

Part 1

# Traditional Crafts in Japan

## A Pragmatic and Short Overview of Contemporary Situation

by Kythzia Barrera Suárez

### Introduction

I will not get into the discussion of what does Crafts means in Japan, because most of the people reading this paper are engaged in culture, so you might be aware that Japan has been, and still is, a repository of traditional Asian crafts. So you probably know that in Japan there is more handicraft activity than in any other developed country. If I had to define crafts in Japan I would say: Simple forms, Supreme quality. But I would not try to define them, but rather explain what I had realized about Japanese Crafts. What is so interesting, for me, it is not only the quantity of crafts available, but the quality and the value for the its society. So, please, let me get straight to the subject.

The Mingei Kan movement started in 1936 by philosopher Soetsu Yanagi, and potter artists Kawai Kanjiro, Shoji Hamada, Bernard Leach among other artist to enhance traditional culture from Japan. Mingei literary means Folk Art, refering to objects made by ordinary people for ordinary people. This was the beginning of Arts and Crafts movement and it definitely influenced the future of crafts in Japan. It gave the foundation for present situation. But nothing comes from nothing, and as in any other human activities, the continuity of dots can be traced back to understand the happy marriage between Design and Crafts in Japan. In my opinion, there were key persons and key moments in the story of Crafts in Japan. Without being an expert, I think that the key persons were: Sen no Riukyu who gave the foundations for the Tea Ceremony precepts and the Wabi-Sabi concept in the Muromachi period (1333-1568); Tokuwaga Family in the Edo-Period (1668-1868) who are responsible for the Unification of Japan which brought about an amazing platform for cultural development; Yanagi and Kanjiro Kawai among many others important figures who started the Mingei Kan movement in 1936; Sori Yanagi who became the bridge between Traditional Crafts and Contemporary Design in the second part of 1900's, Mori the continuation of Yanagi's and finally Naoto Fukasawa in recent times.

Japanese traditional craft products of every region have been manufactured by hand using traditional techniques for over a century and they are still widely used in daily life in the present day. In 1974 the Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries was promulgated to protect products used in everyday life. The reason why this law was promoted is because after World War II, industrialization in Japan made rapid progress along with the high economic growth.

In Japan, from 1970, environmental pollution and urbanization caused increasing problems, and people started to consider the problems of the mass-consumption and mass-disposal socio-economic system. This reflection has led to a return to traditional Japanese styles, and the revival of traditional craft industries has become a trend.

Meanwhile, the successors for traditional techniques were decreasing at accelerated rates and difficulties to obtain raw materials became serious issues in every region. With the concern that the traditional craft industries have always been the core of local industries, and that negative influence on regional economies will inevitably sooner or later hit local economies, the "Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries" was established in In 1974 by the Association for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries, an non profit organization affiliated with the government through the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

In 1991, there were 174 designated items. By 2005, there were 210 items designated as Traditional Craft Products. Today, in 2011, the number of designated items decreased to 198.

After WW II, for some years Japan was trapped in a deep crisis that became a never ending spiral of changes for Japanese's life style. This situation, combined with a downfall of crafts local production as a result of lack of qualified handmade labour and higher costs on existing one, made crafts industry to touch the bottom of a deep hole.

On the 70's the average income grows and the consumers reconsiders traditional crafts again as a buying option. So, on the one hand, traditional crafts touched the bottom of the hole but somehow manages to hold on during critical moments, waiting for the consumers income improvement. The japanese consumer, as soon as they see an improvement of their income, start buying crafts again, so then market stabilizes. It was expected to increases a little bit in the coming years.

The tendency in the "presents" industry has a strong impact in Crafts, because many crafts are bought for presents. Even though the market for presents has decreased considerably in the 1990's, it was expected to have an important development in the long term for the 2000. The forecast was positive. The Japanese crafts had an increase and development during the 2000's due to several conditions that I will explain later on in this document.

Japanese crafts are frequently used in everyday life. Even decorative objects have the characteristic of accomplishing a practical function, like baskets for incense. Besides the traditional crafted object that is produced by traditional techniques and traditional designs, like paper umbrellas- there are a variety of great crafts for new markets with functionality and design for modern life, like for example, Hiyoshiya.

## 1. Market Demand Tendency of Crafts in Japan

### Traditional Crafts

The demand on traditional crafts experienced a downfall since the end of the WW II until the end of 1980's. This downfall was the result of the dramatical changes on Japanese lifestyle and the strong competitiveness of manufactured products. As a result only a limited number of traditional crafts is used in everyday life, but they are still present and take part of life as an important symbol of identity. The kimono is a good example of this critical situation. Kimonos in Japan lost their place as an everyday article, it is not an everyday dress. But nowadays it is still in use for important ceremonies or special occasions. Nevertheless the kimono industry, although it shrink considerably and almost disappears, it is still present and now since 5 years ago, Kimono became fashionable and shopping mall windows like Isetan launch a new Yukata collection every year. During the summer it is common to see young people enjoying nightlife in the streets in Yukata, summer Kimono.

The same had happened with house ware products. The change in the shape of Japanese house brought about many changes. The space and number of rooms designed in the Japanese traditional style is less common in modern Japan. The Japanese food is less popular, because western food is becoming attractive for consumers, and has been accepted in Japanese society, so then the use of traditional tools for cooking has fall and also the use of traditional objects for decorative purposes is not popular anymore. This show us that the demand for traditional crafts in Japan, as in any other country, is closely related to the Japanese traditional lifestyles. The changes as a consequence of postwar times had had an important impact in the demand of traditional crafts.

In general the demand for traditional crafts has shown a decreasing in the long run. The demand on higher price products particularly, went down after 1990's recession. Nevertheless the consumer still was still interested in such products, so demand stayed stable during the 2000's. After 2000's consumers are looking at crafts with new eyes. An increasing number of consumers, in search of a more individualistic lifestyle, are using traditional crafts in their everyday life. The duty is to keep the attention of this kind of consumer might be an important factor to keep the demand of crafts alive.

## 2. Tendencies by type of product.

In this part of the document you will find information about the products that I looked at more carefully.

### • Kimonos

The demand for kimonos is an interesting study case. Kimono is an article that embodies Japanese identity on its very essence. It has been part of Japanese everyday life since early times. The demand of kimonos has an important presence in the market of traditional crafts, but recently in the mid 80's experienced a critical downfall. Kimono industry depends on luxury kimono. The adult age and elderly community maintained the demand and push it forward. Later on, a service on renting kimono became the only option for many people, so instead of buying a kimono, one could just rent it for some days. One of the reasons for the downfall is that Kimono is simply unaffordable for many people, it is too expensive. Right now, Yukata is in fashion, demand is growing, prices are lowering down, and it is a appreciated article. Many Kimono companies disappear during the 1990s and the ones that survived had to adopt the strategy of diversify their product - kimono- and try a different article using the same technique/ technology. An interesting case in this direction is Kawashima Selkon Company and Watanabu and Hinaya.

### The Case of Kawashima Selkon

I would like to stress the case of Kawashima because its roots and origin goes back to 1840 and because of its *aggressive* vision to diversifying their product in order to survive. The company started in 1840 producing Kimonos for Meiji Imperial House. It was the leading company because of its fine quality. They participated in the first International Fair in Paris to showed to the world their capabilities and astonished them all. Their key to success since early times has been the investment on Design. Their philosophy is to invest in Design, then \$ business will come about and follow the flood. Kimono was their favorite product. But because of the market downfall they had to change; nobody was buying kimono anymore. They develop different divisions/ products: 1. Interior design fabrics division, which created the demand for an non-existing product in Japanese society: curtains. They realized that Japanese lifestyle and houses were changing towards a western style, so they join the wave of modernization and created curtains for Japanese interior, in the beginning of 1900's. Then they develop a variety of products and fabrics for tapestry and interior design. 2. Automotive fabrics division, They make fabric carpets and seat covers. 30% of fabrics for cars in

Japan are made in Kawashima. They sell to the EU, China, Europe, and India, it became a global company. They develop a research division for this market to deal with issues like safety, function, design, sustainability and eco-design, and technology. They are developing new fabrics, new products with high-tech approach, or example Banex and Fab-Ace. 3. Theater Curtains division, They come up with the idea of making a art pieces for Theater Curtain. They invite artists, well known artists to design the painting, and they reproduce it with a special technique of knots. Artists like Isamu Noguchi, Le Corbusier among others had designed for Kawashima. The curtain is an enormous, gigantic piece of art of 20m x 10m height. They only produce 30 pieces a year, it takes 3 months to produce and costs around 80 million yens. This idea was totally out of the blue... it didn't exist anywhere in the world. The government and performance community accepted it and now it became part of the culture. They develop this idea to be able to show their best technology and challenging technique in a unique product. Nowadays every theater in every city wants a kawashima curtain, design by their artists and featuring their identity on it. 4. Traditional division that goes down to only producing Oby, the belt for kimonos! So from the high quality company that produced the best Kimonos in Japan in 1840 to a global company that supports traditional culture in Japan, with a school to train their employees and any artist interested in traditional textile. Kawashima Textil School is the best Textile school in Japan.

#### • Tableware

Japan has one of the world's earliest dated pottery culture, the Jomon culture (10,000 b.c.- 300 b.c.). Nevertheless there is no known direct with today's traditional pottery. Today, I would say there are 3 main branches in Japanese ceramics: ordinary tableware products, artistic art-object and sculpture and tea ceremony ceramics. A good ceramist in Japan is the one that can make work for each of these branches. Most Japanese pottery is stoneware, 1250°C. There is also porcelain, a small amount of earthenware and Raku. In Japan a peculiar kind of kiln, Anagrama or climbing kiln, arrived from Asian Continent in the early centuries of this era. The Anagrama kiln allows such temperatures to be sensitively controlled. Unglazed ware have the longest history in Japan. They derived from the Sue ware fired in Anagrama Kilns. The most famous unglazed pottery centers in Japan are Bizen ware, Shigaraki, Tokoname, Echizen, Tamba and Suzu ware. I visited Shigaraki, Tokoname and Tamba. Being Tokoname the one I liked the most for its rare black-brown, rough clay. Shigaraki doesn't use the Anagrama kiln anymore, but Tokoname and Tamba are still in use. Glazed wares were produced at an early date but at different sites, trying to emulate Chinese pots, but Japanese glazed stoneware has its real start after the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi's abortive invasions of Korea. They also called this wars the "Potters Wars" (1594-1597). The result of this military failures was the arrival of Korean potters to Japan, who either started new potteries or revitalized Japanese old kilns. All the Japanese glazed were the result, direct or indirect, of this input of Korean techniques, including an efficient kick wheel and the climbing Anagrama kilns. Among the glazed ware I visited Arita, famous for its production in Porcelain, Kiyomizu in Kyoto where I went once a week to work in my stuff, Okinawa Island a very different ware from the rest of Japan, and Ontayaki a town where Bernard Leach and Yanagi personally visited in the early times of Mingei Kan. See Annex document for further information of these towns.

The amazing aesthetic in Japanese pottery is all about allowing the materials, processes and tools to speak out by themselves. This aesthetics comes in large part from the tea ceremony and the wabi-sabi concept of beauty. It is far too much to get involved to explain that here. It will be enough to say that Japanese pottery displays a kind of intimacy and affectionate quality that does not interfere with expressive or artistic strength. Japanese stoneware is easy to relate to. The technical proficiency of all the potters in Japan is so internalized that it is just a matter of fact: They are all great potters technically speaking, they know the clay as if it was their own skin; so the technique is the unseen support for the appreciation of art by the potters and by ordinary citizen. I had never seen a society that supports and understands so well ceramics. For example, in the case of a Japanese meal, not only is food savored, but the vessels as well. Each container is noticed and admired, Japanese people all say the plate is the *picture frame* for the food and it should also be appreciated on its own. So the wares in which Japanese food is served provide nourishment to every aspect of the human soul and body. That is also why the production of ceramics in the market place stays stable even on crisis or recession.

Tableware in Japan, differs from western tableware drastically in many aspects. The first thing that is important to notice is that in Japan, Small is Beautiful: the scale is considerably smaller than in western tables. In a Japanese table there is always a variety of materials, the more diverse a tableware looks, the best. In Japan does not exist the idea of unify tableware: same dishes, with same design, and same size. In Japanese tableware everything is different. Materials are freely combined in harmonious and spontaneous ways. The demand for lacquer objects was very strong before WW II, but now it has decreased considerably, specially because it is very expensive, but also because needs special care, so it doesn't fit with modern accelerated lifestyle. Additionally it is losing importance compared with cheap imports from China and Thailand. The case of ceramics, *Yakimono*, is also very interesting. Japanese people love for ceramics. The appreciation for traditional ceramics has helped to keep the demand of ceramics stable. Tea ceremony ritual is an important part of their identity and cultural basis, it is embedded in the Zen tradition and away from religious and conservative spheres, drinking tea is part of everyday life in the office, house, and streets of Japan. It should always be done in a beautiful ceramic cup. The prices of bamboo and wood carved products, on the other hand, are very expensive, compared to cheap imports from China and other Asian countries. Bamboo and wood products market is totally dominated by other countries cheap imports which evolved in a situation where Japanese bamboo products only have a chance at higher prices without not much practical uses and functions.

- **Furniture and interior products**

In terms of traditional crafts for interior decoration the Buddhist altars, Hikone Bustudan, represent an important product. The appreciation for furniture of this type has changed for low price products. There are also traditional Japanese "wardrobe/closets" a small type of drawer of 40cm height with drawers. This kind of furniture, made out of beautiful paulownia wood are expensive, so little by little the demand and its production decreases. In this area, there are also cheap imports from other countries that are dominating the market. So traditional products, locally produced with traditional techniques are moving towards the category of luxury product. The Japanese people seem to identify very well with Scandinavian taste, so there are a lot of shops that sell Scandinavian products and furniture. Marimekko is all over the place in Japan and Alvar Aalto furniture as well. I would like to stress to cases that among the vast variety of interior products, are a successful story Design and business-wise.

**The case of Hiyoshiya, Wagasa Maker**

For more than 150 years Hiyoshiya Co. Ltd has been manufacturing traditional Japanese umbrellas, *Wagasa*. About 10 years ago, with the demand for traditional Japanese umbrella decreasing dramatically, Kotaro San actual President, decided to get involved in his wife's family business in order to help it survive. He learned the technique from Zero and in this way took a deep dive into the thousand-year history, manufacturing evolution and cultural importance. Later on he began thinking of new ways to apply this unique craft in contemporary products. Kotaro identified three main elements of the traditional Japanese umbrella: a bamboo frame, a folding mechanism, and the warm atmosphere created when light shines through the *Washi* paper. He thought of lighting products as the perfect way to reinterpret these elements – they could perpetuate the essence of *Wagasas* in designs that would fit in contemporary homes. After several failed attempts he started working closely with designers, Hiyoshiya developed a collection of pendant and base lights that are manufactured using the same materials and craft techniques the company has mastered over the past century. Today Hiyoshiya, is a successful family-run enterprise that creates contemporary products that fit into any modern context. Their beautiful, functional and sustainable designs keep this important craft alive using green materials like bamboo wood and traditional Japanese paper, *Washi*, and plastic with iron mechanisms depending on the market they want to address. Hiyoshiya Co. Ltd has been eligible as a protected item by the Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries since 1996.

**The Case of Kaikado, Tea caddies producer.**

Since 130 years ago, Kaikado Co. Ltd has been producing hand-made Japanese tea caddies designed to last for generations. Takahiro Yagi, the 6th generation of tea caddy makers, learned the craft at a very young age by watching his grandfather and father work at the shop, but he went first to University and after he finished his English Studies at the age of 24 years he started working officially in the business. They were the first generation that invented this product back in 1875 using a new material — tin plate — brought to Japan after Edo-Period, when it open its borders. The special thing about these boxes is they have double-wall airtight seal that helps to maintain the flavor and freshness of tea leaves for a long period, which made it an instant success with dealers and merchants. Today, Kaikado stays true to its origins and hand-made process of over 130 steps. Over time, the following generations introduced new designs and materials like brass and copper, but Kaikado's spirit has been left untouched. One of the most notable characteristics is its beautiful aging process: with the time and use it becomes more beautiful by the changing tone of its exterior. Each of the materials has a subtle change of color at a different pace, copper is the quickest to show at 2 or 3 months, followed by brass that can take between 1 or 3 years, while tin can take as long as 5 years. Since Kaikado's tea caddies are made to last more than 100 years, their color can change dramatically.

- **Non Traditional Crafts**

Persian and Chinese carpets, enter the country and were well accepted by a strong economy in the 70s and 80s. Then Rattan furniture, bamboo baskets and other fibers, again, cheap imports enter the country. At some point all this products were locally produced but now, cheap imports have taken the market.

- **The Industry for presents in Japan**

Japan is a society based on gratitude. Giving presents are part of everyday relationships at work and at home. The amount of money that this industry moves must be insane. I haven't found the numbers, but it is very clear to me, that every time I have a meeting I have to bring a present, every time I am invited to a house I have to bring a present, every time I go to another prefecture I should come back with a present for... somebody. Every time I go into a room with Japanese people, might be a restaurant, the dentistry clinic, a friend's house, my weekly calligraphy lesson, a shop or a workshop I will go back home with a present in my hands. All the relationships you are involved with, will practice the never ending spiral exchange of presents. The demand for presents has an important participation in the crafts industry, specially the traditional crafts of high end price. Also ceramics and lacquer objects are well appreciated as luxury and special presents. And another important participation of this market is the "omiyage" (souvenir) industry, which also moves an important amount of resources. Crafts are a typical souvenir

for tourist market. There has been important and interesting projects on Regional Development through a concept Japanese people created that is called Production Districts where many artisans of the same region join forces and move to live together in order to attract the tourist market. I will talk about in detail about this subject later on in this text.

### 3. Local Production of Crafts Industry

According to statistics, more than 99% of Japanese enterprises are Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and as for traditional craft industries, Medium Enterprises (MEs) with a few family-member employees are the main supporters of the industries. This kind of industries can be found all over the country, it is the basis of Japanese economy, not only in Crafts but also applies for High technology companies like Asyck where I had the chance to participate in a project as part of Yamamoto Laboratory at Kyoto Institute of Technology. Asyck is a family business of LED technology, run by one man, Mr. Kamino, where 17 people work hard to reach 1 thousand million JPY a year. Japanese model of development is based on Medium Enterprises.

In the case of Crafts MEs, they have an important role in defining the distinctive character of each region. In the same way than in Mexico, Brazil or Kenya the traditional craft industries in Japan emerges from regional culture, they are indeed the “regional cultural industries.” Because of this background, traditional craft industries developed as key industries in the region, enhancing the regional economy. Their rich historical background have often made traditional craft products a powerful attraction for tourists. So they have also take advantage of this fact by promoting tourism along with crafts. Design has always been a key factor in the development of both industries. As Yamamoto sensei stated: "Develop culture, then money will flow". In Japan this has proved to be very true. Design has been the fuel for that flow.

However, it was also interesting to realize that Japan is also struggling with the same issues than non-developed nations. In Japan as other countries, the traditional craft industries is declining each year at accelerated rates. According to a survey conducted by the Association for the Promotion of Traditional Crafts Industries, in 2004 the number of employees was about a hundred thousand, the number of enterprises was 17,793, and the production value about 194.2 billion JPY. This indicates that the size of the traditional craft industries has decreased by more than half compared to the peak from the later 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s. Sociologist Nestor García Canclini believes there are various reasons for this decline such as the establishment of the mass- production and mass-consumption economy system resulting from technological innovation, the revolution in industrial materials, and the development of the mass media. Also with the mass production of standardized and low-priced daily goods, the traditional craft items have difficulty competing with the modern industrial products in the market, and thus their market share has decreased. The same story in every country... this is a direct result of globalized markets. However Dr. Canclini believes that far from being an impediment for the development of Crafts the forces of modernity are opportunities to foster change.

Additionally, with the development of the economy, employees expect more from their jobs, and this creates another problem. MEs engaged in manufacturing traditional craft products and related work, do not have great conditions of employment such as salary, holidays and welfare programs. They are not bad, but they are still inadequate, but this fact is one of the reasons why the crafts MEs have been unable to attract the young labor force. One of other main reasons is the burden on employers regarding apprenticeship. Since it takes quite a long time for artisans to acquire enough skills, which are indispensable for traditional craft production, their allowance during the learning period always puts pressure on the management. Against such a backdrop, some local governments have begun to provide support for the employers when they hire new craftspeople. In order to maintain and develop important local industries, such policy measures could be effective in the long run.

#### Annual Production of Crafts in Japan

	1990`s
Annual production Crafts industry (1989)	¥ 786, 274 millions
Annual production Crafts industry ( 1991)	¥ 845, 923 millions
Number of Producers of Traditional Crafts	36, 968 workshops
Number of employees	244, 904 persons
Number of Designated Crafts	174 items (1991)
Annual production of the 174 items	¥ 499, 375 millions

Source: Adex Data Trade  
2010

(Only in Oaxaca we have 28,000 workshops)

This money represents:

0.16% of the total of manufactured industry in Japan

and a 0.3% of the total of MEs production of the manufactured sector

Comparing this numbers with the 1980s statistics, the behavior was better by the end of 1980s. In 1989 this industry started to increase according to the bottom line of the industry of the fiscal year 1989.

**The Designated Production Districts reality in numbers**

Source: Japan Traditional Craft Center

Of the 174 Designated Production Districts in 1990:

number of employees	215, 590 workers in 1989
number of employees	280, 288 workers in 1984

number of companies	27, 348 companies in 1989
number of companies	33, 909 companies in 1984

Age of workers

over 50 years	54% in 1989
over 50 years	22% in 1984

The system of production is normally by using hand tools and a few machinery. Some of them have high technology in kilns or furnaces for ceramics, but generally speaking, everything is done by hand, with simple and traditional techniques, but with very very good infrastructure and working conditions. The working atmosphere is through a system of apprenticeships. In terms of hiring and training this industry differs substantially from other industries, so called, modern. So this has damage the image of crafts industry among potential young workers.

**Traditional Crafts Production Tendency**

Source: Japan Traditional Craft Center

Textile products	23 %
Dying fabrics	14 %
Metal items	8 %
Ceramics	8 %

Others: lacquer, wood items, bamboo items, japanese paper, altars, toys and traditional puppets.

The producers of traditional crafts are spread out along the country`s full extension. (See attached map) Generally speaking, they are integrated on what they called Production Districts. This districts are characterized by the division of work. In Setoyaki, the process of getting the clay, cleaning the clay, firing and painting are usually executed by different and separated entities. This kind of organization applies for many ceramic districts and other crafts.

Textile industry is characterized by a high level of division of work, which was inherited to the modern industry of Fashion. Nevertheless crafts production for small markets or geographically limited markets are produced one by one in-house. For example the wood items, bamboo items, traditional toys and puppets.

Due to the lower hand labour and lack of workers one can observe two different situations inside the production processes:

1. Adoption and integration of machinery and minimization of handmade processes
2. Preservation of traditional production processes, if possible.

The high quality products are totally hand made produced, like for example, high level ceramics like Raku.

Pushed by the low demand on traditional items, a good number of districts is organizing themselves to cope with the crisis. Their strategies they have been using are:

1. creation of groups and associations of producers, for example the Crafts tour in Nara.
2. involvement in the the preservation of traditional techniques, key role.
3. using their experience and knowledge in the creation of new products, satisfactory results
4. open new markets by establishing strategic alliances with other crafts, mixture of 2 techniques for one product.

**4. Crafts Industry Promotion Strategies in Japan**

The main institution in charge of the promotion of Craft industry is The Association for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries. It was established in 1974 as an organization affiliated with the government Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). The Association`s efforts to promote traditional Japanese crafts aims to remind us the quality of handwork and keep a place in the globalized world for products created directly from human effort. Handmade objects are not a thing of the past, however economic factors may increase their market price. The Japanese Cultural Agency also has an independent program of promoting crafts that complements the work of the Association. The later economical development and changes in the social conditions has affected the crafts industries all over the world, The threat that they may disappear is always present; Japan is not exception. For this reason, many traditional craft industries that date from the Edo-Period (1600-1868) face deep problems.

The history of traditional crafts in Japan has a long history behind as a service economy for everyday life items. Even in Feudal times the lords would protect and promote specific techniques in order to develop their kingdoms and culture.

In 1974 the Japanese government created the Law for the promotion of Traditional Crafts from Japan. The Law for the promotion of Traditional Crafts from Japan was created to preserve traditional techniques in Japan, it was revised in 1975 and 1992. The new Law was designed not only to revitalize the Crafts industry through the use of traditional techniques, but to promote the production of new designs and new resources that aim for the development of new markets and to promote the alliances between distributors and production districts. The items selected under the protection of this law are eligible for subsidies to train their successors, for the development of new markets, credits and tax incentives. The Japan Traditional Craft Center gives them a logotype, so the consumer may easily identify the "certificate" of Traditional Craft.



To be eligible, the product must have the following criteria:

- A. The article must be mainly intended for everyday use
- B. The article must be primarily hand-made
- C. The article must be manufactured adopting traditional techniques
- D. The materials should be mainly those which have been traditionally employed
- E. The industry must be of a regional nature, part of a production district.

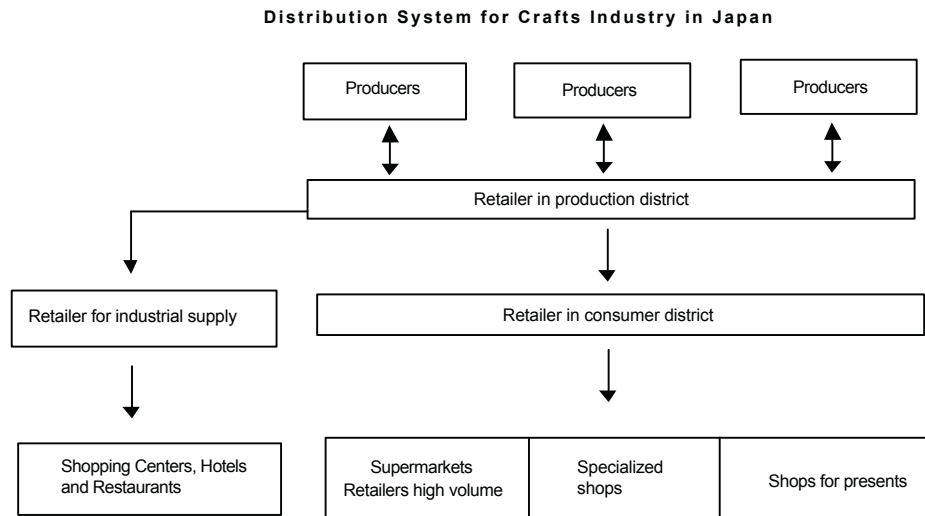
The products that do not fulfill the fifth requirement are treated as "low scale productive districts" and they can also apply for all the benefits offered by this law.

In addition, the government has another program to enhance the local MEs. There are a variety of promotion strategies of local industries. One example is the "Center for the promotion of Local Industries" which receives budget from local and federal government and specifically financed by The Agency for Small and Medium Manufacturers. They have developed the so called "Crafts Villas" that one can find all over Japanese territory. Successful examples are: Morioka Craft Village, the Japanese Paper Villa in Gifu, or the crafts Villa in Nara with more than 200 artisans integrated in one project. The financial structure to access for economical support is as follows: Artisans should present a project with budget included as a potential business plan. Government evaluates the proposal and if they think is doable then they will accept it and get 33.33% of resources from local government, 33.33% from federal government, and the artisans should invest the other 33.33%. The project will need evaluation every year during the following 3 years. The credit should be paid back to the government, and will be invested in other artisans projects or similar initiatives for the promotion of crafts industries. Many times the citizens of the towns where the villas are intended to be established are the ones who also donate and participate in financing the artisans part. It is really amazing system, that works very well in a society that is used to be generous and that has been proved to be deliberately honest and committed with the country's development.

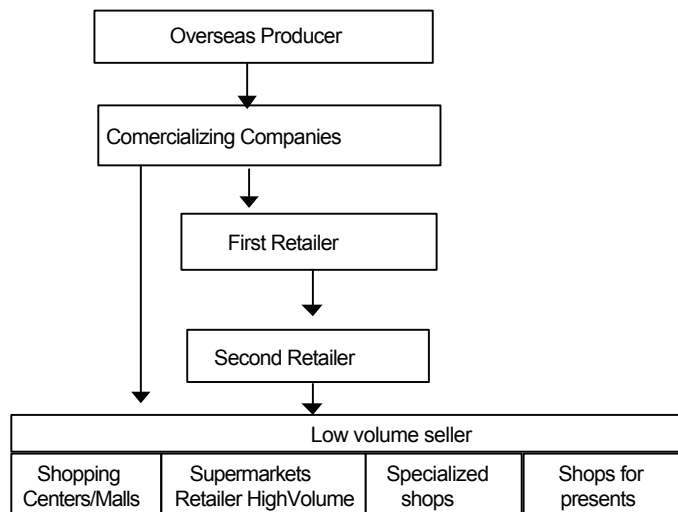
### 5. Japanese Crafts Distribution System

According to a document of Japanese Craft Center, the distribution venues for traditional crafts and non-traditional in Japan are totally different. For traditional crafts there was a system, already discarded, where the intermediary would provide the artisans with raw materials, a kind of subcontract. But now, the intermediary would get an order from a consumer district, lets say a shopping mall, then find the artisan responsible to provide the order, give him a 50% in advance. The document doesn't explain why the old system is not in use anymore. Probably the economic system has find its way so that the shopping mall owner may find the producers directly. But it makes more difficult for the artisan its every day management work. It is easier to have a middle man that deals with the end of the consumer chain. The distribution system of the industry for presents is basically through shopping centers, it should always be consider as a serious selling point. Specialized persons are in charge of this kind of venue. High quality crafts may be well sold in this area but in limited quantities.

5. Japanese Crafts Distribution System



**A General Distribution System for imported Crafts**





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**Katsura Imperial Villa,**

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**Nihon Mingei kan Museum Archives**

4-3-33 Komaba Meguro-ku, Tokyo, 153-0041 Tel (81) 03-3467-4537 [www.mingeikan.or.jp](http://www.mingeikan.or.jp)