



Management of Traditional Crafts without Aiming for Efficiency and Expanding Scale: The Case of Japanese Handmade Paper Production

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Research in Craft Studies

1. The Creativity of Crafts / Crafts as Industries: These studies often discussed from the perspectives of community-based business, sustainability, creative industries, and value as art (ex: Luckman, 2015).
2. Consumer and Market of Crafts (ex: Khan and Amir, 2013; Campbell, 2015).
3. Legitimacy and Authenticity as Tradition Craft: There is research on how traditional industries and traditional culture are recognized by society (ex: Sasaki et al, 2022; Beverland, 2005).

Assumptions in Existing Research

- The productivity of crafts is low, and It is difficult to maintain under the market economy.
- The productivity of crafts as industries should be increased.

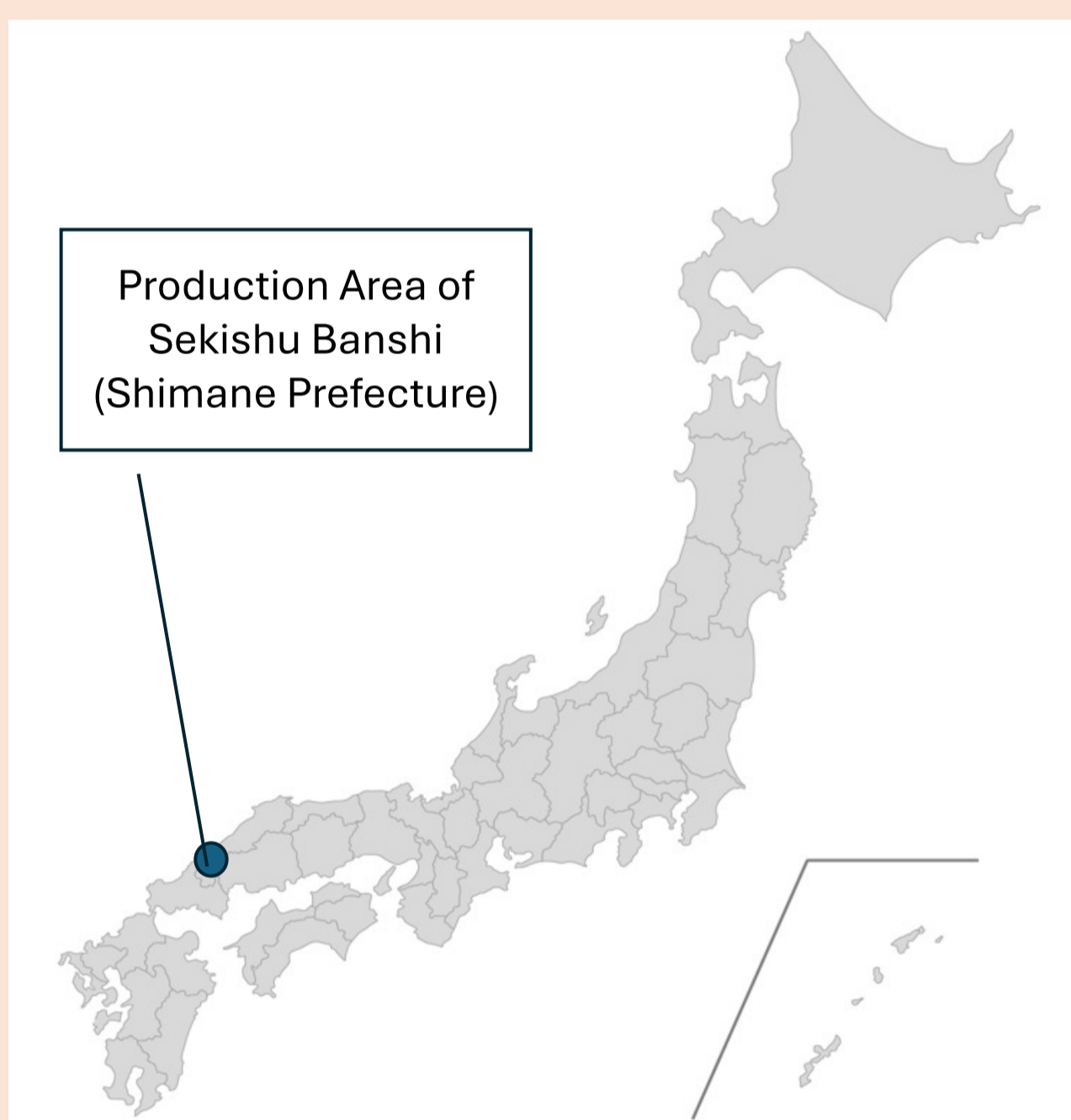
However, some craft businesses, specially traditional crafts in Japan, are not aiming for expansion or productivity improvement. It continues the business through reduction in scale and low-productivity handwork production methods.

Purpose of the study

- This study focuses on the divergence between the current situation of traditional crafts in Japan and the idea of economic growth and industrial promotion that seeks efficiency and expansion of scale, based on the perspective of critical management studies (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Yanagi, 2023),
- It clarifies how traditional crafts in postwar Japan have been at the mercy of economic growth, and how they have developed and declined over time.
- It also shows how traditional crafts have been carried on without aiming to expand the scale or improve productivity from the case studies, not from the perspective of market expansion and increased production efficiency, which is the assumption of conventional management studies.

Case Study “SEKISHU WASHI”

- Traditional Paper made by hand in Shimane Prefecture, located in western Japan.
- Paper produced in the area is water resistant and less-fade by using Kozo (paper mulberry), which grows wild in the area.
- There are only 4 families engaged in the paper production now. The three families are involved it as family business And, one family is a farmer and works as a second job.
- Currently, paper from this area is shipped for cultural assets and calligraphy.



History of “SEKISHU WASHI”

- Paper production was developed as a side business for farmers.
- In 1969, it was designated as Important Intangible Cultural Property under the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties.
- In the 1970s, many farmers developed paper production as their main business..
- In 1989, it was designated as Traditional Craft Product by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry under the Act on the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries.
- In 2009, it was designated as UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Note: There are other handmade paper production areas in Japan. Other two production areas and techniques are also designated as UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage. Total nine production areas and its products are designated as Traditional Craft Product. Total five techniques are designated as Important Intangible Cultural Properties.

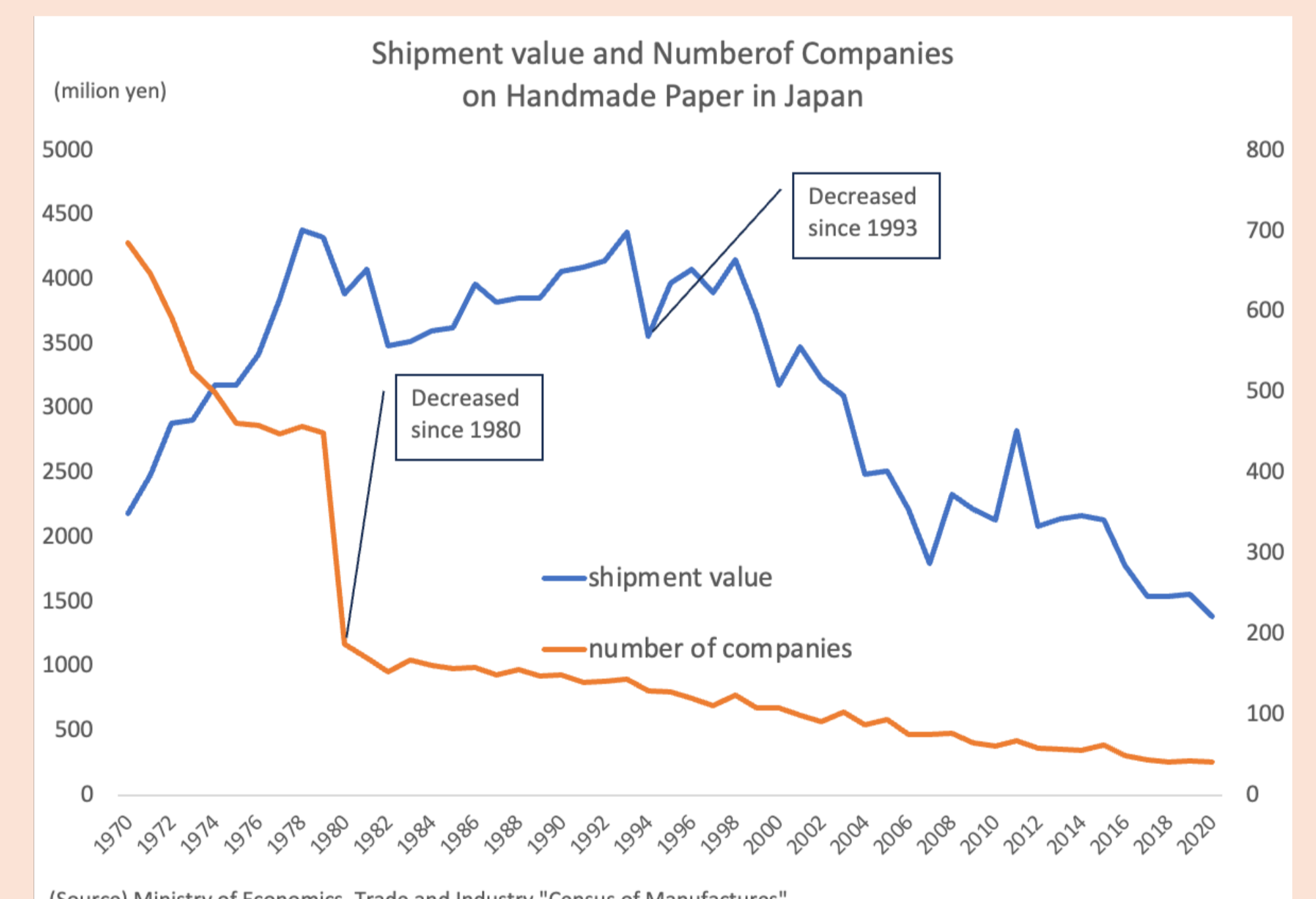
Methods and Data

1. Participant Observation in 2020-2023. I stayed in the production area for 4 periods of 3 days each.
2. Semi-structured and open-ended interview with 9 informants in the production. 5 craft persons (4 families), 3 administrative staff of the local government, 1 farmer who grow the row materials.
3. Statistical data on the volume of handmade Japanese paper shipped and exported.
4. Historical documents and archives about Sekishu Washi.

Result

- The shipment value of handmade paper increased during 1970s. Paper production became a full-time business for farmers, influenced by the high economic growth in 1960s.
- Other paper production areas shifted to machine production, but Sekishu Washi production area missed the chance of mechanization.
- In 1980s, the number of paper production families in the area decreased as a result of shift to a full-time business. In 1990s, the shipment values of handmade paper rapidly declined.
- The handmade technique remained, as a consequence of the non-mechanization.
- This area has historically had connections with wholesalers in Kyoto, the historical city with many traditional arts and event. The handmade paper production technique is required in the field of calligraphy and restoration of cultural assets in Kyoto.
- The demand for cultural property restoration has spread to other areas. It is now exported overseas.

- The raw materials for producing the distinctive paper in the area became difficult to get due to the environmental change. So, the craft persons started growing the raw materials themselves with the support of the local government, farmers, and agricultural experiment station.
- Today, during the season, the entire community in the area works together to harvest and process the plants.
- The quality of paper is controlled by the integrated production.
- All craft persons decided to succeed the family business of paper production after the experiences employed in the other companies.
- The area has become a production center that can meet special demand such as cultural assets, calligraphy and others.
- Several artists and designers from Japan and abroad visit and stay in the area to study the technique and create their works since 2010s.



Discussion

- Due to economic growth, people believed that expanding the business is necessary, and devoted themselves to the paper production business.
- It had to be maintained as an industry for people in the area, even though it was originally a side business.
- After declined, craft persons do not pay much attention to preserve the tradition. They chose the path of the craft person as a way of working and living.
- Despite the institutional pressure to preserve tradition and industrialize the paper production, they continue their activities without being swayed by it.
- Craft persons think someone will succeed the technique of handmade paper production, because there are only four families left, and all families has no next successors, but there are people who want to learn the technique and stay there from other region in Japan and overseas.
- It could be said people can free from the norms of industrialization and maintaining tradition, because of the situation that craft persons in the area get the profit of the remaining players and they have no choice but to adopt integrated production from raw materials to paper.
- It bring the change in attitude toward work. To create is to live

Issues in the future

- We will never be freed from the norms, unless the decline?
- This is only one small-scale craft case study. Other case studies are necessary to generalize the findings.

