Japanese people there are so many, many rules that it may be very difficult for them and for some and I think especially for the women (Swanica Ligtenberg, January 2014, written questionnaire).

Yet, for non-Japanese female potters working within the world of traditional Japanese ceramics discrimination can sometimes be doubled, especially for those practicing wood-firing. For this reason, regardless of nationality, women potters generally work outside the constraints of Japanese tradition, preferring to pursue university art training rather the traditional pottery apprenticeship system and navigate the art world of contemporary clay work, which is not free from patriarchy either. In fact, discrimination towards women goes beyond the world of traditional crafts, reaching the organizational levels of relatively progressive associations, as explored by Kazuko Todate (2009). Tracey Glass touches this issue in the quote below.

Even in my institute, where they were pretty liberal, with artists of different ages, they still expected the women to fetch the tea when a guest came (...). And I was like “we're all working at the same level, why don't you go get the tea?” I said to one of the guys and he did. That's the difference because it's not a company; they are also artists and he didn't take offense (Tracey Glass, November 2017).

In her study of Japanese women performers in New York, art historian Midori Yoshimoto (2005: 11) mentions that, even in the 1960s and 1970s, the Japanese art world was still controlled by patriarchal values, a strict order of seniority and the politics of various artists' associations. Thereby, the author argues how even though women could be recognized by their achievements, they were in the bottom of the social hierarchy and, hence, for them the scrutiny was much stricter (*op. cit.*). Accordingly, it was very difficult for women without the right contacts to reach a position in the artists' associations dominated by men, which propelled many Japanese women artists to pursue their careers abroad. Some of the most famous are Yoko Ono (1933-) and Yayoi Kusama (1929-), amongst other whose life-story is explored by the Yoshimoto (2005). In my study of Japanese women potters in Brazil, I have also explored the gendered trajectories of Japanese pottery and how the male-dominated Japanese ceramic art world motivated Japanese potters to cross national borders and forge a new tradition of high-temperature ceramic wood-firing abroad (Morais, 2015a). Yet, in Japan, women still face many difficulties in establishing themselves professionally, either in ceramics or other non-domestic related occupations. In the quote below, American potter Doris Watanabe narrates the struggles of being a woman potter in Japan:

If you are ambitious and want to get ahead in the Japanese world of ceramics, you are going to have more trouble as a woman. Many of the more famous or successful potters will not accept a woman apprentice. This has traditionally been a man's world. More and more women are finding it easier these days to graduate from art school with a major in ceramics and then set up their own pottery. If they can establish the connections they need to sell their work, they will probably be successful (Doris Watanabe, January 2014, written questionnaire).

The situation described by Watanabe is thus a reflection of the patriarchal values that dominate Japanese society at large, where women are still supposed to fulfill the role of caregivers, thus seen as the main responsible for domestic activities and children rearing, which often hinders them from pursuing a full time professional career, as Portuguese ceramic artist describes Kristina Mar (1964-) below:

There are more men than women working on things that are not related to domestic activities throughout the world. But specifically in Japan, because it is a society based on the household. It is the woman that sustains this nucleus in Japan, so it's very hard to devote to a full-time profession. And the fact that ceramics, in particular, is very physically demanding would be another reason (Kristina Mar, January 2014, written questionnaire).

In fact, while female participation in the Japanese labor force has been growing in the past decades, with 66% of women between 15 and 64 years old working outside the home in 2016, according to OECD data, only 44% of those are in regular employment, with the majority being in part-time or irregular jobs.

Yet another reason for gender inequalities in Japanese ceramics has come from the use of high-temperature wood kilns, which require a certain amount of physical strength and endurance and thus are seen as a male job. This happens not only in Japan but also abroad, with the majority of wood-kilns being owned and operated by men.

Wood fired kilns require a huge amount of physical labor and resources. It's virtually impossible to do it alone. It may be difficult to set up a network which allows a potter to work in the traditional way, especially if there are small children who need to be cared for. As a woman, if you want to enjoy the best of both worlds, your children and your work as an artist, it's just easier to have a smaller operation, a small easily fired kiln and make a smaller amount of pots (Doris Watanabe, January 2014).

While technological developments such as the popularization of smaller gas and electric kilns and clay kneading machines have helped to reduce gender inequalities

imposed by physical constraints, wood-firing still remains mostly a male-dominated activity. In fact, the majority of female subjects work with gas or electric kilns, with Canadian Tracey Glass (1961-) being one of the few foreign female potters in Japan working with wood-firing ceramics. In fact, she was the only interviewed potter working with a *tangama*, a single-chamber wood-firing kiln, typical of the region of Arita. Tracey uses wood ashes from several types of local trees, such as persimmon, chestnut, ginkgo, sawtooth oak and many others, which she burns in the wood stove to make her own original ash glazes for her wood-fired pieces.



Figure 3.20. Tracey Glass *tangama* in Ayabe. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.21. Tracey Glass kiln entrance with offerings to the gods. Photo by the author.

I was really interested in wood-burning kiln, the fire and nature. And then I went to Bizen and I was thinking about becoming an apprentice, but I decided it was not for me, too strict (...). I said “I’m interested in wood burning kiln” and they said *onna no ko da kara muzukashii*, “it will be difficult because you’re a woman” (...). That was a hurdle. But it worked the other way around, it worked better, because I got a colleague who is Korean born in Japan, a woman, I’m a Canadian studying in Japan, a woman. So the two women sharing their studio and everything we got so much publicity. When we moved here because we built the house... We were looking for an old farmhouse but it didn't happen, so we decided to build it. And, as we were doing it, the townspeople, the economic people, the newspapers, eventually TV came... we got so much publicity! Just because it was a unique situation, doing wood-burning kiln in the countryside, two *gaijin* (Tracey Glass, November 2017).

Like Tracy Glass and her colleague, in the past few decades, Japanese and non-Japanese women all around the world have started to get involved with the production of wood-fired ceramics, challenging its predicament as a male activity (see Morais, 2015a). In a recent blog post about the subject, art historian Mary Ann Steggle has stressed the need to reexamine the masculine presumptions that still dominate the ceramic world of wood-firing, reflected in beliefs such as the bigger, longer and dirtier the firing the best (Steggles, 2018). While the process of using wood as combustible has been pointed by the potters as being more environmentally friendly than fossil fuels, the need to develop more efficient kilns that fire for shorter periods of time using less wood is crucial.

Because of these constraints, added to environmental concerns, high cost and difficult logistics of being an individual studio potter working with wood-firing, Australian potter Euan Craig (1964-) has developed a smaller, faster and more efficient wood-fired kiln which he named *euangama*, a modified version of downdraft single-chamber kiln, which has been adopted by other Western potters working in Japan. In this sense, Western potters can take advantage of their position as “outsiders” to appropriate Japanese traditions beyond historical, social, cultural and also gender constraints. Hence, Western potters in Japan often draw on a combination of techniques

and cultural traditions to produce their works, as expressed in the quote below by American Mike Martino:

I get mixed reactions to my work. For the most part, it looks like Karatsu, but it's a tad different (...) Tradition is like a collection of knowledge passed for a period of time. What I do is hopefully it will add to that tradition and if not it will be forgotten. And it will have my influences as an American and South West native pottery (Mike Martino, May 2017)

Nonetheless, being taught in Japan and selling mostly for Japanese customers (only a few have online shops and sell overseas), the majority of the subjects also produce Japanese-style tableware, teaware, *sake* drinking sets, *ikebana* vases and so on. As Mashiko-based American potter Andrew Gemrich (1967-) has put it: *I live in Japan so I make things for Japan*. According to Kyoto-based American Derek Larsen (1975-), while there are specific sects of Japanese society that have intellectual interests in traditional pottery, demand for handmade ceramics goes beyond stereotypes, reaching a large range of people from different generations and occupations.

Furthermore, by being characterized by the use of a variety of side dishes⁴, served in vessels of different shapes, sizes and styles, Japanese food culture allows the potters to produce a large range of vessels. The use of chopsticks instead of a knife and fork was also mentioned by both Euan Craig in the previous chapter and Gary Moler as an important element in defining the vessels designs:

Japanese culture definitely gives you a lot of advantage for that, because they appreciate a mixture of different kinds of vessels, different contrast of color. Bring out the quality of the food or put it in the context of the season. And the other thing that's good about Japanese culture is that you can use chopsticks and that gives you a totally different element of freedom. If it's a knife and fork you have to have flat things. They probably should be glazed, unless you're using soft metals

⁴ Katarzyna J. Cwiertka (2006; 2008) has demystified the concept of a Japanese national cuisine within the context of Japanese nationalism and national identity making, arguing that the concept of harmony between food, vessel and season was mostly limited to professional catered *kaiseki* cuisine before the modern era.

or something like that, because you don't want to hear that terrible [scratching] sound (Gary Moler, February 2017).

In this sense, specific features of Japanese ceramics and culture have encouraged the potters to experiment with a variety of materials, shapes and techniques, providing a more a playful experience and a sense of creative freedom within the act of making, as often mentioned by the subjects. And while some potters' produce most of their work following the tradition of the pottery region where they have established their studios, many of them work with a mix of different styles and techniques from different regions of Japan and the world.

When asked if they consider their work to be Japanese pottery, answers vary as follows: *I make ceramics in Japan, so my work is Japanese*; or *My work is more Japanese than the Japanese*; or yet *I use Shigaraki clay, so it's Shigaraki-style*, thus referring to their professional identities as place-based, showing again the body as a place of culture. British Richard Truckle (1947-2017) remarks below show this creative power of identity, which rather than something innate and immutable, is multiple, dynamic and in constant adaptation:

Basically, my work is a development of the kind of work that I was making in England, but having lived in Japan over twenty-six years, it's affected me. By seeing Japanese pottery, using Japanese pottery, seeing how Japanese pottery is used, seeing that huge variety of Japanese pottery, living with it, which you don't get any other country basically (Richard Truckle, February 2017).

In this sense, together with the theories of embodiment (cf. 3.3.) and enchantment (cf. 3.5.), the artworks made by Western potters living in Japan can be understood as the materialization of a way of experiencing life in a society, following anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1976) position:

The artist works with his audience's capacities – capacities to see, or hear, or touch, sometimes even to taste and smell, with understanding. And though elements of these capacities are indeed innate – it usually helps not to be color

blind – they are brought into actual existence by the experience of living in the midst of certain sorts of things to look at, listen to handle, think about, cope with, and react to (Geert, 1979: 1497).

Thus, for the Geert (1976), art is a language, a structure, a system, an act, a symbol, a pattern of feeling. Therefore, it must be inserted in the context of other human expressions and in the pattern of experiences that it collectively supports. Similarly, the "aesthetic sense" reflects a local knowledge and, hence, it can be understood as a faculty acquired in the experience of a particular society. Thus, despite the majority of the potters having established in Japan in their early twenties, the pervasive influence of the culture they live in (which for most accounts for over twenty years) is visible not only in their technical process but also in their lifestyles, as Douglas Black mentions below:

I've only been a student, high school and art school student in my life in another country, so I've never built a house or lived in any community other than here (Douglas Black, December 2015)

In this sense, as Price and Hawkins (2018: 6) describe: "Where making takes place matters". In her study of the role of material and imaginary spaces in the creation of artists' identities, social geographer Alison L. Bain (2004) argues:

Artistic labor, as one form of economic activity, is embedded within the culturally constructed context of the art world and is located within the place-based culture of the studio, the home, the neighborhood, the community, the city and the nation (Bain, 2004: 425).

In fact, besides the materials, processes, techniques and tools, some of the potters' homes and studios also show how the quintessential image of the traditional Japanese craftsman is embedded in their personal and professional identities. This is the case of Euan Craig, who moved to his wife's family old Japanese-style woodhouse (*kominka*) in Minakami, which was once used to raise silkworms, the traditional activity

of the region. His vivid description of his studio and routine wrote for *Ceramics Monthly* magazine is transcribed below:

As I throw pots on the wooden kick wheel in the soft winter light, there is only a paper thickness between my home, just the other side of the shoji screens, and the studio. In the summer, when the screens are open, there is no separation between home and studio at all. While our four children are at school during the day it is quiet, just the susurration of kettles on the wood stove or the “irori” charcoal brazier, the trundle of the wheel on its bearing, the pat of my bare foot on the wooden fly wheel or the slap of my hands on the clay. This wheel is the pivot around which my studio revolves, and it was the first and most important step in re-establishing my studio after the great earthquake and nuclear disaster of 2011.

Half of the studio is a dark wooden floor, the throwing deck a raised section along the back wall which houses three wheel wells for kick wheels, a lower deck which has space for two electric wheels, and a general purpose area which has the staircase to the loft and the “irori” set into the floor. I imagine a time when there will be “deshi” (apprentices) or “shokunin” (artisans), guest potters or even heirs to use these wheels, but for the moment it is just me.

The other half of the studio is an earth floor, which maintains a constant humidity in the studio and prevents dust. There are alcoves that used to be stables along the wall, one of which holds bamboo drying shelves and a manual slab roller, the other of which contains the concrete wedging table on its stone foundations and clay storage against the damp room wall. The double door damp room (say that three times fast!) was originally built for raising silk worms, and has adjustable bamboo shelving and vents perfect for storing and controlling the drying of my work and it is large enough to hold one full kiln loads worth of pots. I fire my work with wood in a 1 cubic meter “Euan-gama” fast fire kiln. With an analogue pyrometer in the kiln now, I can make my work without using any electricity or



Figure 3.22. Euan Craig home and studio in Minakami. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.23. Euan Craig at his exhibition at Ebiya Gallery in Nihonbashi in November 2016. Photo by the author.

Figure 3.24. *Irori* (Japanese sunken fireplace) at Euan Craig's studio in Minakami. Photo by the author.

fossil fuels at all. Behind the house is a stone well which provides fresh clean water for the studio all year round (Craig in Hartney, 2013).

In fact, the embodiment of “Japaneseness” in his lifestyle is reminiscent of the trajectory of famous Japanologist Lafcadio Hearn’s, “widely admired as the premier and true interpreter of the ways of the Japanese” (Pulvers, 2014, para. 5). While Craig hasn’t acquired Japanese nationality as Hearn did, his life-story resonates with Hearn’s in several ways. One of those is his and other subjects’ disinterest in the establishing social networks based on nationality, ethnicity or “foreignness”, thus contrasting with other immigrant communities in Japan. This is visible in the quote below:

Apparently, there's a part of Minakami, the other side of the bridge here which is called *Gaijin mura* [foreign village]. It's a group of holiday houses, rich people from Tokyo, who have built their holiday houses there and they're all foreigners. And one of the mothers of my youngest son's school friends said to me the other week: “why aren't you gathering with the other foreigners?” I don't have anything in common with them. This is my home, this is where I live, I'm part of this community, I have my commonality here (Euan Craig, February 2017).

Contrarily, social networks are built on the basis of “shared humanity, rather than shared origin”, as Milos Debnar (2016) writes in his study of Europeans in Japan. In this sense, social networks of the majority of the Western potters interviewed, with a few exceptions, include mostly other potters and artists, independent of nationality, and the inhabitants of the local communities where they live and work.

3.7. Community and local development

Given the fact that the vast majority of the potters (thirty-five out of forty subjects) has been practicing ceramics in countryside areas of Japan, their lifestyles are closely interrelated with the Japanese rural society, still highly centered on agriculture, and the

local pottery traditions and identities of the regions where they pottery studio are located, as seen on the previous sections.

Thus, as residents of rural areas, potters are often expected to take part in their community activities, which include cutting grass on the river banks, cleaning the local town hall or take part in the meetings of the neighborhood council committee (*jichikai*) as representative of their household. Often times, social interactions within the local community also include practices of gift giving and reciprocity. Mashiko-based American potter Douglas Black stated that he often receives fruits and vegetables grown by his neighbor, a custom that sometimes works as to create a tie of social obligation when a favor from part of the giver is needed.

Furthermore, since most potters work in traditional areas of pottery production, their professional lives are sometimes intertwined with the local potters' associations. This is the case of John Wells, who is a member of the *Bizen Toyukai* (Bizen Potters' Guild) and the *Bizen Toshinkai* (Toshinkai Association of Bizen Potters) and Euan Craig, who is part of the regional representation of the Mingei Association. Besides traditional potters' associations, Americans Douglas Black and Andrew Gemrich are also part of the board of directors of the Mashiko Ceramic Art Association, currently involved in the creation of artistic international exchanges.

Additionally, a few subjects have also been involved in grassroots activities for the goal of rural revitalization through cultural and artistic exchanges. American John Dix's studio in Sasayama (Hyogo) is part of the Fieldwork project, a non-governmental organization founded by David Jack and Sachiko Matsunaga with the goal of encouraging rural sustainability and multicultural understanding by offering accommodation and other facilities for visitors to experience rural life through the experience of pottery making. Another example of local development projects through creativity fostered by the potters include Artist in Residency programs. This is the case of Shiro Oni Studio in Fujioka (Gunma prefecture), created and run by American artist Kjell Hahn in 2013 with the goals of "connecting rural Japan to the rest of the world" through the exchange of ideas between resident artists and the local community (Shiro Oni studio website). A similar project is the Kouraku kiln factory, a 150-year-old porcelain factory in the famous pottery town of Arita, which has fostered an Art-in-Residence program since 2015. Envisioned by the factory director Takanobu Tokunaga and artist Shin Koyama, the

program, which also includes a Treasure Hunting experience for tourists, is coordinated by Brazilian artist Sebastião Pimenta and will be discussed in detail in Appendix I.

Other grassroots projects created with the goal of bringing international artists and students to live and work in countryside areas struggling with depopulation include: the Sasama International Ceramic Art Festival and Artist in Residence program, created by Japanese potter Shozo Michikawa and currently hosting French potter Joséphine Marinho; and *Queridos Amigos*, a crowd-funded project created by Rikio Hashimoto in Misato (Shimane), which involves a “home/studio-stay” for international ceramic students, mainly from Brazil, to learn pottery and Japanese traditional culture for the duration of three months while taking part in several activities of the local community.

Hence, besides their solo activities in pottery making, community-based projects in the arts and crafts implemented or partaken by the potters have also been contributing to local development, adding to the expansion of creative clusters in rural areas. In fact, in Appendix I, I argue that the active participation of international migrants in their communities of destination can raise important questions about local citizenship and multicultural understanding, thus fueling social change (Burgess, 2004; Sugimoto, 2012). Moreover, by adding to the creation and maintenance of transnational networks of people, practices, knowledge and ideas, the participation of non-Japanese residents in their activities and decision making process of their neighborhoods, villages and towns can impact on the notions of place and identity, contributing to the creation of transnational communities as defined by Delanty (2003), characterized by a dynamic, hybrid and cosmopolitan character (see Appendix I for further discussion).

Yet other forms of local citizenship undertaken by the subjects include environmental activism. This is the case Canadian Tracey Glass (1961-), who lives in Ayabe (Kyoto prefecture), at less than forty kilometers from the Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui. In the past few decades, she has participated in regional anti-nuclear movements, which gained power after the Kobe earthquake in 1995, by volunteering as an interpreter and translator for Green Action, a Japanese activist non-governmental organization established in Kyoto in 1991. Besides environmental activism, Glass and her colleague have also been involved in architectural heritage preservation volunteering activities in the region:



Figure 3.26. Euan Craig’s neighborhood in rural Minakami. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.25. Tracey Glass’s community in rural Ayabe. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.27. Douglas Black’s agricultural community in Motegi. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.28. Douglas Black house garden, Motegi. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.29. Kiln built at during the International Ceramic Art Festival in Sasama. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.30. Ryan Cain and a member of the Mashiko Ceramic Art Club. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.31. Douglas Black and other volunteers of the Hamada Noborigama Revival Firing in 2018. Photo by the author.

We were sort of involved in the late nineties with preserving architecture in the countryside (...). There wasn't anything going on in Ayabe, but Obama is only 35 minutes away from Fukui. So I was involved in the restoration of an old *sakakura* (sake warehouse) and turned it into a gallery. That was one of the projects but it took like two years because people can only work on weekends, it's all volunteer work. We actually restored it with our own hands, pounding the floor and now it's a gallery everyone can use (Tracey Glass, November 2017)

In fact, she is a pioneer in the rural resettlement movement in the rural region of Ayabe, which includes areas designated as dying villages (*genkai shunraku*).

Now in the 2000s a lot of young, organic farmers and artists have moved in and there is more conscious, they moved for a better life for the kids, healthier for themselves so it's changed. When we first came that was our idea, but we were one of the only people we were like pioneers, but now this whole area is designated a dying village (Tracey Glass, January 2018).

Indeed, many of the subjects of the first generation are part of the genesis of the Japanese rural resettlement movement, which slowly took off in the 1970s with white-collar workers leaving the city to pursue alternative lifestyles in countryside areas to develop activities in crafts making or farming. Focusing on agriculture, John Knight (1997) has investigated the tensions between local farmers and new rural resettlers coming from the city to practice natural farming in the mountains of Kii peninsula in the 1980s and 1990s. Besides the influence of Fukuoka Masanobu's writings on natural farming and his criticism of modern industrialized society, the rural resettlers studied by Knight also claimed inspiration in the Japanese indigenous religion of the region, together with ancient Celtic and North American Indian traditions, reflecting an interest in New Age spirituality (Knight, 1997). This cultural mindset points to what Delanty (2003: 115-116) calls the "quintessential post-modern liminal community" represented by the nomadic New Age travelers, characterized by the "rejection of the dominant values of work, respectability and families" and the search for "alternative lifestyles based on a sustainable and more organic way of life".

3.8. Cosmopolitan orientations, ecological worldviews and the search for happiness and well-being

Many of the Western potters' interviewed show ecological worldviews based on a holistic view of man and nature, reflecting the influence of both Western New Age spirituality and Japanese Shintoist cosmologies. As such, they reveal and cosmopolitan orientations, translated into notions of identity based on a sense of shared humanity as a component of nature, rather than on nationality or culture, which are rooted in universalistic thinking. The idea that we are all part of the cosmos is particularly prevalent in Douglas Black's narrative and artworks, often inspired by animist notions of common spirits dwelling in nature and the universe, visible for example, in his sculptural installation *Under One Sky*, presented at the Mashiko *Hijisai* – Living with the Earth Festival in 2015 (see chapter 2.2.2. of part 2).

The correlation of Japanese views of nature to other non-Western cosmologies was frequent in Douglas Black (1967-) and Suzanne Wang's (1970-) accounts presented in the previous chapter, reflected in references to Native North American traditions and their comparison to Japanese views of nature, Japanese relationships with the material reality and Japanese the traditional apprenticeship based on observation, repetition and trial-error rather than the explicit verbal transmission of knowledge. Similarly, Euan Craig (1964-) described the *mingei* philosophy as reflecting universal ideas about the human condition, thus showing our commonality and our place in the universe. This shows the subjects' focus on the interconnectedness of the human experience in its diverse manifestations, pointing to a universalistic orientations. In this sense, the subjects discourses and worldviews show their own attempts to bring Japanese emic values to the etic sphere, searching for their comparative dimensions and compatibility with other Western and non-Western realities.

The subjects' holistic conceptions of the integration between humans and nature draw on Japanese indigenous cosmologies and other subaltern cultural traditions beyond Eurocentric Judeo-Christianity views of humanity and the universe, which have been appropriated by contemporary Western environmental movements. For Castells (2010: 183-184), this incorporation of human identity with the "cosmological self" goes

well beyond the New Age spirituality by translating “old-fashioned care-taking of our descendants that is our own flesh and blood”, as the author phrases it.

Besides grassroots projects and environmental activism, the subjects’ ecological aspirations are expressed in a desire to lead sustainable lifestyles beyond pottery making, reflected in practices of recycling and DIY (do-it-yourself). In fact, many of the subjects have not only built their own pottery tools but also their homes and studios, often from recycled and abandoned materials. This was the case of Americans Douglas Black (1967-) and Gary Moler (1951-), the latter of who is quoted below:

I built this house with the second-hand materials: this came from an old farmhouse, this was a big window in a school, this was the handrail of the school and these were the doors to the classroom. This was a case for microscopes in the science room (...). The policy was that if it was one hundred percent natural wood, even if it's old or dirty or something like that, it still has some kind of intrinsic quality to it. This is good. You can play with it or give it a new life (Gary Moler, February 2017).

Yet, leading alternative lifestyles seems to be as much of a personal choice as a condition of their professions or the result of fortuitous life events. For Australian Euan Craig (1964-), the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake has reinforced his aspirations for self-sufficiency and energy conservation. Besides building a small economic wood-fired kiln and using a wood stove and a wood-fired bath, Craig’s ultimate goal is to plant enough trees to fulfill his domestic and professional use. His lifestyle thus reflects holistic ecological worldviews of the relationship between man and nature, which were omnipresent throughout his life-story account:

My children learned how to chop wood and light fires and cook and they use handcrafted pots. They helped fix this house up and they see the kitchen table that I made and they eat food that we make ourselves, some of it we grow ourselves, some are from Mika's [his wife's] parents, the rice we eat is from Mika's grandparents' farm. They know where everything has come from and they understand their place in the grand scheme of things. So hopefully that will lead

on to a greater understanding of our responsibility to maintain the health of this whole organism. I think crafts are a very important part of that (Euan Craig, February 2016).

In fact, the burst of the Japanese economic bubble in the early nineties together with the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake have triggered a growth in environmental consciousness, promoting a societal reevaluation of how to relate to living. Besides being no longer a priority in a context of material wealth, the quest for material accumulation, comfort and convenience is increasingly starting to be seen as conflicting with the goals of sustainability (Cwierka & Machotka, 2018: 20). In this context, new movements focusing on self-sufficiency, self-realization and community-building have been gaining terrain in the past years. Euan Craig (1964-) points out the urgency in taking into account the role of handmade crafts in the current framework of fast environmental degradation:

Now the awareness about our place in nature, our place in the world, is much more vital to our survival, because of the results of industrialization. All the things that William Morris and Yanagi Soetsu and the *hippies* said about if we don't look after our environment, we're going to become extinct... all the things they said are coming true now and we have to do something very important now. That's why I think there's this raised awareness. The main reason why I chose pottery was for my own lifestyle, my own self-development. And once I became a potter I realized that I had a responsibility to nature and the greater community as well (Euan Craig, February 2016)

Thus, the resurgence of interest in craft making practices both in consumption, popular culture and academia cannot be disconnected from this growing ecological awareness born from large-scale global environmental changes (Price & Hawkins, 2018: 19). Contemporary trends such as the makers' movement, DIY, slow food movement and new forms of urban migration to the countryside, as well as socially-engaged art, have been connected to the values of post-materialism in the context of the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist mode of production (Mori, 2005; Price & Hawkins, 2018;

Cwiertka & Machotka, 2018). As discussed on chapter three (part one), this new environmental awareness has also led to a quest for sustainable and ethical consumption, reflected in the growth of economies of sharing and practices of recycling and reparation. Thus, this renewed interest in handmade crafts should be understood in the context of the shift from an industrial to a postindustrial society centered on knowledge and creativity.

From the point of view of the consumer, the question of handicrafts can also reflect aspirations beyond conspicuous consumption, expressing a disillusionment with modern capitalist society, economic materialism, overconsumption and environmental destruction and a desire to “go back to the basics” reflected in more authentic and natural lifestyles (or what is perceived as such). Yet, these aspirations are sometimes solved through consumption itself, as explored in chapter three (part one). In fact, several potters have pointed out the fact that their clients see in their works the organic lifestyles they aspire to, reflecting a desire for a quality of life through aesthetic pleasure:

I used to sell mainly in Tokyo because (...) Tokyo people live in this sort of high pressure on the natural environment and there's almost like a thirsty for something different, for something real, for something natural, for something that can improve their lives (Gary Moler, February 2017).

Most of my customers live in metropolitan areas and particularly in Tokyo. By having my pots on their table they've got a little bit of country (Euan Craig, February 2016).

My customers are people with a passion for food, sake, tea, flowers, and hospitality. Mentally, they all seem to desire the same thing, time to relax, switch off, unwind and enjoy a life filled with beautiful things (Derek Larsen, June 2017, written questionnaire).

In this sense, consumer's interest in handmade crafts is associated with both ideas of conspicuous and ethical consumption, but can also reflect a quest for happiness and well-being through pleasure obtained from the contact with the material world. In this

context, by focusing on sensual aspects of ceramics in mundane routine activities, particularly certain types of pottery that allow a more complete sensorial experience, we can recognize the role of aesthetics in everyday life. In their study of happiness and the search for a good life in Japan, Manzenreiter and Holthus (2017) stress the importance of food for social well-being in many societies. Thus, as both producers and consumers of crafts, the subjects have often mentioned the enriching role of pottery in people's lives expressed, for example, in the daily pleasure of eating and drinking. This highlights the active role of objects in the relationships they establish with people, as stressed by Gary Moler (1951-) below:

If you use it in daily life, it's something that enriches your life. And that brings people to the conversation. The quality of life becomes higher at a philosophical level. It's not just like putting nutrients in your body. Because of what I told you, that I experienced this group of people with nice food, nice vessels, nice history of all these pieces... And so what I learned is that it's not just something physical, it's not just a physical object. There's sort of a philosophical content or an immaterial content that you could also communicate (Gary Moler, February 2017).

This recognition of the role of materiality, spirituality and aesthetics in human, social and ecological development is, in fact, omnipresent throughout the potters' accounts. By seeing the notion of the good life has intimately tied up with an increase in and access to beauty, John Clammer (2012: 220-223) stresses the role of aesthetics in the creation of a more "humane, ecologically responsible, poetic, spiritual and holistic" concept of development:

For the aesthetic is not only that immediately presents itself to the senses, but equally that which invokes and enshrines memory and the recognition of sites of happiness and suffering, embodies emotions, nostalgia and modes of representation of the past and their projection into the present and the future. The recovery of some sense of the 'fullness' of the aesthetic dimension of human life and our life in nature is an important part of the attempt to reconstruct an appropriate philosophical anthropology for our time, and equally to recover a

sense of the fullness of culture, not as a denuded and abstract concept, but as the cradle and expression of human being-in-the-world (Clammer, 2012: 226).

In this sense, Clammer's (2002, 2015) view of aesthetics, spirituality and creative expression as basic human needs relates to Chibber's (2013) call for universalistic understanding of humanity in its basic aspects:

The idea that needs are *not* internal to *a* culture can be understood in two ways: first, it can be taken to mean that they are universal in scope, being common to many cultures; second, it can mean that they are not culturally constructed at all—they operate independently of culture. So, needs could be ruled out as reasons either because they are culturally constructed but not unique to a given culture, or because they are not cultural constructions at all (Chibber, 2013: 187-188).

Similarly, Daniel Chernillo (2014) has called for self-reflection in the scientific analysis of society by proposing philosophical sociology as a path to overcome reductivist and essentialist conceptions of humanity and understand conceptions of good life, justice, democracy or freedom within the frame of universalism. Arguing that there is no cosmopolitanism without a strong universalistic view of humanity, the author has called for a redefinition of cosmopolitanism's universalistic orientation beyond claims of Eurocentrism, thus rejecting the notion of universalism as an intrinsically Western development, which he considers anachronistic and inaccurate (Chernilo, 2012).

Focusing on aesthetics, Nikos Papastergiardis (2012) sees in art and imagination as a crucial starting point for cosmopolitanism, translated in the interest and celebration of the Other and its difference. Calling for a reappraisal of the function of the imagination as a world-making process, the author stresses its power in making and breaking the limits of social institutions. Rather than simply reflecting other forms of knowledge of the world, artistic practices are producing knowledge in the world and can, therefore, work as powerful mechanisms of change (Papastergiardis, 2012).

Drawing on Harumi Befu's emic-etic distinction (1989) and following Clammer's (2002, 2015) understanding aesthetics, spirituality and creative expression as basic

human needs, I argue that the potters' negotiation of the emic values attached to Japanese ceramics, Zen aesthetics, the tea ceremony and the *mingei* translates etic ideals, aspirations and concerns reflected in: a desire for a more sustainable and organic relationship between humans and the environment; a pursuit of happiness and well-being through self-fulfilling and self-determined lifestyles; a search for aesthetic pleasure and spirituality through a closer relationship with the material reality; and a reevaluation of the meaning of craftsmanship within a more humanizing and gratifying model of life and work. In this sense, the potters' attraction and negotiation of the emic values tied to Japanese ceramics can be brought to the etic arena and contribute to the establish global discussions about pressing social, economic and cultural issues the role of aesthetics, arts (understood in the broader sense) and creativity in the creation of a more humane and sustainable society.

Their potters' appropriation and embodiment of difference show their cosmopolitan aspirations based on shared understanding of the humanity and its place in the universe through the bodily, sensorial and emotional connections established with the material world. Their life-stories, lifestyles, worldviews, technical processes and artworks and worldviews highlight the connections between the quest for a recovery of the values of craftsmanship, human relationships to the material reality and a search for self-fulfillment, happiness and well-being. Moreover, cosmopolitan aspirations can contribute to the creation of postmodern transnational communities, characterized by fluid and multiple belongings (Delanty, 2003; Beck *apud* Rantanen, 2005; Beck, 2006).

3.9. Japan as utopia

As approached in the previous section, in recent years, both in the Japan and the West, the question of crafts and *mingei* has been brought again to the center of the discussion about leading a more human and sustainable lifestyle (Matsui, 2005; Sennett, 2008; Kurata, 2015; Price & Hawkins, 2018). The need to rethink the role of crafts in the contemporary world was mentioned by Australian potter Euan Craig (1964-) below:

People, if they have the choice, don't want to have mass-produced industrial artificial meat and vegetables on their table. They want to know who made it and where, and know that it's healthy and natural. And extending that into handcrafts, knowing who made this coffee mug, where it was made, what it was made from... Knowing that this glaze doesn't have any lead in it, knowing that this pot was fired in a wood kiln, putting carbon inside rather than using fossil fuels, for example. And people want to know that traceability of who made what where, so they feel in touch with the food they're eating, the cups they're using, the clothes they're wearing... So I think there's a real need for *mingei* now and not just as protecting the tradition, but as something which is about understanding human beings and as part of the natural world (Euan Craig, February 2017).

While motivations of Western potters to come to Japan have often been fed by idealized images of Japanese culture and ceramics, some of the subjects have come to the country with no preconceived ideas but felt a desire for self-realization and self-fulfillment provided by the opportunity of making something with their hands. This was the case of Canadian Randy Woolsey (1944).

I'm from Prairie cowboy Canada in the middle of Canada, but I used to go almost every day to see the exhibition's then I started dreaming about actually making things for myself. I'd never met a potter, I'd never seen a kiln, never thought about pottery, but it really interested me (Randy Woosley, November 2017)

The attraction of Western potters to Japanese ceramics can thus be understood within the context of dissatisfaction with the values of the modern industrial capitalist society, which feeds individualism, social alienation, dehumanization of labor and the environmental degradation, by searching in craftwork for a shared sense of humanity and its place in the universe. Through its similarities with other movements of the past, such as the British Arts and Crafts movement and the Japanese folk crafts movement (*mingei*), both of which looked at craftsmanship as a model for community and pride in one's work, the potters' views can be interpreted as a reflection of nostalgia as defined by Jennifer Robertson (1988) below:

Nostalgia is provoked by a dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of a remembered, or imagined, past plenitude. By the same token, the nostalgic reaction generally is of a distinctly conservative bent, although nostalgia may also fuel a fervor for cultural transformation (Robertson, 1988: 504).

Yet, as an emotional response to modernity, nostalgia works as a mechanism for the critique of modernity and, in this process, it can encourage the construction of alternative visions of the future in which the values of history constitute a model for action in the present (Clammer, 2002: 222; Plaza, 2003: 6). In this sense, as a source of utopian imagination, art (understood here in a broader sense) can function as a way to envision and construct another world (Clammer, 2015: 14-15.). These orientations are visible throughout the potters' accounts, lifestyles and worldviews, but also their artworks. Describing his conceptual sculptures as grounded but rooted in dreams, Douglas Black hinted at the role of hope and creativity in building alternatives for the future in the present in his installation at the Hijisai – Living with the Earth Festival 2018, suitably titled *Remember the Future*:

Our planet is a miracle.

Our hope is a deep source of creativity.

Our gratitude harmonizes.

Our time is now.

(Douglas Black, *Remember the Future*, 2018)

In his study of the relationships between art, homosexuality and Japanophilia, Christopher Reed (2016) sees the act of imagining Japan as a way of articulating dissent from structures of normativity and authoritative “truths” of one’s home culture, thus creating a point of departure for self-invention. By positioning himself in between postcolonial theory informed by the criticism of Orientalism and reductivist views of Japanese culture as static, the author raises questions about the role of art and creativity in the construction of hybrid identities. Thus, as what happened in other moments in history, Western interest in non-Western art reflects a yearning for something beyond the limits of our own society, as explored by anthropologist Paul van der Grijp (2009),

which can be located either in the exotic Other, in an idealized past or in an alternative future:

One answer may be: to look for something we do not find in our own society, either in our daily work and social life or in conventional Western art. The Industrial Revolution has brought employment and welfare to many, along with a strong feeling of alienation – from one's work, social relationships and even from oneself – to many more. I think that it is no accident that, since this revolution, art has become the laboratory par excellence to cope with this alienated feeling in its different manifestations via the search for authenticity either elsewhere, in other cultures (compare the art currents of Orientalism, Japonism, Primitivism), or in the social and professional margins of our own society, in nature, or even in our own subconscious (Surrealism). This search for the authentic, the pure and the natural has been translated into a yearning for the exotic in numerous forms. The central idea being that it is always better elsewhere. The here-and-now often seems to be a dreary valley, while behind the mountains the grass is always greener. However, our Arcadia may not be simply elsewhere, but it may also be located in another time, a Golden Age either in the past or in a projected future (Grijp, 2009: 314)

In this sense, the attraction for the exotic "other" in general, and for the East in particular, relates to a search for radically different life experiences, causing a sense of displacement from which the construction of the self is made. While the construction of the Other is made at the image of ourselves, like a reflection in a mirror, it can also become for a source of inspiration, creative stimulus and self-invention, as John Dawsey puts it:

The mirror of the East becomes a sort of magic mirror. More than his ability to fix identities - including whom it fetches the image of himself as the symmetric inverse figure of the other - it is emphasized their ability to change forms. The mirror of the East also presents itself as a "creative void", where a whirlwind fall apart even the images of Orientalism (Dawsey, 2012: 2, my translation).

Focusing on political philosophy, Kojin Karatani (2016) has defined the role of Japan as a place of utopia through the theoretical implications of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which rejects war as a means to settle international conflicts. By renouncing its sovereignty to put in place a pacifist agenda, Japan can make a universal contribution to the political order thus being an existing utopia (Gabrakova, 2017).

In the field of arts and culture, Japan can function as a place of existing utopia from a Western perspective in three main aspects: it fills the role of the distant and exotic Other, functioning as the opposite image on a mirror that feeds creativity and self-invention; it promotes the idealization of long-lasting histories and traditions, fed by a Western nostalgia for its own lost ones, thus presenting itself as a living past; it projects itself in the future by making use of these histories, representations and discourses for continuous reinvention.

In this sense, the creative re-appropriation of tradition can also democratize it. An interesting example of the democratization and subversion of elitist practices lies in contemporary reinterpretations of Japanese tea ceremony as public art performance at the hands of both Japanese and non-Japanese practitioners (for example, at the hand of artists Erika Kobayashi, Mai Ueda and Adam Wojcinski, the last two as founders of the World Tea Gathering). In particular, as a former practitioner at the Urasenke tea school, Kobayashi's work questions normative conventions of the tea ceremony by incorporating feminist discourses and native Brazilian cultural references. Similarly, contemporary reinventions of the kimono that mix traditional and hybridized forms for the means of creative self-expression also show the role of creativity and imagination in subverting normative ideas of Japaneseness (see Assmann, 2008; Cliffe, 2013; Hall, 2015). This contemporary trend of reappraising tradition at the light of new social, ecological and even feminist movements is visible across the globe (see Price & Hawkins, 2018).

In sum, as Karatani (1998: 153) puts it, "the most typical subversion of colonialism is the aestheticist way of appreciating and respecting the other". In this process, while historically and culturally embedded by the ideology of Orientalism, aesthetic representations of Japanese culture highlight the role of Japan as a discourse or, as argued by Roland Barthes (1983), a system of signs, a "fictive nation," or a "novelistic object" that go beyond reality itself. Furthermore, by acquiring materiality through

bodily practices, the incorporation of historically, politically, socially and culturally marked Eastern ideas and practices into Western context through universalizing projects can be interpreted as an inversion and subversion of the Western ideology of Orientalism (Clarke, 1997; Borup; 2004).

3.10. Conclusion: towards a cosmopolitan view of culture and humanity

Deriving from the Ancient Greek word meaning “citizen of the world”, cosmopolitanism departs from the notion that, independently of nation, class, gender, culture or ethnicity we are all part of the cosmos, thus highlighting a de-territorialized sense of belonging that goes beyond the borders of the nation-state. Differently from its modern conceptions born from European Enlightenment, which ignored difference and diversity, postmodern definitions of cosmopolitanism highlight hybridism and syncretism through the coexistence of multiple perspectives. Understood as a condition of the contemporary world (Beck, 2007), where everything and everyone is increasingly interconnected, postmodern cosmopolitanism acknowledges difference and its compatibility and, in this process, it can bridge the dichotomies between essentialism and universalism, and between Japaneseness and Eurocentrism. Hence, by focusing on interconnectedness rather than conflict, we can find the commonality of human experience expressed in its diverse manifestations.

By moving freely between cultural domains, Japanese ceramics show their cosmopolitan potential for condensing meanings and values that go beyond the concept of nation and national culture and, in this process, they can become transculture. Therefore, by looking past the political and institutional arrangements of Japaneseness and their materializations in cultural practice through the arts, creativity and imagination, the aesthetic and spiritual values tied to the production and consumption of Japanese ceramics show their cosmopolitan and transformative potential. While acknowledging their emic origins, we can bring them to a global conversation by recognizing its etic aspects, thus highlighting the commonality of the human experience.

Hence, seeing human beings in a holistic manner and as part of the cosmos, the potters' negotiations of identities, traditions and histories in between Japan and the West reflect their cosmopolitan orientations, while bringing Japanese emic values into an etic conversation. Their negotiations of Japanese and Western local knowledge reveals hybrid, fluid and dynamic identities with multiple belongings, thus contributing to question the limits of national and cultural identity in the contemporary world.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this doctoral dissertation, I investigated the life-stories, lifestyles, technical processes, artworks and worldviews of Western potters in Japan in their intersections with the wider cultural narratives born from the historical, social and transnational trajectories of Japanese culture. By looking at the corporeal, sensorial, affective and emotional relationships established with Japanese pottery and its concepts, materials and techniques within the fabric of their everyday lives in the country, I explored how images of Japan were embodied, appropriated and negotiated in the potters' discourses and practices.

In the first part of this essay, we saw how Western knowledge on Japan, in its endless dialectic negotiation with Japanese self-representations, has contributed to the creation of an aestheticized image of the country, marked by Western Orientalism and Japanese cultural nationalism. Disseminated in the West in through the transnational trajectories of Zen, the tea ceremony and the folk crafts, representations of Japanese traditional arts and crafts have often focused on ideas of craftsmanship and spirituality. Fueled by nostalgia by their own lost cultural traditions and anxieties about Western modernity, these cultural narratives and imaginaries have attracted Westerners to come to the country in search for something beyond the normative patterns of their societies. Looking East for self-invention, they searched in the Other's difference for creative stimulus and ways to overcome modernity.

In the second part of this study, I presented the life-story trajectories of forty Western potters who had been practicing ceramics in Japan during the period of this research, by employing an in-depth qualitative approach based on ethnographic fieldwork. Focusing on six case studies in the region of Mashiko, a folk pottery center popularized through the transnational connections of the *mingei* movement, I gave voice to the potters' to narrate their personal stories and ceramic making processes, marked by the transnational experience and social, cultural and artistic negotiations.

The analysis of the potters' discourses highlighted the historical, political and institutional trajectories of Japanese ceramics and the spiritual and aesthetic values, meanings and ideals translated as Japanese culture. Yet, by investigating the potters' corporeal, sensorial and creative engagements with Japanese concepts, processes, techniques and materials, hybrid and syncretic identities were also revealed. Their pursuits of alternative, self-fulfilled and sustainable lifestyles through the artistic creation of craft in the countryside uncovered ecological and environmental concerns, translated in a holistic understanding of the relationships between man and nature, highlighting the relationships between materiality and spirituality. By exploring the potters' syncretism and mediation of Japanese and Western cosmologies and worldviews, I exposed their cosmopolitan orientations, rooted in a shared understanding of humanity and its place in the universe.

Drawing on Befu's (1989) emic-etic distinction and following Sugimoto's (2018) proposal of a cosmopolitan methodological approach, I argued that the potters' attraction, appropriation and negotiation of the emic values attached to Japanese ceramics reflects etic aspirations, ideals and needs translated in a search for self-realization, happiness and well-being through a closer relationship with nature and the material reality. Their syncretism of local Japanese and Western knowledge highlights the compatibility of multiple perspectives, thus evidencing their cosmopolitan orientations and hybrid, fluid and dynamic identities characterized by multiple belongings. Furthermore, the articulation of emic concepts in the etic arena has contributed to bringing local knowledge into a global conversation about the role of aesthetics, art (understood here in a broader sense) and imagination in the construction of a more humane and sustainable society.

In this process, I confirmed that the Western potters' attraction and negotiation of ideas of craftsmanship and spirituality in Japanese ceramic reveal anxieties about the present, but also utopian projects for the future and a search for alternatives ways of being in the world. Yearning for something beyond the normative standards of Western society, achieved through the process of displacement and the immersion in the culture of the Other, their trajectories showed the power of art, creativity and imagination in subverting the ideologies of Orientalism and Japanese uniqueness.

In the process of mediating local and global knowledge in the exploration of the potters' personal narratives, material practices, bodily experiences and earthly relationships in their lifeworld in Japan, I aimed at building multicultural concepts and highlight the coexistence of difference while also emphasizing interconnectedness and the commonality of human experience within its diverse manifestations.

Employing a cross-disciplinary social sciences' perspective based on an in-depth qualitative research and an ethnographic approach to the life-story of Western potters in Japan, this study added to discussions that permeate a multiplicity of academic fields, in particular: the lifestyle and cultural motivations present in mobility and migration; the significance of non-Western regimes of knowledge beyond the Western dichotomy of art and craft for social theory and material culture studies; the transnational, transcultural and cosmopolitan aspects of Japanese culture and tradition; hybridism and cultural identity in an interconnected globalized world.

The analysis of the Western potters' transnational trajectories has contributed to shed light on the often overlooked human and subjective aspect of international mobility and migration, particularly in its lifestyle and cultural orientations. Coming to Japan as travelers, exchanges students or specifically to practice ceramics from the mid-1960s until today, they revealed common motivations for migration despite their heterogeneity. Their aspirations for mobility have in common a quest for self-realization and a sense of adventure translated in a quest for alternative experiences through the displacement of the self into the culture of the Other, thus illustrating the role of imagination, myth and cultural narratives in mobility. Furthermore, while some of the subjects have eventually returned to their home countries, the majority has established permanently in Japan, thus blending mobility into migration. In this sense, their personal trajectories can contribute to rethinking cultural policies and migration patterns beyond the dichotomy of low-skilled and high-skilled workers from West to Eastward direction.

The potters' hybrid and syncretic identities were present in their appropriations of Japanese ceramic styles and techniques, as well as the aesthetic and spiritual values tied to them, which are a product of Japanese local native cosmologies and ecological worldviews, reflecting holistic understandings of the relationships between man and nature. Given the fact that the majority of the subjects has established their studios in traditional regions of pottery production in rural areas around Japan, their professional

identities are often tied to their geographical places, while also mixing cultural and artistic references from around the world, thus revealing cosmopolitan orientations.

By working with techniques and concepts identified as “uniquely” Japanese, their embodiment, appropriation and reinterpretation of Japanese tradition reflect their negotiations in between Japaneseness and foreignness, contributing to question the limits of cultural identity and belonging in the contemporary world. Furthermore, by giving continuity to traditional Japanese processes and techniques, Western potters in Japan can contribute to the local development of ceramics and to its transformation into transnational culture.

Drawing on Eastern non-dualistic conceptions of mind-body relationships and holistic conceptions of culture and humanity beyond the Western rationalistic model, postmodern theories of materiality have proved useful in the analysis of the potters’ approach to the process of making ceramics and exploring their corporeal, sensorial, affective and emotional relations to Japanese ceramic, their techniques, processes and materials. By approaching Japanese ceramics as a material cultural product, I aimed at bridging the dichotomies between art and craft that reflect the unequal power relations between Western and non-Western systems of knowledge.

Moreover, I showed how the potters’ criticism of the modern industrial society rooted in their environmentalist thinking, together with their pursuit of sustainable and organic lifestyles in the countryside, inspired by Eastern and Western New Age spirituality, mirrors other contemporary social developments located at the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy. In this sense, the potters’ trajectories hint at new possibilities for the construction of a society based on knowledge and creativity and its impacts on the revitalization of rural areas. By looking at their quest for self-determined and self-sufficient alternative lifestyles, this study contributes to adding to discussions about the role of handmade crafts in the construction of a more for humanizing, self-fulfilling and sustainable alternatives modes of life and work.

Besides their individual pottery work, the subjects have been actively contributing to the revitalization of their communities through the implementation and participation in grassroots projects based on the arts, knowledge and creativity, particularly in Appendix I. In this context, the investigation of the impact of Western potters in their local communities opened up to additional discussions about local citizenship,

democracy, multicultural understandings and their contributions to rural development. Hence, I suggest that the recognition of the role of migrants in their communities of destination can lead to the creation of transnational local communities, an issue which is worthy of further investigation.

By interpreting the life-stories, lifestyles, technical processes, artworks and worldviews of Westerners potters in Japan as a reflection of cosmopolitan aspirations and hybrid identities beyond East and West binaries, this study aimed to establish a global dialogue through the articulation of local knowledge, giving voice to local actors for a the goal of transcultural analysis. This was possible by following Sugimoto's (2018) proposal of methodological cosmopolitanism in the field of Japanese studies, which appears as a solution for the essentialism versus universalism issue through the acknowledge of the coexistence for diversity and the compatibility of multiple perspectives.

Through their bodily experiences in-between two cultures, Western potters show intercultural competencies in negotiating difference and the embodiment of this difference. Their ability to move between multiple identities highlights their hybrid, fluid and dynamic character. In this sense, their identity is both Japanese and Western but also neither one nor the other. It is located in a third space, a liminal territory beyond binaries and the dualism between the Self and the Other.

APPENDIX I

Spicing up a 150-year-old porcelain factory: Art, Localism and Transnationalism in Arita's Happy Lucky Kiln¹

Introduction

Over the past few decades, a growing transnational movement of people, capital, goods and services facilitated by globalization has had a substantial impact on notions of place, identity and community (Delanty, 2003; Favel, 2014). While global interconnectedness has contributed to the dissolution of national borders, it has also affected localities, which are now actively participating in an international exchange of ideas and networks. In recent years, the notion of translocality has taken form within transnationalism scholarship to stress the social production of space and local-local relations beyond the deterritorialized concept of nation (Appadurai, 1996). Seeing space beyond geography and as a social reality, Perth (2014) defines translocality as an open process which produces exchanges and close interrelations between different places and people, creating communities and networks through mobility and migration flows. Negotiating tensions between local and global, in the past few decades, rural communities across the globe have been acknowledging transnational flows as a means to overcome problems created by the centrifugal forces of globalization.

In the following pages, I will examine the impact of globalization, mobility and migration in rural Japan by recognizing the role in of art and culture in local development. In particular, I will investigate the case of Kouraku kiln, a 150-year-old porcelain factory in Arita, Saga Prefecture, a traditional area of pottery production that has been struggling with economic decline, and its non-governmental strategies to overcome it. In 2015, the Kouraku (Happy Lucky in Japanese) kiln factory established an Artist-in-Residence and a Treasure Hunting program, changing the focus from the products to the production site in order to draw visitors to the area. Besides contributing to local development, the presence of international artists and the participation of Brazilian national Sebastião Pimenta as coordinator of both programs have stimulated

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exchanges between the small countryside town of Arita and people and knowledge from across the globe.

This case study brings insights into how local communities may transpose the borders of their geographically defined space through global mobility, cultural exchange and network creation, from a transdisciplinary and transnational perspective. This case study will add to discussions about the revitalization of rural places and the regeneration of Japanese traditional crafts. Participants in Arita acknowledge globalization by addressing issues related to the impact of transnational flows in rural communities, the implications of mobility and international migration in the creation of multicultural exchanges and the relationship between art, society and local development.

Research background

As in many developed countries, rural depopulation has become a pressing issue in Japan. Aging populations, an exodus of youth and a decline in agriculture and manufacturing have had a negative impact on traditional industries, where changes in lifestyle and consumers' tastes, together with lowering prices due to the flow of cheap imports, in addition to low wages and poor working conditions, have led to economic decline (Yonemitsu, 2006: 53-56). While the post-war period has seen the redefinition of rurality as a site of nostalgia and long-lost traditions (Knight, 1993; Ivy, 1995), the last two decades have witnessed the expansion of experimental enterprises in the field of arts and culture as strategies of local development through tourism. By negotiating their identity between ideas rooted in the notion of Japanese uniqueness and global interconnectedness, rural areas have been drawing visitors from all over the world.

Additionally, post-modernization and the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist mode of production have stimulated the rise of a new economy focused on the service and creative sectors. Thus, while the decline in manufacturing has endangered traditional local industries, localities have been shifting their brand from products to production areas, providing on-site opportunities to consume experiences along with goods. Moreover, besides tourism being one of the largest growth sectors of the Japanese economy, the United Nations has also stressed its role in sustainable

development. Similarly, Clammer (2015) has called for a concept of development that goes beyond economic views and recognizes humans as cultural and spiritual beings whose needs include leisure, beauty and creative expression.

In this context, from the 1990s, with the end of the bubble economy and, more recently, the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake, new cultural forms of protest such and the so-called "socially-engaged art" movement have emerged in Japan, reflecting discontent with neoliberalism and globalization (Mōri, 2005). Together with this trend, contemporary art festivals have also been expanding in rural regions throughout the country (Favell, 2015; Borggreen, 2017), exemplifying the role of art in local development. Furthermore, by acknowledging globalization and its transnational flows of goods, people and knowledge within their strategies for rural revitalization, these innovative projects in arts and culture not only attract tourists but also encourage young urbanites and the creative class looking for alternative, sustainable and self-determined lifestyles to migrate to those areas (see Benson & O'Reilly, 2009 and Klien, 2015 for a discussion of lifestyle migration).

Shrinking populations and labor shortages have also raised the questions of immigration and social integration in Japan. According to Befu (2013: 9), while the foreign population in the country saw an increase of just 0.2% between 1960 and 1980, the number rose 300% from 1980 to 2010, hitting a record 2,471,258 in June 2017 (Ministry of Justice, 2017). A majority of foreign nationals come from other Asian countries, mainly China, South Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam, representing almost 83% of all international migrants, followed by South America (10%), Europe (2,9%) and North America (2,8%). While foreign residents still account for less than two percent of the total population of the country, around 15,000 become naturalized Japanese citizens every year (Befu, 2009: 31). However, more than 80% of immigrants live in the three great metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya (Douglass and Roberts, 2003).

Research into immigration flows to Japan is still based on the dichotomy of low-skilled and economic motivated workers from developing countries versus Western expatriates, often portrayed as privileged transnational elites. However, the explosion in international travel resulting from globalization has made it possible for an ambitious or adventurous middle class to pursue career and education opportunities abroad

(Favel, 2014: 131). This type of migration, dominated by lifestyle orientations and cultural motivations, is poorly covered in existing studies, especially migration from West to East. Furthermore, many migrants still struggle to establish permanent residence in the country, due to the limitations of the current visa categories and lack of integration policies (Debnar, 2011; Takahata, 2016; Shinohara 2016).

Accordingly, the recognition of migrants as transnational agents of social and cultural capital and thus active contributors to the creation and maintenance of a variety of institutions in their receiving societies has been raised by Shipper (2008). Similarly, Tsuda (2006) has approached the question of immigration through the lens of local citizenship, arguing that the recognition of migrants as participative members of society might contribute to strengthening democracy in the places where they arrive. Furthermore, contemporary global society has taken notions of citizenship and identity beyond the nation-state and blurred the borders between global mobility and international migration (Favell, 2014). Travelers, students and transnational elites seem particularly privileged in the creation of such connections between localities. In this context, the implementation and participation in community-based art projects by non-Japanese nationals can add to the expansion of creative clusters in rural areas, therefore showing how foreign migrants can act as agents for social change in their communities of destination (Burgess, 2004; Sugimoto, 2012).

This case-study is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out at the Kouraku kiln factory in October 2016 and April-May 2017 through qualitative research based on participant observation and semi-directive interviews. Besides the individual production of ceramics, some Western potters in Japan have been responsible for the implementation of grassroots projects focusing on international artistic and cultural exchanges and rural revitalization, as is the case of Brazilian Sebastião Pimenta, coordinator of the Artist-in-Residence program at the Kouraku kiln factory.

I first learned about Pimenta and his activities at Kouraku kiln from the blog *Spoon & Tamago*, which will be discussed later on. As a Portuguese national who has lived in Brazil for almost a decade researching Japanese-Brazilian potters, I had the advantage of interviewing Pimenta in Portuguese and better understand the socio-cultural context of his interest and motivations to come to Japan. Besides Pimenta, I interviewed factory

director Takanobu Tokunaga and four factory workers in Japanese, as well as artist in residence Shirley Bhatnagar from India in English.

Data collection was made through voice recordings, ethnographic notes and photographs, but also included informal talks with other artists, tourists and local residents. I stayed at Kouraku kiln's Airbnb accommodation and attended the Arita Pottery Fair in spring 2017. Furthermore, contact with Pimenta and follow-up communications regarding projects taking place at the Kouraku kiln factory continued online through social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Short quotes from the interviews are included in the text in quotation marks, while quotes longer than three lines are presented in a separate paragraph as a block quote, following the MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines. All the original accounts in Portuguese and Japanese are translated to English.

Arita

Arita town is located in Saga Prefecture, on the island of Kyushu in southern Japan, about 80 kilometers from its largest city Fukuoka. Its population consists of 20,734 inhabitants and 7,751 households as of October 2016, nine percent less than in 2006, when the city merged with the neighboring Nishi-Arita forming a new municipality (Arita Town Statistics, 2016). In 2016, roughly thirty-two percent of the population was over sixty-five years old, with only fourteen percent being under fifteen. Around two-thirds of Arita's 65.85 square kilometer territory is comprised of mountains and forests, with the rest being mainly rice paddies and small pottery kilns. Most of Arita's economy is dependent on the agricultural sector and the ceramics industry. Being one of the most famous ceramics centers in Japan, the largest in terms of handmade production, its identity is heavily centered on this industry.

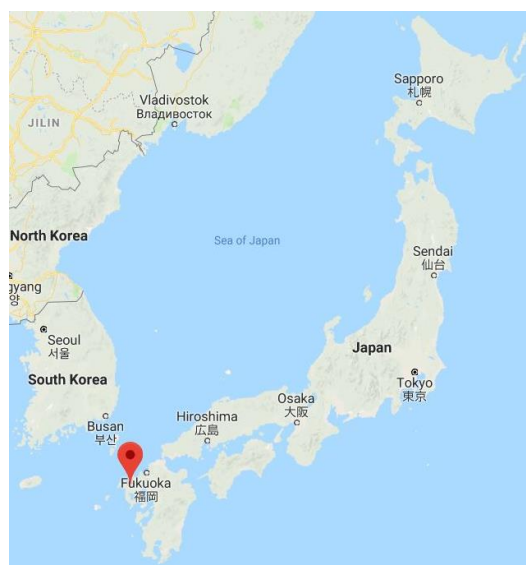


Figure 1. Location of Arita in Japan.
Source: Google Maps



Figure 2. The traditional landscape of Arita: mountains and rice fields. Photo by the author.

The small mountain town hosts around 150 ceramics businesses today, mostly small-scale family-owned businesses but also including highly mechanized factories, traditional handicraft workshops and individual artists' studios. The city is easily accessible by train and hosts an annual Ceramics Fair during the nation's Golden Week holidays, which has brought more than 700 thousand visitors to the town every year since the 1990s. The fair brought in 1.2 million visitors in 2016, representing about half of all annual tourists (a total of 2.5 million in 2015) in one week, but figures have slowly been decreasing since 2013. Other minor events recently created in an attempt to attract tourists outside of this primary event are the Fall Ceramics Festival and the Ceramic Doll Festival taking place in early spring. These have drawn 162,000 and 45,000 attendants respectively in 2015, a growth of 180 and 150 percent from five years ago (Arita Town Statistics, 2016).

The development of pottery in Japan is heavily marked by transnational trajectories, starting with the introduction of high-temperature wood-firing kilns and the potters' wheel from China via Korea in the fifth century. Arita's porcelain history began with such transnational exchange. In the seventeenth century, feudal lord Toyotomi Hideyoshi's military campaigns in the Korean peninsula (1592-98) brought Korean potters to Japan, most of whom established at its southern island of Kyushu. According to the tradition, one such potter, Yi Sam-pyeong, found kaolin stone suitable for porcelain making in the area known as Izumiyama quarry in Arita in 1616, giving birth to the first porcelain wares produced in the Japanese archipelago.

During the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), porcelain production in the region was carried out under the strict management of the Saga domain within the old Hizen province, dominated by the Nabeshima clan² and inspired by Chinese underglaze blue porcelain. In the mid-seventeenth century, with the decline of Chinese exports, Arita ware was exported to Europe by the Dutch East India Company from the port of Imari downstream of the Arita River, becoming known as Imari ware.



Figure 3. Underglazed blue Arita plate with the monogram of the Dutch East India Company, circa 1660. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art website

The end of the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), saw a significant increase in sales of Japanese ceramics, and gradually Japanese and European designs were introduced. Arita style fascinated European royalty and aristocracy in what has been described as “porcelain sickness” (Jorg, 2016), but with the discovery of porcelain production process in Europe in the eighteenth-century imitations of Japanese-style porcelain appeared in large scale.

With the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and the opening of the country, Arita ware started being shown at the Universal Expositions, where it received much praise, becoming a symbol of the high quality of Japanese crafts. From 1887 to 1912 there was an increase in exports to Europe and the United States, but with the decline of the fad of *Japonisme*, Arita ware exports faded and its production started to refocus on the domestic market. From the beginning of the twentieth century, a growing number of factories introduced Western technology and the application of scientific knowledge to craft production brought significant changes to traditional industries.

From the Taisho era (1912-1926), Japan saw the rise of artist-craftsmen who stressed the importance of creative expression. Individual artists started setting up their studios side by side with traditional kilns and mass-producing factories. At the beginning of the Showa era (1926-1989), Japan's economic depression was accompanied by a drop in the price of ceramics, and the competitiveness of other industrial centers caused a

² High-quality porcelain produced for the personal use and profit of the Nabeshima clan in Okawachi, today Imari town near Arita, became known as Nabeshima ware.

decline in Arita's production leading to unemployment. During the war period, with government command of the economy, many kilns were forced to switch to military factories, and the distribution prices of ceramics were strictly regulated.

After the war, the demand for ceramics and other everyday goods intensified all over Japan, and Arita experienced a rapid increase in porcelain production volume and sales during the so-called "economic miracle" of the 1960s and 1970s, which encouraged further technological developments in order to answer to growing demand (Tolliday and Yonemitsu, 2007). Nonetheless, the Japanese folk crafts movement that sought the appreciation and revival of traditional handicrafts induced a folk crafts boom in the 1960s and 1970s. This helped to contain the pursuit of mass-production and standardization, encouraging the urban middle-class to travel to the countryside.

Lost Decade in Arita

Arita town and its ceramic products benefited from the rapid postwar economic growth through the 1980s, which saw the rise of domestic tourism as a form of recreation of a rurally nostalgic urban middle-class. However, the 1990s opened with a severe recession when the asset bubble burst, followed by the so-called "lost decade", which has affected almost all industrial districts in Japan. Total sales of ceramic related items decreased rapidly, from 27 billion JPY in 1994 to 5.9 billion JPY in 2014, with the number of shops reducing by half and the number of workers almost one third (Arita Town Statistics, 2016). Two decades later, the city still struggles with the consequences of the economic collapse that caused many businesses to go bankrupt and subsequent economic stagnation. Arita faces the same problems as many rural areas throughout the country. Asked about the difficulties in Arita town, Yoshiko Nagata and Hidemi Ikeda, two sixty-year-old workers at Kouraku kiln factory, replied:



Figure 4. Unsold porcelain ware, Kouraku kiln factory.
Photo by the author

Young people don't want to work with pottery anymore, the salaries are low and the work is "dirty" (...). We just need to look at the Ceramic Festival to realize the decline of Arita ware. When we were young, it was full of people, from Kami-Arita to Arita station there was almost no space to walk. Now makers have decreased, but buyers have dropped even more. One-third of the stores have closed. Before all the stores became pottery shops, there were fish shops, meat shops, but now the pottery shops are closing too (...). People buy far fewer pots nowadays. The food culture has changed from using many small dishes to just a big one. People don't eat at home anymore; they don't cook anymore. They buy their meals at the convenience store and eat in those plastic containers. Even if makers try hard to make cute and cheap pottery, it doesn't sell. Families are smaller too... The number of ryokans [traditional Japanese inns] and hotels, in general, has also decreased and they now have buffet style food with Western-style ware (May 1st, 2017, translated from Japanese by the author).

All of these circumstances prompted the decrease of Arita's porcelain industry by four-fifths between 1994 and 2014, making it a "ghost town" that survived primarily on ceramics tourism. Since Arita has long been without a hotel, the most common pattern of visit has involved arriving for the day to sightsee, buy pottery at one of the shops near the station and return home on a late-afternoon train or spend the night in a neighboring city. Before 2010, the town hardly received any tourists outside of the annual Ceramics Fair, and therefore investment in tourism-related facilities such as guesthouses, cafes and restaurants might have seemed unlikely to produce profit.

Nevertheless, in the last couple of years, the situation has been alleviated due to innovative activities put in place by the local community and its residents, including partnerships between local potteries and Tokyo corporations, especially within the food industry and the production of new luxury goods (Yamamoto: 2016). The 400th anniversary of Arita porcelain in 2016 has also brought some economic and cultural stimulus to the region through the development of a total of seventeen projects under the *Arita Episode 2 initiative* by Saga prefecture. These include a collaboration between Arita's manufactures and international designers with the support of the Dutch embassy

named *2016/project*. The collection was launched in 2016 and won the Cool Japan semi-Grand Prix in 2017.

Many of these enterprises focus on the rebranding, selling and marketing of products by capitalizing on Arita's history and identity. Some of those projects have received support of the national government via the "Cool Japan Initiative", which relies on images of cultural authenticity, "Japaneseness" and what Koichi Iwabuchi (2015) calls "brand nationalism" in order to overcome Japan's economic recession by increasing the overseas demand for Japanese cultural products (Burgess, 2015). Still, the policy generally overlooks problems relating to its beneficiaries "and whose culture, interest and voice are attended too" (Iwabuchi, 2015: 30).

Similarly, young Japanese artists and designers have been negotiating ideas of Japaneseness with the goal of global appeal (Fujita, 2011). This reveals how Japanese arts, design and associated ideas of beauty and craftsmanship are still deeply intertwined with what the state wants to convey as Japanese culture, cultural values, tradition and identity in the international stage.

Overcoming the crisis through tourism

Other problems facing traditional industries include lack of publicity and poor communication between producers and consumers (Yonemitsu, 2006). As the ceramics market is traditionally dominated by wholesalers, Arita ware often passes through a retail system and, thus, consumers rarely have the chance to buy directly from the producer, except during the Ceramic Fair. Furthermore, by being sold at department stores all over the country, there was no need for consumers to visit Arita to encounter its ceramic products. Local actors needed to find new ways to draw consumers to the town by redirecting the image of Arita from products to the production site (Reihner, 2010).

For Arita, then, the growth of the tourist business has provided an opportunity to attract consumers directly to production sites by selling "authentic" local experiences. An example of this strategy can be seen in the growing number of workshops and factories opening for public visits and hands-on learning opportunities. Since 2015, Arita

has invested in the development of tourism through community planning, which has been appearing in rural areas around Japan as a reaction to social and economic decline. Usually characterized by decentralization of the planning process, increased public participation, bottom-up approaches and cooperation between local residents and local governments, community planning attempts to maintain productive activity and employment in their communities (Rausch, 2005; Reiher, 2010).

The Arita Town Development Public Corporation (*Arita Machizukuri Kousha*) is a non-profit organization created in April 2015 by the initiative of Ryoji Takada, former Executive director of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Arita. In an interview published by *Dig Japan* with Mr. Fujiyama, a member of this organization, the strategy of redirecting the image of Arita from the products to the place is evident:

Actually, Arita town is not just about Arita ware. In addition to rich agricultural resources such as cumquats with sweet fruits, rice grown in terrace paddy fields and *sake* made with famous natural water, beef, pork and chicken, there are also the Toroto hot springs, a sea of clouds that reminds viewers of the movie “Laputa: Castle in the Sky”, the beautiful and mystical Arita dam and town streets with rows of traditional architecture (*DigJapan*, 2016, translated from Japanese).

Besides drawing on supposedly unique features of the region in order to create local distinctiveness, place-making strategies have also been taking advantage of globalization and engaging in transnational networks by transcending their geographically-defined spaces and connecting with people and knowledge from all over the globe. In this process, local communities can become transnational. The case presented here is an example of how contemporary art developments and transnational flows are being appropriated within the place-making strategy in one of Arita’s century-old porcelain factories Kouraku kiln.

Kouraku Kiln Porcelain Factory

According to the Kouraku kiln website, the history of Kouraku kiln factory dates back to 1865 when Kosuke Tokunaga first built a wood-fired climbing kiln in the area of Yoshimiyama, where he started his production with a group of around twenty people. From 1915 onwards, Kouraku kiln specialized in the making of *hibachi* braziers, and it was only in 1941 that domestic tableware production was initiated with the third generation Tetsuo Tokunaga after replacing the climbing kiln



Figure 5. Climbing kiln used from 1865 to the 1880s in Kouraku kiln.

Source: Kouraku kiln.

with a single-chamber one in 1930. During the Second World War, Kouraku kiln manufactured military dishes with around thirty employees as an Army Designed Factory, and after the war, it turned to tableware, the main factory's product until this day.

In 1961, heavy oil was introduced as a replacement for coal, and in 1962, the factory headquarters were transferred to its current location in the Maruo area. The original building dating from the Meiji period (1868-1912) was reformed and reused as the factory's production area where a heavy oil tunnel kiln of fifty meters was built. In the following year, Kouraku kiln was officially founded as a corporation under the name of Tokunaga Ceramics Co., Ltd. and a gas-fired tunnel kiln was built in 1970. During this time, Kouraku had its highest number of workers, totaling 220 people, according to the current director. This coincided with the so-called "economic miracle" when the region experienced tremendous growth.

In 1984, Takeshi Tokunaga assumed the position as the fourth generation president. After the bubble burst and with the number of workers reduced to 35, a gas-fueled single type kiln was introduced, consisting of the main factory's kiln today. In 2010, Kouraku entered in its fifth generation at the hands of director Takanobu Tokunaga, who joined the company in 1995 after graduating from the Kyoto Art University.

Since the last decade of the twentieth century, the Kouraku kiln has struggled with the post-bubble recession, which halved the number of factory workers, from 75 people in 1987 to 35 by the early 1990s, and reduced sales by one-third. The factory is comprised of many abandoned buildings, some of which used to function as the workers' residences, now filled up with boxes of unsold porcelain ware, unpaid orders from hotels and restaurants that went bankrupt and even personal belongings left behind by the workers. Work dynamics at the factory have changed accordingly, with the majority of the 15 workers participating in all the stages of production from casting to glazing, painting and firing, as specified by Tokunaga.

Because of the reduced number of workers and the change from the highly-mechanized tunnel kiln to a single type kiln in 1993, workers who usually operated in a specific section of the production started being allocated to other sections. This allowed them to acquire knowledge of the whole process by focusing on different tasks at different stages and not just a repetitive one. Hence, before the recession, one person was responsible for only one small part of the making process, but the reduction of the number of workers required them to become multi-skilled. This reality contrasts with the strict division of labor implemented in most of Arita's manufactures since the seventeenth



Figure 6. Kouraku workers unloading the gas single-chamber kiln. Photo by the author.



Figure 7. Kouraku kiln worker hand painting porcelain. Photo by the author.

century and which divided the production into at least nineteen separate processes (Morris-Suzuki, 1994: 31). Furthermore, while most of the shapes are formed by using plaster casts, the glazing, painting and all the stages in between are still performed by the workers by hand. Because of this, Shirley Bhatnagar, a designer from India and artist-in-residence in 2016, described the Kouraku kiln factory as a place “stuck in time

between the Industrial Revolution and now, where there is still the trace of ancient craftsmanship” (October 10th, 2016).

Bhatnagar also stated that Kouraku’s workers have vast know-how and hence could be artists and designers themselves. The concept of *know-how* points to the notion of *tacit knowledge* which, as opposed to explicit knowledge, cannot be transmitted through verbal communication. Rather, it is acquired through observation, imitation, repetition and interaction with others. The concept is often present in apprenticeship-like systems, contributing to the creation of “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1990). In this sense, the economic recession has brought the recovery of the values of craftsmanship to Kouraku kiln, blurring the lines between industry and craft. By being involved in all stages of the production and working by hand instead of heavy machinery, the dynamics of Kouraku kiln factory workers highlight the relationship between labor and community, providing a sense of pride and dignity for one’s work.

The reduced workforce and decreased sales created the need for the current director to reinvigorate the kiln site by engaging in a number of different programs. Aiming to project the image of Kouraku kiln nationally and internationally, the company has established partnerships with domestic and international companies, such as Isetan Cosmetics, Nestlé Japan and Suntory (Kouraku kiln factory website). But thirty percent of the factory’s revenue since 2016 has come from outside manufacturing, which had been its sole focus for 150 years. This new income is derived from two service-related initiatives: a Treasure Hunt that provides visitors with an almost “archaeological” experience while also contributing to the sale of product surplus on-site, and an Artist-in-Residence program that offers space, materials and equipment to artists wanting to develop their work at the factory grounds.

The idea of creating an Artist-in-Residence appeared to director Takanobu Tokunaga after the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami displaced a community of potters from the traditional production area of Soma pottery in Fukushima prefecture, to whom he offered his factory as a place to develop their work. This initiative created a space of exchange between people with different backgrounds and knowledge of ceramics, which Tokunaga saw as an opportunity to spice up his company’s business. The choice of a non-Japanese national to run the Artist-in-Residence project arose through the suggestion of artist Shin Koyama, who had also been using Kouraku’s

headquarters to produce his artwork. Koyama had met Sebastião Pimenta at the Sanbao Ceramic Art Institute in the famous Chinese porcelain town of Jingdezhen, where Pimenta was working as studio director of their Artist-in-Residence project in 2011.

Born in Minas Gerais, Brazil, in 1964, Pimenta first came to Japan in 1991 through a scholarship offered by the Japanese government to study at Miyagi University. Having studied *sumie*³ since the age of sixteen, he returned to Japan multiple times between 1993 and 1998 to develop his technique at Sendai Arts Museum, during which time he made contact with local potters and started learning ceramics. In 1998, Pimenta returned to Brazil and opened his pottery studio. In 2007, he worked to the Sanbao Ceramic Art Institute as an artist-in-residence and was then invited to return as studio coordinator in 2011, when he met artist Shin Koyama.

In 2013, Pimenta was invited by Tokunaga and Koyama to coordinate the Artist-in-Residence program as a part of a bigger project involving prefectural funds with the support of the local government to commemorate the 400th anniversary of porcelain production in Arita. He first came to visit the town for three months in 2013, then returned to Brazil to obtain a visa. Besides several complications concerning his work visa application, early 2014 brought a new mayor to Arita and the government support was canceled for the Kouraku kiln project, delaying his arrival. He finally came to Japan in January 2015 to coordinate the residence via private sponsorship of the factory.

Kouraku kiln's Artist in Residence program informally started in July 2013, receiving six people in its first year, mostly through the direct invitation from the factory and word of mouth. However, in the last two years, the program has received around forty resident artists, potters and designers from more than fifteen countries, who have stayed at Kouraku between a minimum of two weeks and a maximum of three months. Through a fee of 250,000 Japanese yen per month, the artists are provided with materials, tools and equipment to develop their artistic or small-scale utilitarian work at the factory headquarters under Pimenta's orientation. Artists are also offered accommodation at a nearby building that used to function as the factory workers residence. Renewed and transformed into an *Airbnb*, the guesthouse also accepts tourists, becoming one of the few lodging facilities available in Arita after its last hotel

³ Meaning "black ink", the Japanese word *sumie* refers to a painting technique of Chinese origin, best known for its use in calligraphy.

closed in 2006. Thus, realizing the existence of demand, several other tourist lodgings have recently opened in the city.

Besides advertising the Artist-in-Residence program as a learning opportunity for artists, Kouraku kiln's website also promotes it as a cultural experience: "the studio and the residence are surrounded by mountains, farmland and natural forest. The region around Arita is famous for pure mountain water, green tea and fresh local produce, including fish, rice, Saga beef and sake". Likewise, Pimenta is introduced as the studio director "fluent in Japanese, English, Spanish and Portuguese" with "a wide knowledge of Asian ceramics and porcelain". In fact, he has become the face of Kouraku kiln, with flyers for the Treasure Hunting project featuring a caricature of him. Domestic tourists who come to the site without prior research are often surprised by the presence of a non-Japanese national with extensive knowledge of Japanese ceramics culture in the small countryside town. In this way, Pimenta himself become one of the Kouraku kiln's attractions.

The Treasure Hunting program was created to bring in financial resources to invest in the residence program while clearing up abandoned factory space for a future artist's studio. It started off as Pimenta's idea when he saw the warehouse filled with boxes containing hundreds of thousands of unfinished and discontinued factory pieces from the Showa era (1926-1989). As the name suggests, the project allows visitors to search in the surplus hundred thousand unsold items of porcelain within the factory's warehouse for 90 minutes, filling up a basket for the price of 5,000 or 10,000 yen. After the launch in April 2015, the project was not well publicized initially and thus didn't get much attention, receiving an average of only five participants per month. However, everything changed in March 2016, after the activity was featured in *Spoon & Tamago*, an English-language blog about Japanese culture directed towards tourists and expats, as Pimenta accounts below:

We didn't know how to advertise it. The game changer was when the blog *Spoon & Tamago* made a post on March 29th, 2016. Two days later we received around 50 people, and that lasted for about four months. There was even a day when we received 100 people! The sales were a success. In the beginning, the main audience was comprised of 90% Europeans and Americans because of the English

language audience of the blog. Today about 80% of foreign visitors are Korean and Chinese, and only 20% are Japanese. Europeans and other non-Asians are rare nowadays (Sebastião Pimenta, May 1st, 2017, translated from Portuguese by the author).

After the blog post by *Spoon & Tamago* went viral, receiving over twenty thousand shares within 24 hours, the number of visitors to the factory blew up almost immediately. Pimenta also noticed how groups of people from the same nationality would suddenly start joining in Treasure Hunts, propelled by the free publicity given by travel bloggers and websites from their countries, then stop just as suddenly. This shows how adaptations to globalization that take advantage of the internet and social media might benefit small-scale enterprises like the Kouraku kiln that have struggled with a lack of publicity. Yet, such strategies also raise issues about the volatility of these spaces.

The mobilization of social media networks in place-making strategies also highlights the role of virtual communication in strengthening localities through its deterritorialization by connecting people beyond time and place boundaries. In this sense, the internet and social media have been vital for the implementation of Kouraku kiln factory's service initiatives. Besides advertising their programs on their website, Kouraku is also present on Facebook, Instagram and Airbnb, allowing it to engage with transnational exchanges of people, knowledge and ideas. Pimenta's highlights the role of social media in the expansion of Kouraku's programs beyond formal channels of communication:

We started receiving phone calls from travel agencies in Japan, one that specializes in Korean tourists and then, three or four months ago, buses full of Korean tourists started coming through. People from Singapore also came in December 2016. Taiwanese started coming two or three weeks ago. One month ago, we received a bus only with Hawaiian tourists. I think it's because of social media. If you search "Treasure Hunting Arita" on Google, blogs and websites written in English, Chinese, Korean and even Turkish will come out (Sebastião Pimenta, April 2017).

Thus, while before 2013 Kouraku's focus was solely on production, the implementation of the Artist-in-Residence program and the Treasure Hunt started attracting visitors directly to the production site not only to consume but also to learn and experience. Besides the Treasure Hunt, factory tours are sometimes offered by Pimenta himself, as well as hands-on pottery activities and workshops.



Figure 8. Treasure Hunting warehouse.
Photo by the author.



Figure 9. Pimenta and artist-in-residence Shirley Bhatnagar. Photo by the author.

Creating Happy Lucky Place to Visit and Work

Community relationships within Arita, similarly to other rural regions, are often dominated by the insiders versus outsiders' binary, with the former being defined by features such as ancestorship, ownership, presence, acknowledgment and commitment to the community (Holthus & Manzenreiter, 2017). In this context, newcomers (both from urban areas and international travelers) are often regarded as a threat to the *status quo*, thus inhibiting innovation and change.

Yet, as a cosmopolitan creative, Pimenta has been generating new ideas within and without the factory, by participating in community gatherings and playing an active role within the community building association. His position as a transnational migrant has contributed to the development of an atmosphere of diversity in Arita town, where other foreign residents and Japanese nationals coming from large urban centers have also started to set up businesses focused on tourism and other services.

While the presence of an outsider with an active voice inside the small community has led to conflicts within the more traditional and hierarchical circles, Pimenta has become a reference figure in the small town and many don't want him to leave. He

jokingly says: “I’m the most famous Brazilian in Arita”. For some, he has even become a synonym of the Kouraku kiln factory.

Indeed, as previously mentioned, Pimenta has himself become one of Kouraku kiln’s attractions. Drawing on Creighton’s (1997) investigation of the images surrounding foreigners in Japan through the concept of *misemono* (‘things to look at’), Pimenta’s Japanese language abilities and his knowledge of Japanese traditional culture and ceramics are presented as something surprising and admirable for being an exception to the rule of “otherness”. When asked about the impact of his presence in the factory, most of the Kouraku kiln workers replied that the environment has become lighter and fun. One of the workers said:

I don't think of him as a foreigner, he always speaks in Japanese and all... I think it's okay if young people want to leave Arita or don't want to work in ceramics. People come from here and there in Japan and also from abroad to work in Arita, so I think it's not a big problem. I think it is okay for people who want to do it to do it (Nanoka-san, May 1st, 2017, translated from Japanese by the author).

Kouraku’s director, Takanobu Tokunaga, also stresses the need to accept international migrants as active members of their communities of reception by filling the space left by the aging population.

Japan is struggling with population decline, and thus there are fewer people to produce things. People in younger generations, as well as foreigners, should be included to fill the vacuum (...). The passing down of knowledge doesn't have to be limited to younger generations; it can be extended to foreigners. If they are a part of this project, it will have a greater impact (May 2nd, 2017, translated from Japanese).

In fact, recent studies have proposed how migrants can contribute to the repopulation and revitalization of rural areas not only by filling labor shortages but also by creating new opportunities for economic growth, exchange of expertise and cultural change (European Network for Rural Development, 2016). Moreover, cosmopolitans

and creatives can draw on local traditions and identities as opportunities for innovation and development as shown in the case of Kouraku kiln.

The recognition of foreign nationals as possible bearers of Japanese cultural traditions and participative members of their communities can bring diversity and innovation to rural areas, contributing to the development of multicultural and transnational localities. It also contributes to social integration by allowing migrants to have an active and productive role in their receiving societies. Yet, Pimenta still feels the strains of his position both in the factory and within Arita's social structures: "Being a Brazilian, I think I could do much more in Brazil, but in Japan I don't have the autonomy, the authority or freedom to do things here as I wish, since I'm constantly bumping into the hierarchy" (May 1st, 2017). In this sense, knowledge of Japanese language and culture might also fill the role of "cultural capital" that facilitates his integration into Japanese society, by giving legitimacy and social status. And while Kouraku kiln director took an economic risk, challenging the conventions by inviting a foreign national as implementer and coordinator of his Artist-in-Residence program, many of Arita's traditional associations, which are still based on long-established hierarchies and a politics of seniority, have not always been as open and accepting of Pimenta's influence in the community as Tokunaga.

In this sense, for many, active participation of foreign nationals in their communities of destination is only desirable as long as it contributes to the goals of economic growth and fulfilling labor shortages but becomes unwelcome when it involves changes to the *status quo*. This reflects the utilitarian roles which migrants are often given by the Japanese government. The situation is also visible in the government's frequent refusal to recognize basic civil and political rights for non-Japanese nationals (Morita, 2015), thus showing how the ideology of homogeneity still predominates in Japanese society.

Yamamoto (2016: 98) has also pointed out the lack of solidarity and the antagonisms between the more traditional associations in Arita. Many tensions arise from the fact that Arita is still monopolized by old pottery families, famous big factories and powerful associations. These reflect the rigidities within the government's promotion of traditional groups and techniques, which often overlook the diversity of contemporary Japanese people and its artistic expressions. By focusing on the concept

of “Japaneseness” and its claims of cultural uniqueness and authenticity, the heterogeneous and hybrid character of culture is often ignored.

Likewise, the privileged and powerful traditional groups are the ones often receiving governmental support, even though they are larger than almost all the other ceramic producers in Arita. For Kouraku’s director, trying to get his projects approval and support within Arita’s associations has proved fruitless so far. He criticized the difficulty of new or smaller associations and businesses to get the support of such governmental cultural policies such as the Cool Japan Project due to their top-down approaches based on the national-prefectural-local government chain, which more often than not diverts funds to existing powerful and influential associations (May 1st, 2017).

In this sense, bottom-up approaches to rural revitalization can contribute to strengthening local citizenship and democracy by involving the cooperation of local residents and local government, generating opportunities for social exchange, community engagement, solidarity and network creation. However, local actors and dynamics must be considered and included when developing integration policies by the government.

The case of Kouraku kiln factory shows how, by shifting the focus from production to creativity, traditional manufacturers are able to exploit their industries not just by selling products but also knowledge and skill, generating tangible and intangible values, as expressed in Pimenta’s quote below:

Arita city is broke. It’s not able to survive only from ceramics anymore. But it still has factories with equipment, materials and a skilled workforce; it has a history. Arita may not be a city that sells pottery, which sells a product, but it can sell technique, know-how. People are coming here, using the city’s facilities, material infrastructures and human resources. We are fifteen people that can teach ceramics. The workers at Kouraku kiln are not just uneducated people; they can do ceramics, they can discuss ceramics, they can be designers, they have know-how (October 10th, 2016).

By contributing to economic and socio-cultural regional development, such initiatives can draw tourists and creatives from urban to rural regions, function as

revitalization strategies, besides contributing to promote multicultural understanding by involving socio-cultural exchanges between local residents and international artists.

In fact, community art projects that acknowledge globalization have been growing in Japan in the last few decades, and while most of them are in small-scale and independent, some have been receiving much publicity and governmental support, the most famous being the Echigo-Tsumari and Setouchi art triennials, implemented in 2000 and 2010 respectively. According to Favell (2015), this movement was triggered by non-profit social responses to ineffective governmental support after the Kobe earthquake of 1995 and, more recently, the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami, as well as socially-engaged art projects during the period of the economic bubble.

This trend includes the appropriation of abandoned factory buildings for a variety of art, cultural and educational projects, which has been happening in urban areas in developed countries in transition from an industrial to a post-industrial mode of society. Less conspicuously, the transformation of abandoned rural spaces into sites of cultural and artistic endeavors has also been on the rise. However, while a few artist-in-residence projects can be found in traditional craft production areas (one of the most famous being the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park), the Kouraku kiln Artist-in-Residence program located inside an active factory space is unique. For ceramic artist Shirley Bhatnagar, that was the appeal for her to join the program:

When you go to a residence, you usually go to an art center, where there are just mostly other artists (...). But because this is a factory, somehow it is different from an art center, which is very special. In most art residencies, you are just given an empty room and tools, and you work with what you already know. In a factory you have to work with what you have, whatever they are using in the factory. The kind of processes I have access to in a factory, I don't have in an art residence. I don't know any factories that give art residencies (October 10th, 2016).

One of the characteristics of Kouraku's program is daily direct contact between the international resident artists and the factory workers and their working processes. While most artist-in-residence programs include exchanges between the artists and the local community, those are limited and often formally arranged. In contrast, at the

Kouraku kiln, artists-in-residence and factory workers interact on a daily basis spontaneously and informally, even though they do not speak a common language. According to Pimenta, the possibility of establishing this kind of relationship has been one of the most praised features of the program. Furthermore, this type of artistic and cultural exchange also aims to function as a business opportunity for Kouraku kiln and a place-making marketing strategy for Arita, as director Tokunaga explains below:

The Artist-in-Residence is a *cross-bound* experience where people who come and stay are exposed to the products, and when they go back to their countries, they will be like ambassadors or sales representatives of Arita ware. Having them sell the concept abroad is a much more effective way of advertising Arita ware because it's more trustworthy and persuasive (May 1st, 2017, translated from Japanese).

Discussion: Spicing up an Old Town and Art Tradition

Place-making strategies often involve the reconstruction of locality through identity play and difference creation at a symbolic level and infrastructure development at a material level. In this sense, the initiatives at Kouraku kiln factory are an example of how these strategies make use of local history, culture and natural resources to address the issues facing many countryside areas around the country by redirecting their identity from the products to the production site. By acknowledging globalization and contemporary social developments, this strategies of rural revitalization aim to attract visitors from the outside but also appeal to local residents by reframing supposedly “unique” features of the region within the context of the nation (Knight, 1993; Appadurai, 1996; Long, 2012). During this process, however, global and hybrid features might be easily forgotten in the name of cultural nationalism and essentialism. Exploring the traits which are lacking in other areas to construct local difference often involves “inventing traditions” that take advantage of a sentiment of nostalgia for a “lost past”, a strategy that has long attracted an urban middle-class to rural areas to take part in “authentic” local experiences unavailable in the city.

Furthermore, Stolarick *et al.* (2010) observed the limitations of strategies involving achieving economic development through tourism. The authors argue that “most tourism-based jobs (many in accommodations and food service) are low paying and seasonal, do not offer equivalent employment to lost manufacturing and agricultural jobs and increase inequality across the region” (*ibid.*: 250). This reality was evident in Arita, where the city’s main event, the Spring Pottery Fair, has attracted thousands of people to the region for just a few days while it remains deserted for the rest of the year, a reality that still resonates with many other Japanese traditional craft production areas. In this sense, initiatives such as those of Kouraku kiln can contribute to drawing tourists and visitors to the countryside town all year round.

Other rural areas around Japan have been drawing on their own historical and cultural resources in order to bring international visitors to their sites, contributing to local development. While many traditional pottery regions have drawn mostly seasonal domestic tourists by organizing annual craft fairs, the grass-roots implementation of Artist-in-Residence programs and International Art Festivals as a strategy of rural revitalization by acknowledging globalization and the role of the arts and crafts in development has been a growing trend. Some examples include the Sasama International Ceramic Art Festival (Shizuoka), created in 2011 by Japanese potter Shoko Michikawa, and the Shiro Oni Studio Residency in Fujioka (Gunma), created and coordinated by American artist Kjell Hahn in 2013. Abroad, the mobilization of traditional crafts for the goal of rural development by connecting art, tourism and the selling of practical knowledge and “authentic” experiences include the Cerdeira Arts and Crafts Village in Portugal, created in 2012 after the area became depopulated in 1980.

Inbound programs for international artists, students and visitors have also contributed to attracting cultural creatives to the countryside, creating cosmopolitan and transnational rural localities. The last decades have also witnessed a growing movement of young urbanites moving to rural areas in search of self-realization and self-determined lifestyles, as investigated by Klien (2016b). Similarly, international artists have also been coming to Japan since the 1960s to learn traditional crafts. Some of them ended up establishing themselves in countryside regions of traditional craft production (Morais, 2018). Their concerns about self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment have motivated

the establishment of alternative lifestyles that depart from the classic economic and materialist model and involve the participation in the small-scale local-level activities.

In this sense, cosmopolitans and creatives, including culturally and lifestyle oriented migrants, can draw on local identity and traditions to further revitalization, development and change in rural areas facing population and economic decline. However, current Japanese visa categories do not often accommodate this type of migrants and governmental strategies to attract and admit international migrants to those regions are still lacking. In this context, immigration and integration policies can be reassessed in order to develop future approaches to rural development. Through this process, migrants can contribute to multicultural exchanges and the creation of transnational communities in rural areas.

Conclusion

The case of Kouraku kiln shows how recognition of contemporary developments in the fields of art and culture can contribute to rural revitalization by bringing visitors from outside to consume knowledge and experiences. I propose that, by taking advantage of transnational flows, rural areas can overcome the problems created by the centrifugal forces brought by globalization. Furthermore, through the appropriation of the global for locally-based projects, rural communities around the world can become transnational (Delanty, 2003).

Studies about the creation of transnational communities have often focused on urban areas and the so-called international elites, while the possibility of rural places as cosmopolitan, transnational and sources of innovative cultural and artistic projects are not often addressed. Kouraku kiln offers an example of a local revitalization strategy that acknowledges globalization by taking advantage of Arita's history, tradition and infrastructure by selling knowledge and experiences. While functioning as a business opportunity stimulating local economic development, the program also contributes to the expansion of transnational exchanges in local communities and the creation of local-local relationships beyond a geographically defined space.

Contemporary art developments and transnational flows in Arita speak to recent trends in transnationalism, rural revitalization and community art. We can see how these international developments are being acknowledged and appropriated within place-making strategies in areas of traditional craft production and contributing to local development. Other areas of Japan and other countries struggling with challenges resulting from rural decline might learn from the situation in Arita.

The interplay between local and global and the acknowledgment of globalization and its transnational flows of knowledge and people allows Kouraku kiln to negotiate a new identity beyond monolithic concepts of “Japaneseness”. By recognizing the diversity of Japanese contemporary society and accepting foreign residents as active members of their communities, its initiatives can contribute to multicultural coexistence, local citizenship and social inclusivity. This case study, therefore, may promote discussions about the contributions migrants can make to Japan (and beyond) as a multicultural society, their impact on local traditions and communities and their ability to negotiate Japanese national and local discourses and stories of tradition and culture in the revitalization of crafts and the countryside.

APPENDIX II

ARTISTS' PROFILES



Source: Randy Woosley Pottery website
<http://www.randywoosleypottery.com/randy-woosley.html>

Randy Woosley

Randy Woosley was born in Regina, Canada, in 1944. Son of a cabinet maker, he always liked making things himself. After dropping out from university, he traveled throughout Europe, Australia and East Asia before arriving in Japan in 1965. While working as an English teacher in Tokyo, he fell in love with the ceramics he saw at a department store he frequented during his lunchtime and went to Mashiko to study at the Tsukamoto factory. There, he worked at the glazing section from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with only two Thursdays off a month

and a salary that was “enough to buy a pack of cigarettes”. There, he would practice throwing at the wheel at night, while learning through observation. In 1969, he moved to Kasama to study under Koji Nakano, who then helped him to set up his own studio with an *anagama* kiln in the neighborhood. In 1975, he went back to Canada, where he set up a pottery studio. He returned to Japan in 1989, building a new *anagama* kiln, which suffered irreparable damaged during the 2011 Great Eastern Japan Earthquake. Randy now works with an oil-fired salt kiln to make mostly small Japanese pots, such as *guinomi*, *yunomi* and tea bowls, inspired by Chinese, Korean and Japanese traditions. He has exhibited at the Ibaraki Industrial Arts Exhibition (1996) and at the Ibaraki Ceramic Art Museum several times (2008, 2009 and 2010). Woosley also participates in the Kasama Pottery Festival twice a year.



Harvey Young

Harvey Young was born in 1945 in Illinois, United States. After majoring in psychology and art from the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1969, he came to Japan to study ceramics with famous potter Hiroshi Seto in Mashiko for seventeen months. In 1971, he traveled throughout Europe and studied under Danish potter Gutte Eriksen, returning to the United States in 1973. In 1974, he opened his first pottery studio in California, where he worked for ten years. In 1984, he returned to Mashiko, Japan, where he made ceramics until he passed away in September 2015. Young has exhibited his works at solo exhibitions in department stores around Japan. After his passing, his work became part of the permanent collection at Mashiko Ceramic Art Museum.

Source: Harvey Young Pottery website
<http://www.harveyyoungpottery.com/>



Source: Kondo, Kyoshi (ed.) *Mashiko Potters*, 2000.

Doris Watanabe

Doris Watanabe was born in Germany in 1951. After graduating in Asian Studies in 1974, she came to Japan to teach English, experience Japanese culture and deepen her Japanese language abilities. Her interest in Zen and art in general drew her into ceramics and thus, in 1975, she started learning pottery in Mashiko. From 1978, she exhibited her works at solo exhibitions in department stores and galleries around Japan and, between 1979 and 1980, she worked as a potter in Minnesota, United States. She returned to Mashiko in 1981 and became a full-time English teacher in 1986.



Source: Wood Fired Ceramics by Gary Moller website
<http://www12.plala.or.jp/garymoller/top.htm#top>

Gary Moller

Gary Moller was born in Ohio, United States, in 1951. In 1971, he studied ceramics at Skidmore College (New York) and, interested in Japanese ceramics and architecture, came to Japan in 1972 as an exchange student, studying ceramics by himself in a studio rented from a potter in Kyoto for three months, after which he had a graduation exhibition. He returned to the USA to finish his major in Fine Arts from Colgate University and came back to Japan in 1974, establishing in Tokyo, where he deepened his knowledge of ceramics through the frequent contact with Tama-based potter Tsuji Seimei and the many

artists and intellectuals that frequented his studio. In 1977, he established his studio in Shigaraki, where he built an *anagama* kiln and two kick-wheels in the Yamagami region. In 1992, he also added a tea house to his studio residence. Moller uses clay dug from the mountains of Shigaraki, rich in natural feldspar granules, which he pounds by hand and sun dries before aging for a year. His *anagama* kilns are fired with local red pines, thus creating natural ash-glazes. During his forty years making ceramics in Japan, he has shown his works at solo and group exhibitions at department stores and galleries around Japan and the United States.



Source: Kondo, Kyoshi (ed.)
Mashiko Potters. 2000.

José Farromba

José Farromba was born in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1943. With a major in Fine Arts from Lisbon University, his interest in Zen and Japanese aesthetics brought him to Japan in 1973, when he traveled the country north to south, from Hokkaido to Kyushu, during half a year, before establishing in Mashiko to study ceramics. In 1976, he established his kiln as an independent potter in Mashiko, later acquiring a second residence and studio in Shiroishi, in Miyagi prefecture. Farromba has received several prizes, including the Gold Prize at the International Ceramic Exhibition in Kyoto in 1988 and the Order of Merit Award from Portugal in 1995.



Source: Richard Milgrim Tea Ceramics website
<http://teaceramics.com>

Richard Milgrim

Richard Milgrim was born in White Plains, New York state, in 1955. In the early 1970s, after starting to study ceramics at the University of Massachusetts, he transferred to the Antioch College in Ohio, where he met several “Japanophiles” and professors who had close personal contact with Japan. In 1977, he first came to Japan for one year, spending two months studying the language and ten months travelling around the country, visiting museums and pottery kilns. He then went back to the United States and worked as a research assistant at Fogg Museum, Harvard University, in 1978. In

1979, he got his B.A. in Fine Arts and Japanese Culture and worked at a tea ceremony exhibition at the Japan House Gallery in New York, where he met 15th generation Urasenke Grand Master Sen Genshitsu. In the same year, he returned to Japan to study tea ceremony at Urasenke tea school and ceramics in a pottery studio Kyoto. After learning the basics of the tea ceremony, he focused on ceramics and spend four years studying in Hagi, Bizen and Mino with potters Tobei Tahara, Yu Fujiwara and Koemon Kato respectively. In 1984, he opened his individual potter kiln in Northern Kyoto under the name of Richadogama and, in 2000, he opened a second studio in the United States under the name of Konkogama. Both names were given by tea master Sen Genshitsu, who has endorsed his worked since the beginning of his career. Richard Milgrim produces mainly tea ware, working with different ceramic styles from Raku to Shigaraki and others, mostly made from Mino clay and natural glazes. He has exhibited his work solo at department stores and galleries across Japan, New Zealand, Hawaii and the United States. In 2007, commemorating thirty years from his first arrival in Japan, he launched a book under the name *Tea Ceramics Artist Richard Milgrim: A retrospective*, published by Kodansha International.



Source: John Wells Facebook page

John Wells

John Wells was born in Missouri, the United States, in 1957. During his studies in Fine Arts at the Occidental College in Los Angeles, he came to Japan for one year as an exchange student at Waseda University. After returning to the United States to finish his major, he took a summer pottery course with a teacher who had studied under Bizen National Treasure Toyo Kaneshige. He then decided he too wanted to study pottery in Bizen and wrote a letter to Michiaki Kaneshige, who had taken over the pottery after his father's death. Despite not receiving an answer, he decided to come to Japan while attempting to contact Kaneshige and, in 1982, he finally received approval

by the potter to go to Bizen and start his apprenticeship, which lasted for three years. In 1985, he built his individual studio with *noborigama* in Bizen, where he has been making Bizen style pottery for the past three decades. Since 1991, he has held exhibitions around Japan, including a joint exhibit with Michiaki Kaneshige at Kurodatoen gallery in Tokyo, a group exhibition of Toyo Kaneshige and his school at Daiwa department store in Toyama and several solo exhibitions in Tokyo, Okayama and Hiroshima. During his career, Wells has received several awards and given lectures and demonstrations about Bizen ware around Japan and the United States. Wells is a member of the Toshinkai Association of Bizen Potters and the Bizen Potters' Guild (Toyukai).

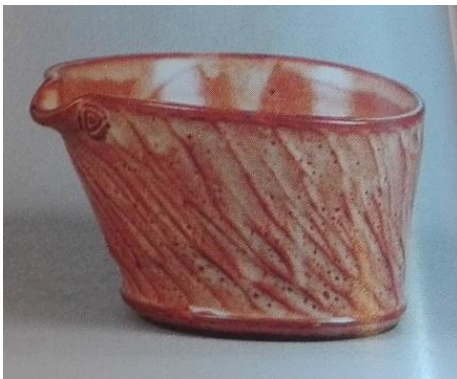


Source: Tracy Glass website
<http://traceyglass.com/EN/Home.html>

Tracey Glass

Tracey Glass was born in Toronto, Canada, in 1961. She first came to Japan in 1979 to study Zen as an exchange student from the University of California Berkeley, where she majored in Cultural Anthropology and International Studies. In 1980, she completed a three month experience at a Soto Zen Buddhist temple in Nara, after which she traveled around Asia, while studying and working in Kansai. It was during her stay in Japan that she started being interested in ceramics, after experiencing its close connection with Japanese food and drink culture, and began studying under Nanako Kaji in Kyoto. In 1983, she started her full time professional pottery training at the Tekisui

Art Museum Ceramic Research in Ashiya, Hyogo prefecture. In 1986, she transferred to the University of New York, changing her major to ceramics. The next year, she graduated from both institutes and started working under potter Junichi Kozuru in Fukuoka, where she acquired experience with wood-firing and ash glazing. In 1991, together with a Korean colleague, Choi Hwa Bun, she finished building her home and studio in Ayabe, in the countryside of Kyoto prefecture, where they built a wood-fired *tangama* style kiln. Since then, Glass has exhibited her work in group and solo exhibitions at galleries and department stores around Japan, Canada and the USA. Between 1993 and 1997, she exhibited in the Annual Women's Ceramic Art Association Competition in Kyoto. She is also a member of the Shinsho Art and Craft Association, based in Kyoto and the Kyoto Craft Artists' Association, since 2001 and 2012 respectively. Besides her ceramic work, Glass also teaches about the aesthetics of food-on-plate presentation at a local cooking school. She has also been an activist for the revitalization of Japanese countryside, cross-cultural harmony, environmentalism and antinuclearism.



Source: Kondo, Kyoshi (ed.)
Mashiko Potters, 2000.

Darice Veri

Darice Veri was born in Ohio, the United States, in 1958. In 1982, she majored in Fine Arts from the Columbus College of Arts and design and moved to Mashiko to pursue her interest in ceramics, drawn by the works and philosophy of Shoji Hamada and the *mingei* group. After apprenticing at a pottery studio, she opened her own studio in 1987. In 1989, she received the first time selection prize at the Kokuten art exhibition held at the Mingei Museum in Tokyo. Darice divides time between Japan and the United States, where she teaches ceramics.



Source: Steve Tootell Creative Educator website
<https://www.stevetootell-creative-educator.com/>

Steve Tootell

Steve Tootell was born in the United Kingdom in 1953. He majored in Education at Liverpool University, where he learned ceramics from professors who were taught by Bernard Leach. In England, he taught art and design for ten years before coming to Japan in 1984. Since 1986, he has been teaching at the International School of Sacred Heart, where he is also Head of the Creative and Performing Arts department. Seeing himself as a creative artist and art educator, Tootell has experience with pottery, painting, printmaking, film, graphic arts and music. He has been responsible for coordinating the 10 World Art Educator Workshops in Japan featuring International

Master Potters and the Artscape International Student Art Exhibition in Tokyo for the

past 26 years. Besides his work as an art educator in Tokyo, Steve Tootell also has a pottery studio in Denbigh, North Wales.



Source: Richard and Mieko Pottery website
<http://richardandmiekopottery.com>

Richard Truckle

Richard Truckle was born in East Grinstead, England, in 1947. He graduated in painting from the King Alfred's College in 1970 and started doing pottery in 1976, after taking a course at Harrow Art School, where he was taught the Leach Tradition. In 1977, he taught pottery at Surrey University and, the next year, started working as an assistant in different pottery studios and art schools in England. He first visited Japan in 1984, moving to Tokoname, Aichi prefecture, in 1991, establishing a studio with his wife, potter Mieko Sagisaka. In 2004, he established a second workshop in France and, in 2004, he built a large wood firing kiln in the south of Tokoname, where he made mostly functional tableware in a mix of the English country style and Japanese tradition. From

1980, Truckle exhibited at department stores and galleries around Japan and was a finalist at the Japan's national art competition Kokuten in 1997. In 2007, he participated as a guest at the Limeuil pottery festival in the southwest of France. Richard Truckle passed away in June 2017.



Source: Andrew J. Gemrich weblog
<http://andrewgemrich.jugem.jp/?eid=38>

Andrew Gemrich

Andrew Gemrich was born in Michigan, the United States, in 1967. During his major in English Literature at Kalamazoo University, he took a Japanese language course, coming to Japan as an exchange student at Waseda University in 1988. After returning to the United States to finish his bachelor degree, he started taking pottery classes, coming back to Japan in 1991 to teach English at Iwate prefecture while studying pottery at a local potter's studio. In 1993, he moved to Mashiko to focus on learning ceramics and worked at the city's Kyohan Center (Sales Cooperative). In 1994, he apprenticed with Shunji Chikaraishi for one year, after which he

established his own pottery studio in Mashiko. In 1997, he built a small wood-fired box kiln and, in 2004, he moved his studio to the neighboring city of Motegi, where he has been doing pottery on a Japanese kick wheel, decorated with ash glazing and iron painting. In 1996, Gemrich won the Hamada Shoji Award at the First Mashiko Ceramic Art Exhibition. He has exhibited in department stores and galleries around Japan and the United States and is a member of the board of directors of the Mashiko Ceramic Art Association (MCAA).



Source: John Dix, an American potter in Japan website
<http://www.johndix.com>

John Dix

John Dix was born in Flint, Michigan, United States, in 1960. In 1982, he majored in Liberal Arts from Albion College and from 1983 to 1985 he studied ceramics at the Terrestrial Forming Pottery in Michigan. Between 1985 and 1986, he apprenticed at a pottery studio in Chania, Greece and worked with potters in Jerusalem, Israel, after which he came back to Terrestrial Forming Pottery to work as a studio manager. He moved to Japan in 1989 to teach English while studying at Tekisui Pottery Studio in Ashiya, Hyogo prefecture. In 1992, he quit his job to work with Bizen potter Kenichi Mikami in Okayama, where he stayed for two years. In 1995, he established his studio with an *anagama* kiln at Fieldwork, in Sasayama, Hyogo, one of the four facilities of a grassroots NPO founded by David Jack and Sachiko Matsunaga to encourage rural sustainability and multicultural

understanding. Fieldwork has facilities in Scotland, Hong Kong, Bangladesh and Japan. Located near Tamba, one of the six old Japanese kilns, Fieldwork Japan offers accommodation and other facilities for people to experience rural life through pottery. Besides running the ceramic program at Fieldwork, John Dix teaches ceramics in Kobe, where he also has a pottery studio, dividing his time between the city and Sasayama. Since 1991, he has exhibited at museums, galleries and department stores across Japan and the United States, where he has also taught several workshops since 2006.



Source: Christopher Ravenhall website
<https://chrispots.jimdo.com>

Christopher Ravenhall

Christopher Ravenhall was born in 1968 in England, where he worked as a carpenter during his youth. In a trip to Nepal, he came in contact with a project involving ceramics by a non-governmental organization and decided he wanted to study pottery. Through an acquaintance, he was given an opportunity to do a homestay in Okayama and study under Mamoru Taku in Bizen, where he stayed from 1989 to 1992, despite his original plan of going to Australia. After his three year

apprenticeship, he worked at Bizen Ichiyo Gama in 1994 and, in 1999, he finally set up his individual pottery studio in Akaiwashi city. In 2015, he moved to a new area, where he built an *anagama* kiln, producing works with traditional Bizen techniques while being inspired by different Western folk and historical traditions.



Source: Douglas Black website
<https://sites.google.com/site/douglasblackart/home>

Douglas Black

Douglas Black was born in Lawrence, Kansas, the United States, in 1967. After entering the Columbus College of Art and Design (CCAD) in Ohio in the late 1980s to study Fine Arts, Black became interested in ceramics through his teacher Ban Kajitani, with whom he worked as an assistant for three years. During a lecture at his university, he was invited by Japanese potter Ichizo Mori to study ceramics with him in Kuwana, Mie prefecture, where Black arrived in 1990, after finishing his bachelor degree in Fine Arts. After training under the strict master-disciple pottery system, he

moved to Kasama, Ibaraki, and then to Motegi, Tochigi, where he became an assistant to contemporary ceramic artist Koji Usaka for one year and a half. During this time, he started building his home and studio in Motegi, where he eventually set up a gas kiln in 1992 and becoming an independent artist. In 1992, Black first showed at an exhibition at Gallery Toko in Mashiko and, between 1993 and 1997, he was a member of *Geoidwork*, a Tokyo based group of collaborating artists, designers and musicians produced by Baba

Koshi. Since 1992, Douglas Black has shown his work in solo exhibitions in Mashiko, Tokyo and other regions of Japan, as well as group exhibitions abroad, including Korea, Singapore, Thailand, England, France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy and the USA. From 2012, he participated in the Mungyeong Teabowl Festival, Namiseom International Ceramic Festival and Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale, all in Korea and, in 2015, he was made a founding committee member for the new International Ceramix Festival on Jeju Island. Since 2016, he has been a member of the board of directors of the Mashiko Ceramic Art Association (MCAA), contributing to international cultural and artistic exchanges, in particular between Mashiko and Icheon potters.



Source: Euan Craig, The Potter in Japan Facebook page
<https://www.facebook.com/Euan-Craig-The-Potter-in-Japan-131466626875774/>

Euan Craig

Euan Craig was born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1964. At the age of 12, he moved to the historic pottery town of Bendigo and, at the age of 14, having already decided to become a potter, worked part-time jobs at several ceramic studios. In 1985, Craig got his bachelor degree in Arts and Ceramics Design from Latrobe University and, the following year, he established his own studio, Castle Donnington Pottery, in Swan Hill, which he ran for four years before coming to Japan in 1990. In Mashiko, he worked as a wheel thrower for National Treasure Tatsuzo Shimaoka, before becoming independent in 1994, when he built a wood fired kiln “euangama” in Ichikai, neighbor to Mashiko. In 2011, after his studio and kiln suffered severe damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake, he relocated to Minakami, Gunma prefecture, where he has been making mostly wood fired functional tableware

ever since. Euan Craig has held solo and group exhibitions at department stores and galleries across Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom and Denmark. He has been featured in magazines, newspapers and television, including the NHK World series *Japanophiles* in 2012. He is also a member of the Japan Mingei Association.



Source: Karatsu pots website
<http://karatsupots.com>

Mike Martino

Mike Martino was born in New Mexico, the United States, in 1968. He came to Japan in 1990 to study *karate* while working as an English teacher. In 1997, he went back to the United States, returning to Japan in 2002, when he started to study ceramics after meeting Karatsu potter Yoshihisa Tsuruta. In 2005, he set up a studio with a gas kiln in Taku city, Saga prefecture. In 2008, he began showing his work to the public, participating in exhibitions and

conducting workshops in Japan, the United States and Europe. In 2010, he built a ten meter *anagama/ noborigama* hybrid, in which he fires most of his work, done within the Karatsu pottery tradition. Most of his work is made to be used in the tea ceremony, but he also makes tableware and sculptural pieces.



Source: Sebastião Pimenta Facebook page.

Sebastião Pimenta

Sebastião Pimenta was born in Minas Gerais, Brazil, in 1964. At the age of 16, he started studying *sumie* (ink wash painting) and, after graduating in design, he specialized in art education, working as an art teacher at a high school in Brazil. He first came to Japan in 1991 through a teacher training program at Miyagi University of Education offered by the Japanese government. In 1994, he went to Mongolia to study folk and religious painting, returning to Japan in 1995 to work with *sumie* and *nihonga*. It was during this time that he started learning ceramics through contacts with local potters. In 1998, he returned to Brazil and in 2001 he opened a pottery studio

in Minas Gerais, while working as a university professor. In 2007, Pimenta participated in an artist-in-residency program at the Sanbao Ceramic Art Institute in Jingdezhen, the so-called porcelain capital of China, returning in the next three years and in 2011, as the residence studio director. There, he met Japanese artist Shin Koyama who, together with Kourakugama director, Takanobu Tokunaga, invited him to go to Arita, Saga prefecture, to implement and coordinate an artist residency, where he has been working since 2015.



Source: Galerie Nuage website
<http://g-nuage.shop-pro.jp>

Regina Goto

Regina Goto was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1956 to Japanese parents. She started learning ceramics as a hobby with Shoichi Yamada at the Brazilian Society of Japanese Culture in São Paulo. In 1991, she came to Mashiko to study ceramics, becoming independent in 1994, when she established a studio in Mashiko, which was relocated to the neighboring town of Motegi, Tochigi prefecture, in 2007, where she makes ceramics together with her husband Yoshikuni Goto.



Source: Lubarte website
www.lubarte.com

Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo

Jesualdo Fernández-Bravo was born in Daimiel, Ciudad-Real, Spain, in 1957. He studied Law at the Complutense University of Madrid between 1974 and 1979 and from 1981 to 1985 he worked as a commercial director at a company in Equatorial Guinea. He then returned to Spain in 1986, coming to Japan for tourism in 1991. Here, he became interested in Japanese traditional culture and started studying *kyudo* (Japanese archery) and ceramics, while teaching Spanish at a language school in Tokyo. Then, from 1992 to 1998, he studied porcelain with potter Hitomi Itabashi and stoneware with

contemporary clay artist Ryosai Hoshino. In 2000, he established his studio together with his wife, potter Akane Niwa, in Nasu-Karasuyama, Tochigi prefecture, about 30 km from Mashiko, where they built a small wood fired kiln. After the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake, the potters moved to Awaji island, Hyogo prefecture, where they opened a new studio and gallery in 2014. Fernández-Bravo works mainly with porcelain molded with *ikomi* technique and handmade painted. He has exhibited his works around Japan and participated in ceramic competitions such as the Mino International Ceramic Competition (2005 and 2008), Izushi Porcelain Triennale (2006) and has won the Grand Prize at Nissin Foods Contemporary Ceramic Art Exhibition in 1994.



Source: Kristina Mar website
<http://www.kristinamar.com>

Kristina Mar

Kristina Mar, pseudonym, was born in Coimbra, Portugal, in 1964. In 1987, she specialized in Industrial Ceramics and in 1990, she received a degree in sculpture from the Porto School of Fine Arts. Between 1990 and 1993 she traveled around Asia, working in Macau as a graphic designer before arriving in Japan in 1993. Then, she did an artist-

in-residence program at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park and, between 1995 and 1996, worked as a part-time assistant professor at the ceramic department of Kyoto University of Art and Design. Since 1996, she has been working as an independent artist in Kyoto, holding solo and group exhibitions in different cities of Japan and in Macau. She has participated in international ceramic competitions in Japan, Portugal, Italy and Belgium, and performed workshops and demonstrations at several events in the United States, Macau and Japan. Kristina Mar works mainly with porcelain to produce tableware, *objet*, sculptures and installations mixing different media.



Source: Agnès Husz website
<http://www.agneshusz.com>

Agnes Husz

Agnes Husz was born in Mohacs, Hungary, in 1963. She received her masters' degree from the Nagy University of Arts and Design in 1990, arriving in Japan in 1993, where she has been working at her studio in Chikuma, Nagano prefecture. As a ceramic artist focusing on contemporary clay work and sculptural ceramics, Husz has an extensive curriculum that includes numerous solo and group

exhibitions in galleries and museums around Japan and Europe. Since 1990, she has participated in many artist in residence programs and received awards at international competitions in Japan, Hungary and Egypt. In 2015, she received the Ferenczy Noemi Prize from the Hungarian Ministry of Cultural Heritage. Her artworks are in public collections of museums in France, Japan, Holland and Hungary.



Source: Matthew Sovjani website
<https://matthewsovjani.stores.jp>

Matthew Sovjani

Matthew Sovjani was born in New York, the United States, in 1969 from a family of artists. He graduated in Arts and Illustration from the Columbus College of Art and Design, where he took a course in ceramics and was invited by a Japanese professor to come study in Japan. Arriving in 1993, he apprenticed with a potter in Kasama for one year, after which he worked in a ceramics factory in Mashiko. In 1995, he established his studio with a small wood fired kiln in Motegi. He has participated in various exhibitions in Mashiko, Tokyo, Mito (Ibaraki prefecture) and Iwaki (Fukushima prefecture).



Source : Swan ceramics website
www.swan ceramics.com

Swanica Ligtenberg

Swanica Ligtenberg was born in the Netherlands in 1955 into a family of craftsmen and artists. She worked as a psychologist before moving to Switzerland to pursue an education in ceramics at the School of Decorative Art in Geneva in 1981. In 1983, she established her own ceramic workshop in Switzerland, then moving it to New Jersey, the United States, in 1985, to California in 1990 and finally to Kamakura, Japan, in 2006, where she stayed until 2013. In 2016, Ligtenberg returned to the Netherlands, where

she has the Swan Ceramics Art gallery and studio. Since 1983, she has held solo and group exhibitions in department stores, galleries and museums around Japan, China, Indonesia, Mexico, the United States, Switzerland and the Netherlands. She has received several awards, such as “honorable mention” at the Mino International Ceramics Competition in 2008 and 2014. She has pieces in museums in China and Indonesia and has been featured in numerous publications, magazine and newspaper articles and television. She works mainly with low-fired clay to make colorful pieces and *raku*.



Source: Kjell Hahn website
<http://kjellhahn.com>

Kjell Hahn

Kjell Hahn majored in Painting from Truman State University, Kirksville, Missouri, the United States, in 2001. In 1998, he co-founded the Tom Thumb Gallery, a student run alternative exhibition space in Kirksville, which he co-directed for three years. In 2001, he came to Japan through the JET program to teach English in Hiroshima, where he stayed for three years before moving to New York, where he worked as

a metal fabricator in Brooklyn. In 2007, he came back to Japan, spending three years cycling around the country while collaborating with ceramic artists, including John Dix and Taihei Sugiyama in Sasayama, Hyogo prefecture. Between 2008 and 2013 he worked as a set designer for flamenco artist Chiaki Horikoshi and founded the Oni Ten Gallery, in Onishi, Gunma prefecture, in 2009. In 2013, he co-founded the NPO Kinuya Art Net and established the Shiro Oni Studio artist in residency program as founder and director, reforming abandoned buildings in Onishi. Hahn works with several media, such as ceramics, drawing, installation and video to produce contemporary art objects and has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions around Japan. He also has permanent installations in Kobe, Himeji, Sasayama and Tokyo.



Source: Derek Larsen Facebook page.

Derek Larsen

Derek Larsen was born in Kansas, the United States, in 1975. He started making pottery as a high school student and built his first *anagama* kiln in Kansas in 1998. In 2000, he majored in Design from the University of Kansas and in 2003 he earned a master degree in ceramic research from Southern Cross University, Australia and a second masters in ceramics from the University of Kansas in 2006. After working as an art professor in the United States, Larsen came to Japan in 2008 and, in 2010, he participated in the artist in residence program at Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park. In 2011, he built an *anagama* in Kakidaira, Aichi prefecture and in 2013, moved to Kyoto, where he makes contemporary Shigaraki-style wood-fired ceramics. He has held exhibitions in Japan and the United States.



Mpindi Kibudde

Mpindi Ronald Kibudde was born in Wakiso, Uganda, in 1981. After graduating from Makerere University in 2005, he started working as a ceramic artist and, in 2007, also as a fine arts teacher. In 2009, he came to Japan to pursue a doctorate course in ceramics at Tokyo University of Arts, where he researched wood firing and wood fired kilns, especially the Bizen style techniques, with the aim of applying them to Ugandan pottery. He returned to Uganda in 2014, where he has been teaching Ceramics as Drawing at Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts, Makerere University. He has exhibited in Uganda, Kenya, South Korea and Japan. His work has been inspired by Asian and African musical instruments, such as the *shamisen*, *koto*, *biwa* and the udu drum from Nigeria.

Source: Tokyo University of the Arts Doctoral Program Final Exhibition 2014
<http://dr-exhibition.geidai.ac.jp/2014/summary/mpindironaldkibudde/>.



Mirjam Watajima

Mirjam Watajima was born in Munster, Germany, in 1983. Wanting to be a potter since high school, she entered the Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle, from which she got a Bachelor of Art with a focus on product design in 2005. Between 2002 and 2005, she apprenticed at the Keramische Werkstatt Mar Margaretenhohe atelier in Essen and, in 2008, she came to Japan for the first time as an exchange student at the Arita College of Ceramics for six months, returning again in 2010 as a regular student in the wheel

Source: Studio Wani website
www.studiowani.com

throwing course. In 2012, she started living in Japan permanently and working at the Toubou Ao atelier in Arita, before opening Studio Wani in the ceramic region of Nakaoyama, in the Hasami town of Nagasaki prefecture, together with her husband, Kenichiro Watajima, in 2017. Mirjam produces underglaze and overglaze painted porcelain inspired by the traditional style of Arita and Hasami region, thrown on the wheel and fired in a gas kiln.

Karina Hamaguchi

Karina Hamaguchi was born in Suzano, São Paulo State, Brazil, in 1983 and is the third generation of a family of Japanese immigrants. While working as a physiotherapist in northeast Brazil, her interest in her ancestors' culture led her to study about Japan and eastern medicine and, eventually, she started teaching Japanese culture in poor communities and to Nikkei-Brazilian seniors who had lost all contact with Japan. In June 2012, she came to Japan for six months with a scholarship in physiotherapy from Kochi prefecture and, in her free time, started taking a ceramics course with a local potter, where she learned the *raku* technique and glass ceramics. She went back to Brazil in 2013, where she is still working as a physiotherapist.



Source: Kate Strachan website
www.katestrachan.com

Kate Strachan

Kate Strachan was born in Philadelphia, the United States, in 1982. She started taking ceramic classes at a community college and became interested in Japanese ceramics and aesthetics through visiting artists who would often come to give lectures there. After getting her BFA in Fashion Design, she did a Moravian Tile Works Residence and got a scholarship from Anderson Ranch to study ceramics in 2011. In 2012, she arrived in Japan to work as a ceramics assistant at Ohi-yaki Studio in Kanazawa, where she stayed for two years. Between 2014 and 2017, she attended the Yokohama Izumi Ceramic School, while doing ceramics at her home studio in Kamakura.

From 2016, Strachan has held several group exhibitions in Japan and, in 2017, she participated in the International Ceramic Art festival in Sasama.



Source: Codo experiment
website <http://codoexperiment.com>

Andrew Vlock

Andrew Vlock was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the United States, in 1988. Before coming to Japan in 2014, he studied Business and Hospitality at Cornell University and traveled around India and Southeast Asia. Interested in the relationship between traditional crafts and Buddhist philosophy, he arrived in Japan where, during a visit to Mashiko Pottery Fair, he ended up staying at Furuki guesthouse and was offered an opportunity as a trainee at their Mashiko Ceramic Art Club. There, he worked for one year before going back to the United States, where he established Codo Ceramics and Textiles together with Chinatsu Nagamune in Massachusetts.



Source: Timi Lantos personal archive

Timi Lantos

Timi Lantos was born in Kecskemét, Hungary, in 1985. She started doing ceramics at the age of 15, after entering the ceramic department of Kandó Kálmán Vocational School of Art, Kecskemét, in 2000. In 2006, she entered the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest, graduating as a porcelain designer in 2011, proceeding to the doctoral course with a focus on mold porcelain in 2013. In 2011 and 2012, she participated in a

smokeless kiln building and glazes for wood-firing workshop with Masakazu Kusakabe at the International Ceramic Studio in Kecskemét and was invited to work as his assistant in his studio in Miharu, Fukushima prefecture, where she stayed for three months in 2015. In Europe, she participated in ceramic competitions, receiving several awards from the European Ceramic Context, Young Talent Category, in Bornholm (Denmark), the Westerwald prize in Germany, the International Triennial of Silicate Arts, in Kecskemét (Hungary), all in 2014, and the International Triennial of Silicate Arts, held at the National Museum of Slovenia in 2015.

In 2016, she came back to Japan to work and study at the Mashiko Ceramic Art Club, where she is currently developing her artworks. In 2017, she had her first solo exhibition at the Mashiko Ceramic Art Association (MCAA). She has also participated in the Mashiko Pottery Fair in the fall of 2017 and spring 2018.



Ariel Cecilio

Ariel Cecilio was born in Argentina in 1973. He came to Japan in 2016 to study *anagama* firing, *haikaburi* (ash-covered) technique and *kurinuki* hand carving ceramics in Kurabuchi-Takasaki, Gunma prefecture, with potter Kei Sato, with whom he stayed for one year. In July 2017, he had his graduation exhibition at Yamada Denki Art Gallery in Takasaki, Gunma.

Source: Ariel Cecilio personal archive



Source: Ryan Cain's personal archive

Ryan Cain

Ryan Cain was born in California, the United States, in 1998. During his studies at an international high school, where he met many students from Korea and Japan, he did a pottery course for three years and started to become interested in tea and tea ware. Determined to come to Japan to study ceramics for one year before entering university, he wrote to the mayor of Mashiko town, who recommend him to contact the Mashiko Ceramic Art Club. After getting a cultural visa with the club's sponsorship, Cain stayed there studying and working for one year between 2016

and 2017, before going back to the United States to start his studies in Economics and Asian Studies at Yale University. In July 2017, he held a group exhibition at Mashiko Ceramic Art Association (MCAA).



Source: Suzanne Wang ceramics website
<http://www.suzannewangceramics.com>

Suzanne Wang

Suzanne Wang was born in Taiwan in 1970 but grew up in California, the United States, later becoming an American citizen. She studied sculptural ceramics from the age of 15 to 21, later pursuing studies in Drama, followed by a M.F.A. in Scene Design at New York University. She worked in the industry for ten years, before moving to China, later returning to the United States to work for a tea company in rural

Connecticut. It was then that she revived her interest in pottery, resuming her ceramic studies. In 2010, she moved to Hawaii, where she attended ceramic courses at the local community college, later establishing her own individual studio in the Hamakua coast. After attending two workshops by Mashiko potter Ken Matsuzaki in 2013 and 2014, she decided she wanted to learn Japanese pottery and asked him if she could train with him for three months. After a small trip to Mashiko, she came to Japan again in 2016, where she stayed for one year studying under Matsuzaki.



Source : Kimie Ino personal archive.

Kimie Ino

Kimie Ino was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1982, from a Japanese father and a *nissei* mother. She graduated in Mechatronics Engineering in 2006, coming to Japan in 2007 to study at Kyoto University for one year with a scholarship from the Japan International Corporation Agency. After working in the field of engineering for several years, she found ceramics as a way to escape her stressful job. After taking a wheel turning course in 2011, she came to Japan again in 2012 to study at the *Tokoname Togei Kenkyujo*, in Aichi, where she stayed for one year. During that time, she also participated in the

construction of an *anagama* kiln in Sasama, Shizuoka prefecture, for the second edition of the International Ceramics Art Festival in November 2013. After that, she came back to Brazil and initiated her masters' course in Ceramic Engineering at the University of São Paulo, before returning to Japan in April 2017, to enroll at the Ishoken Ceramic School in Tajimi, Gifu prefecture, where she was the first foreign student in a new international program with a one to two years duration. At Ishoken, Ino has been developing her creative and expressive skills through a focus on the production of porcelain objects.



Source: Joséphine Marinho website
<https://josephinemarinho.wixsite.com/ceramics/home-1>

Joséphine Marinho

Joséphine Marinho was born in Monaco in 1993. After studying pottery at the Ceramic School of Longchamp in France for four years, where she got three different degrees (throwing, decoration and artistic ceramics), she received an art trade diploma from the Duperré School of Applied Arts in Paris. In 2016, she came to Japan for three months as the first resident artist of Sasama Artist in Residence Program, in Shizuoka prefecture, founded and coordinated by Seto-based potter Shozo Michikawa. In 2017, she

returned again for one year as a resident artist and volunteer at the Sanson-Toshi Koryu Center, helping in the organization of the fourth edition of the Sasama International Ceramic Art Festival.



Source: Douglas Barnez personal archive

Douglas Barnez

Douglas Barnez was born in Amparo, São Paulo state, Brazil, in 1995. In 2017, he entered the Applied Arts course with emphasis in ceramics at São João del-Rei Federal University, the only university in Brazil offering a higher level education specializing in applied arts. After meeting Japanese potter Rikio Hashimoto during a workshop at his university, he came to Japan to study ceramics in Misato, Shimane prefecture, at the studio of potter Rikio Hashimoto for three months between September and November 2017, a trip which was

supported through crowdfunding. After returning to Brazil, he set up his own pottery studio, Caritó Atelier, in Amparo, São Paulo state.



Source: Author's personal archive
Photo by Johnny Mazzilli.

Wellington Emmerich

Wellington Emmerich was born in Cunha, São Paulo state, Brazil in 1996. In 2012, as a high school student, he studied ceramics at the Cunha Ceramics Cultural Institute, created by Cunha-based Japanese potter Mieko Ukeseki in 2009 to protect and develop the town's ceramic tradition by passing it down to younger generations. After finishing the Basic Ceramic Course, he entered a local pottery as an assistant and was later hired as a professional wheel thrower. In 2017, he set up his own individual potter's studio, Cantinho da Cerâmica, in Cunha, and was invited by Rikio Hashimoto to do an artist in residence program studio in Misato, Shimane prefecture, where he stayed for three months. He has exhibited several times in group exhibitions at the Cunha Craftsman House.



Source: Kazue Morita's personal archive.

Kazue Morita

Kazue Morita was born in Porto Alegre, south of Brazil, in 1986. After studying Journalism, she started a masters in Art History and it was then that she began to practice ceramics first as a hobby in 2013. Being a third generation Japanese descendant, she started to become interested in Japanese arts and ceramics and went to the city of Cunha to learn different Japanese pottery techniques. She finally came to Japan in 2017 to study for three months at potter Rikio Hashimoto's studio in Misato,

Shimane prefecture. She is currently pursuing a second B.A. in Product Design and researching about ceramics and Japanese traditional arts.

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