

Original Paper

The Formation and Development of Japanese Craftsmanship

Linmei Zuo¹

¹ Foreign Languages and Literature, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing, China

Received: October 11, 2022 Accepted: October 21, 2022 Online Published: November 8, 2022

doi:10.22158/jar.v6n4p25

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jar.v6n4p25>

Abstract

Japanese craftsmanship is an important resource of Japanese industrial culture. The Japanese manufacturing industry has a global reputation and strong competitiveness and influence, and the artisan spirit is one of the “secret weapons” that has made the Japanese manufacturing industry strong. The evolution of Japanese craftsmanship in different historical periods can further enrich the connotation of craftsmanship and deepen people’s understanding of craftsmanship, which is of positive significance to all countries in cultivating and promoting craftsmanship and improving the service capability of various industries.

Keywords

craftsmanship, made in Japan, Japanese culture, artisanal enterprises

1. Generation of Japanese Craftsmanship

1.1 The Primitive Beliefs That All Things Are Spiritual

The primitive belief in the spirit of everything Japan’s primitive society, due to low productivity, people were powerless against natural disasters and bewildered by the ever-changing natural phenomena, so the primitive religion of “nature worship”, which relies on nature, emerged. People believed that “all things have spirits” and asked for their blessing. They made figures, animals, mountain dolls and various kinds of earthen plates, rock plates and delicate stone rods and swords as objects of worship or sacrificial tools. Among them, bracelets made of shells, waist rings made of antlers, lacquer combs and other accompanying accessories do not show the difference in status and class, but only have the function of witchcraft. However, it can be inferred from the broken appearance of the female figure clay dolls found and the adoption of the bent hand and foot burying, that people in this period observed many taboos and tried to protect themselves and their society from natural threats through such witchcraft. In addition, the fact that young animals and females were seldom hunted and killed at that time shows that people at that time had begun to pay attention to avoid indiscriminate

hunting, which is a manifestation of humility and love for nature.

1.2 Excellence under the Pride of Identity

Ancient artisans were equivalent to a special technical team, and the royal family allocated them land to maintain their livelihood. Although they were slaves, they could not be bought and sold, nor could they be killed at will, and they generally had their own families, and their status was significantly higher than that of the slave girls of the time. As Marx said, “Labor is a means of satisfying the need to maintain physical existence”. In ancient Japan, although the status of artisans was low, they had a stable economic income and some privileges, which were sufficient to sustain their livelihood. Because of the existence of people who protected them, the craftsmen had no other worries and dedicated all their energy and skills to the ruler, and all their labor and suffering disappeared with the ruler’s satisfied expression. The artisans carried the secret arts throughout their work, attempting to make exquisite, unique works to dominate the top, and they were increasingly encouraged to pursue their skills, to be extremely skilled in the secret arts, and to strive for excellence.

2. The Formation of Japanese Craftsmanship

In the Middle Ages, craftsmen became increasingly independent from agriculture, and became full-time artisans, and their skills were greatly enhanced. The “craftsmen” were transformed from amateurs to professionals, focused on their work and obsessed with the refinement of their skills. They made their own efforts to specialize their skills, otherwise it would be impossible for them to do their work adequately. At that time, there were many famous local products, such as silk from Awa, Hachijo from Mino, Hosho from Hitachi, Bambu from Kofei, swords from Bichū, kettle from Noto, pot from Kawachi, spade from Izumo, hand box from Iyo, armor from Musashi, paper from Danma, and lacquer from Echigo and Rokuo. From this, we can see that the increasing specialization of craftsmen contributed to the improvement of technical skills and the quality of products. In addition, the craftsmen of the Middle Ages generally believed that they were imbued with the mystical power of the gods and Buddhas when they were making their work, and that the instruments they made therefore had spiritual power. For example, when forging and making swords, craftsmen would tie straw ropes around the forge to keep demons away, thus inviting the gods to come. Therefore, the craftsmen are almost demanding, full of pride in their work, and persistence and concentration are their main spiritual qualities.

3. Establishment of Japanese Craftsmanship

As reflected in the saying, “When a powerful merchant of Osaka is angry, the world’s daimyo are afraid”, the town people, who account for about 6% of the total population, are the most economically powerful class in modern times. In the course of its formation for more than four hundred years, the town people, along with the growth of their own class, their economic power and their cultural creativity, gradually broke away from their spontaneous traditional moral habits without a conscious moral consciousness independent of the ruling class, and began to develop their own class consciousness, moral consciousness and values. Throughout the town’s family rules that emerged after the widespread dissemination of Ishida Umeiwa’s Shinshu thought, the main contents of the town’s ethics include the following five points:

The first is to obey the law. Since they entered the master’s house, they were taught to “treat the master as their true parent”. For example, “If you are loyal to your master, your master’s house will prosper, and so will your own prosperity” (“Sumitomo Sotetsu Dainikata”).

Second, they were contented and patient. Since they could not compete with the Shogunate and the samurai class, who were the rulers, the townspeople had to be content with the status quo in order to stabilize their family business. For example, “If you are content, your family will be rich even if you are poor; if you are not content, your family will be poor even if you are rich” (Yatani Family Sutra).

Third, they were hardworking and frugal. It was a common wish of the townspeople at that time to create and increase wealth and to consolidate and develop their family business. For example, “If you don’t sweat, you won’t get real property” (Homma family motto), “Time is like an arrow, but diligence is the mother of happiness” (Gomura and Zaemon family’s “Precautions”), “Diligence is the root of wealth, and frugality is the source of wealth” (Mukai Family, “The Family Oracle”). As the Shogunate frequently issued orders prohibiting extravagance, the townspeople reflected on their status and the pursuit of a luxurious life, and it gradually became the consensus of the townspeople to focus on diligence and frugality. For example, “everything in the store life is simple, one dish and one soup are served in the morning and evening, and no alcohol is allowed” (Sumitomo Nagasaki Shogun’s Family Law).

The fourth is honesty and integrity. Through the simple example of a drop of oil polluting a liter of water, Ishida Umeiwa warned the townspeople of the importance of business ethics, and that dishonesty and attempts to get rich overnight were tantamount to self-destruction. His advice had a great influence on the townspeople, and the pursuit of integrity in business became a major part of the family motto. For example, in the family motto of Usami Matsuhurudo, a long-established store in Kyoto that was established in 1785 to engage in framing, it was stipulated that: five taels of integrity, three taels of consideration, four taels of tolerance, two taels of judgment, and one tael of politeness.

Fifth, credibility is paramount. Reputation, that is, business ethics, in order to establish a good image of the town in the minds of customers. The reputation of the townspeople is always linked to the family business of the townspeople. If the reputation is good, the family business will be developed, and vice versa, the family business will be decayed. How to establish reputation? Many townspeople have their own specific rules. For example, “We must buy good quality goods to sell and never buy poor quality goods” (Yamanaka Iashin), and “We must never trade improperly in gold, silver, rice, herbs, and other goods” (Wakasa Yakusho).

4. The Generalization of Craftsmanship in Modern Japan

In Japan, the spirit of “journeyman” is not limited to the “journeyman” profession, but spreads throughout the society, and some people call this phenomenon “pan-journeyman culture”. For example, in Japanese media reports, it is common to see “policy workers”, “sumo wrestlers”, “science workers”, and “education workers”, all of which refer to people working in their field. For example, in Japanese media reports, it is common to find the terms “policy janitor”, “sumo janitor”, “science janitor”, and “education janitor” referring to a person who has mastered the skills in his or her field, not necessarily a craftsman. Because of the respect Japanese society has for craftsmen, the general public sees craftsmanship as an exemplary quality and is eager to imitate it. Craftsmanship is about refinement, and refinement requires effort and dedication. By concentrating on one thing without any distractions or distractions, one can exercise one’s soul and develop a deep personality in the process of refinement day after day. Craftsmanship has gone beyond the scope of “work” itself, and everyone should have the spirit of craftsmanship, not the spirit of a certain profession. Craftsmanship is not only a working attitude, but also a human attitude, a calm temperament and a firm faith. The pursuit of craftsmanship is not only applicable to the manufacturing industry, but can also permeate all aspects of our life: government departments, service industry, education, literary creation, scientific research ... The connotation of craftsmanship contains the spirit of work for excellence, the dedication of love and devotion, the innovation of pursuing excellence and the pursuit of unity of technology and path.

5. Conclusion

In summary, “craftsmanship” has evolved in Japan through four stages: ancient, medieval, modern, and modern times. The “Internet+” era has given us the opportunity to develop a “craftsman society” and a number of “craftsman enterprises”. The era of “Internet+” has brought new thinking, new methods and new paths to traditional industries, but to develop through “Internet+”, the most important thing we should look at is craftsmanship. The evolution of craftsmanship in different historical periods in Japan is conducive to further enriching the connotation of craftsmanship and deepening people’s understanding of craftsmanship, which is of positive significance to all countries in cultivating and promoting craftsmanship and improving the service capacity of various industries.

References

- Liu, J. C. (2001). *A Study of Machinist Ethical Thought: A New Theory of the Motivation of Modernization in Japan* (p. 46). Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Liu, Z. Y. (2011). *Craft culture* (Y. Y. Xu, Tran., p. 99). Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press.
- Luo, C. Y. (2018). Implications, origin, defects and inspiration of Japanese craftsmanship. *Vocational and Technical Education*, 39(18), 68-73.
- Pu, S. Z., & Cui, Y. C. (2020). The formation, development and contemporary significance of Japanese craftsman culture. *Science Today*, (04), 17-23, 30.
- Pu, S. Z., & Cui, Y. C. (2022). A Study of Japanese Craftsmanship as a Common Sense of Professional Ethics. *Studies on Japan*, 36(02), 37-45.
- Ye, Z. H. (2020). The extension of Da Craftsmanship from the comparison of Chinese and Japanese craftsmanship. *Packaging Engineering*, 41(18), 389-394.
- Ye, Z. H. (2020). The extension of Da Craftsmanship from the comparison of Chinese and Japanese craftsmanship. *Packaging Engineering*, 41(18), 389-394.
- Zhou, F. F. (2019). The heritage of craftsmanship in Japan and its contemporary value. *Journal of Japanese Studies*, (06), 135-159.
- Zhou, F. F. (2019). The transformation of traditional Japanese artisans to modern industry. *Culture Vertical*, (05), 124-131, 143.
- Zhu, Q., & Liu, P. F. (2018). The emergence of craftsmanship and its historical evolution in Japan. *Yunnan Social Science*, (03), 90-96, 186.