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Handicrafts and Gender in Modern Japan

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Abstract

This article[1] traces the transformation of handicrafts (*shugei*) in modern Japan, from a concept which referred generally to manual skills to an exclusively female sphere of activity that incorporated sewing, weaving, sericulture, and cooking. The first part of the article sets the stage by discussing the role of education in the gendering of handicrafts and by defining the sphere of handicrafts during the Meiji period through a detailed analysis of a handful of similar concepts which circulated at the time. In the second part, the article turns to the ways in which the new concept of handicrafts was disseminated through the medium of textbooks and popular magazines. The examination of these media suggests that handicraft-making was conceptualized and explained as a type of activity that offered comfort and cultivated feminine virtues, while also preparing women for their future role as mothers. Furthermore, handicrafts acted as a sort of safety valve for the labor market, offering women the possibility of supporting themselves in times of need and supplying cheap labor in times of war, when there was a shortage of male labor.

Keywords: handicrafts, Meiji period, domestic advice manuals, household education, female labor

The Japanese term *shugei* refers to handwork, creative activities, and domestic pursuits in which women were expected to engage in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan.

Shugei was a widespread activity, covering handicrafts created, used, and consumed within a domestic family environment. However, due to foreign export demand and the fact that the more general category of handicrafts often constituted a form of supplementary work, handicrafts in modern Japan—a category known as *kōgei*—also held value as products in their own right.

As this article will discuss, the main creators of *shugei* were women who belonged to the middle and upper strata of society and had no need to work for money. On the one hand, it was considered demeaning for women to engage in work, but idleness was also frowned upon, which made it necessary for these women to search for an occupation. *Shugei* was precisely the type of work ideally suited for this situation, as Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker have shown in their effective depictions of the interconnections between women and handicrafts; women's "native modesty, and tenderness of men towards them, exempts them from public business, to pass their time in imitating fruit and flowers."[2] Although Pollock and Parker's research is concerned with handicrafts in Western Europe, it is also applicable to the situation in late nineteenth-century Japan. Writing on embroidery, they point out that: "The act of embroidering, the hours a woman spent sitting stitching for love of home and family, symbolized the domestic virtues of tireless industry, selfless service and praiseworthy thrift."[3] In other words, these artifacts were not supposed to circulate as commodities, but were intended for the exclusive use and benefit of the family. It was precisely the act of allowing their wives to engage in a type of handwork which offered no economic security that brought social status to men from an economically powerful background. It was an action through which they displayed their own power.

This article will demonstrate three main points about *shugei* in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan. First, that *shugei* was a generic name for a broad range of handwork performed by women. Even the modern conception of *shugei,* which developed hand in hand with the establishment of a female education system, was based on the premise that handicraft was exclusively a female activity. Furthermore, *kōgei* and *shugei* were not concepts associated with a higher or lower rank, but were fundamentally distinguished by reference to the gender of the creator. Thus it can be said that hierarchy within the world of craft was a result of gender norms.

Second, the article will show how the impressive amount of *shugei* textbooks published during this period contributed to the wide popularization and educational importance of this activity. Such texts not only conceptualized handicrafts as simple techniques, but also prescribed and disseminated the history, purpose, meaning, and benefits of each type of handicraft work, such as crochet and embroidery.

From simple handicrafts which could be executed at an early age to those which required a high degree of skill, women were encouraged to continue making handicrafts suitable for their age and social station. Handicraft was considered an easy skill, with

a strong ornamental dimension, which also provided some financial support in times of need. The interconnection of handicrafts and feminine virtues (*futoku*) took the form of a beautiful, aesthetic, and non-remunerative domestic act, as well as wifely monetary assistance at times of financial crisis. It characterized the lives of all women and was an activity none could escape.

Third, the article explores how, quite apart from the textbooks, society encouraged women to pursue *shugei*.[4] School education, women's magazines, and other forms of media addressed women of all ages, classes, and regional backgrounds, encouraging them to become interested in handicrafts and keeping them up to date with the latest trends. Women were aware of *shugei* even if they showed no inclination toward handicrafts. As we will see, the meaning of modern craft in this context was grounded in the belief that women performed this activity. Their final aim was the acquisition of feminine virtues. Handicrafts played the role of cultivating the character of women, educating them, and reforming them. To put it differently, *shugei* was a way of encouraging all women to be feminine.

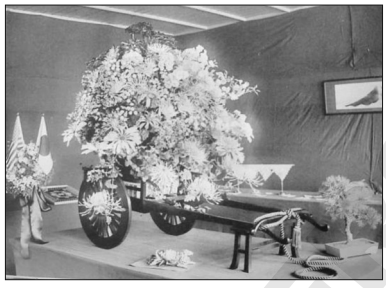

Fig 1 Panama Pacific International Exposition, creations of the Artificial Flowers Section, 1914. Reproduced from Akiko Yamasaki, *Kindai Nihon no "shugei" to jendaa* ["Handicrafts" and Gender in Modern Japan] (Yokohoma: Seori Shobō, 2005), Repository of the Alumni Association of the Joshi University of Art and Design.[5]

The Language of Handicrafts in Modern Japan

The concept of *shugei* was redefined after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, as Western culture was imported into Japan on a mass scale.[6] It came to include crafts such as wool yarn knitting, lace-making, artificial flowers, beadwork, hand-weaving, batik, *oshie* (cloth appliqué), millinery, leather crafts, and nut carvings. During this time, most imported Western items were elite commodities accessible only to the more privileged, due to their cost and scarcity. As a result, generally speaking *shugei* skills [trans.: i.e. catering more to the non-elite] were learned as part of a school education.

One example of the way in which *shugei* was employed at the beginning of the Meiji period, prior to the influx of Western-style handicrafts and their systematization through school education, is found in Nakamura Masanao's *Saigoku Risshihen*, published in 1870. This text is a translation of Samuel Smiles's book *Self Help* (1859), which praises artists like Claude Lorraine for their manual skill: "His mastery of hand [here translated *shugei*] and eye eventually secured for him the first rank among the landscape painters."[7] If we accept Nakamura's text as a faithful illustration of the word's usage in the social context of his time, then we can argue that in 1870 *shugei* was perceived as expressing skills and artistic power associated with all work of the hand (*teshigoto*). The

term *shugei* as used in this context does not refer to "handicraft," but to technique, skills (*ginō*), and artistic power (*gijutsuryoku*). In other words, it refers to "crafts" (*gei*) of the "hand" (*te*, also *shu*) and it is not used to indicate a specific field of production.

In 1872, the government passed the Fundamental Code of Education (*Gakusei*), which aimed to bring modern education to the remotest corners of the country.[8] The *Gakusei* made eight years of elementary education compulsory for all boys and girls.[9] It outlined, on the one hand, a very broad system of education, which incorporated modern learning, skills, and morals. On the other hand it introduced, exclusively for girls, extracurricular subjects related to domestic life. This was based on Section 26, which stated that "Elementary girls' schools shall teach *shugei* in addition to the curriculum of compulsory education."[10] The term *shugei* as used in this context seemed to revive the concept of *fukō* (women's work, crafts) inherited from feudal times.[11] In short, it can be argued that through the exclusive introduction into elementary girls' schools, *shugei*—a word that formerly indicated skills related to handwork—came to be determined by gender. As employed by Nakamura Masanao, the word *shugei* had no gender determination; but once it incorporated the framework of *fukō*, it became a practice restricted to women alone.

The mission statement of Tōyō Women's Crafts School, founded in Tokyo in the late 1800s, reflected the importance of *shugei* within educational establishments:

> The aim of women's learning is, needless to say, to cultivate the character and inculcate feminine virtues. Nevertheless, the training of a full-fledged, self-reliant spirit should not be neglected. Pursuits such as the arts greatly encourage these [qualities] and cultivate taste. We believe that, in order to achieve this aim, teaching students the road of independence is the most necessary aspect of a woman's education. There are things we must learn in this respect. We venture to establish this school with this aim in mind and pledge to cultivate virtuous individuals. What can be expected of us is that it will become an environment of perseverance, female modesty, and progressive spirit, a model for the education of all girls.[12]

It can be argued that this was an interpretation of handicrafts which emulated the common understanding of *shugei* as an activity that opened up the road of independence for women and "pledged to cultivate virtuous individuals" by means of learning artistic skills (*bijutsu gigei*). Accordingly, the curriculum of the Tōyō School consisted of both familiar domestic crafts—sewing, embroidery, flower arranging—as well as other subjects such as logic, English, Japanese writing, and applied sciences.

Surveys of other girls' vocational schools confirm that, in the context of girls' education, handicrafts (*shugei*) were separated by age group. For younger girls, sewing predominated and basic needlework was the topic of study. In older girls' schools, a more specialized handicraft education was pursued, with some institutions established for the explicit purpose of teaching such work. The range of handicrafts consisted of basic crafts such as sewing, embroidery,

artificial flowers, design, dyeing, and knitting, all of which were deemed suitable for women.

Shugei in Context: The Sphere of Handicrafts

To get a better grasp of the meaning and framework of *shugei* in modern Japan, let us examine a few apparent synonyms of the term. Despite the fact that the Fundamental Code of Education (*Gakusei*) of 1872 was one trigger for the gendering of *shugei*, domestic craft was not gendered and institutionalized simply because these regulations were adopted. Rather, it is entirely possible that *shugei* was not exclusively undertaken by women until the 1880s–90s. Although it is difficult to establish with any degree of precision to what extent a certain concept becomes generalized or shared, I have examined a number of dictionaries and lexicons published during the Meiji period as one possible indicator of such trends.[13] *Shugei* did not appear in any of the publications examined; instead, other words such as *kōgei* and *gigei* were used. The difference between these two concepts is that while *gigei* referred broadly to skills, *kōgei* denoted a more limited range of skills and their products. *Gigei* was defined in the *Iroha jiten* (ABC Dictionary) in 1888 as "accomplishments, arts, skills," while *kōgei* also referred to works of art (*kōsaku no gei*). In the *Nihon daijirin* (lit. Great Forest of Words of Japan), *gigei* appeared as accomplishments, arts, skills, performances, while *kōgei* indicated skills used to make things. The word *gigei* did not appear in the *Genkai* Dictionary of Japan, but *kōgei* was defined as skills related to the arts and *kōgyō* as an enterprise related to the arts. Thus, although the field covered by these two words was identical, they could be distinguished based on the breadth of their scope.

Shugei was incorporated into the framework of *gigei*, but even as part of "accomplishments, arts, skills," it carried a stronger connotation of arts, rather than accomplishments or skills. It was also distinguished from *kōgei*. The art historian Satō Dōshin points out that, before the birth of the word *bijutsu* (fine arts), *gigei* connected the concept and practice of *kōgei* to that of *geijutsu* (arts) in its function as a "word which indicated an act of creation."[14] It is possible, therefore, that both practically and conceptually, *gigei* was used as a term which expressed both nuances.[15] The word *gigei* is relatively similar in meaning to *gijutsu* but, as it contains the character for arts (*gei*), it indicates a higher level of refinement than does *gijutsu* (*jutsu* referring to technique). Thus it was also the most appropriate word for labeling the sub-section of *kōgei* (works of art) that was later repackaged as *bijutsu* (fine arts) in the Meiji period, including the genres of painting, architecture, and fine arts (also redefined during the Meiji period). Significantly, however, these two words were used simultaneously at this time: *bijutsu* when the genres were bundled together as a new concept and *gigei* when they were brought together as an already-existing one. Indeed, Satō also draws our attention to the fact that *gigei* is an older word which was selected from among the available traditional terminology; significantly, it was used in the Imperial Household Artist system created in 1890 for the purpose of protecting and encouraging traditional arts.[16] In short, the original range of reference was essentially the same, but two different words were used to

express it, in order to mark a difference in intention: *bijutsu* as creating the future and *gigei* as protecting the past.[17]

Satō's description of *gigei* as pertaining to the artistic dimension of work (*bijutsu*) is accurate, but examining accounts of *gigei* that appear in essays on handicrafts shows that it had other meanings outside those he ascribes to it. Considering the range of meanings of *shugei* and *gigei* as they appear in Shimoda Utako's *The Arts of Women* (1905) and *Compendium of Women's Handicrafts* (1899) allows us to argue that *gigei* was a generic name used to describe a relatively broad range of skills. According to one account, women mastered *gigei* to be able to sew, but should also try to apply embroidery to kimono collars or to decorate their interiors with artificial flowers and pressed plants. Other commentators suggested that drawing could also be practiced to a limited extent as a female art (*gigei*), but that it was unsuitable in an excessive amount, indicating that drawing too could be regarded as belonging to the category of *gigei*. It also included music and art; one commentator suggested that, apart from the usual subjects of study dedicated to women, there is a tendency to learn about drawing, works of art, and music; these being necessary to know about as one type of art (*gigei*) and believed to be an important means of cultivating ideas of beauty.

During the Meiji period, another word was also used as a synonym for *shugei*. This was *jokō*, an ancient term which appears in the "Balance of Commerce" of the *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian, second–first century BCE) and in the "Annals of Emperor Jing" of the *Hanshu* (The Book of Han, first century CE), where it was originally used to describe the crafts of women or, more generally, women's work: activities such as sewing, weaving, embroidery, knitting, crafts, flower pressing, and cloth appliqué produced or performed by women. The *jokōba* or women's colleges found in Japan in the early Meiji period also derived their name from this word, which means that they were places where women learned crafts.

Given that the types of crafts covered under the headings of *shugei* and *jokō* were very similar, we might conclude that they were used nearly as synonyms. On the contrary, however, their basic definitions appear to have been different. As I have previously suggested, *shugei* (handicrafts) was originally a broad name for women's handwork, which could also include the sphere of housework, and thus was a strongly gendered term. It incorporated a normative attitude which presumed that such work was either performed or should be performed by women. However, following the popularization of the concept of *shugei*, the establishment of a compulsory education system, and the development of a culture of literacy, the term came to describe a relatively fixed field of activity. Consequently, its gender determination became unclear: the gendered word was transformed into an established concept through the absorption of gender norms and institutionalization. The idea that *shugei* referred to female activity became widespread; as a result, the word came to be a recognized name for techniques and work such as embroidery and artificial flowers. Only when the process of establishing a fixed field of meaning was completed did the incorporation of men become logically possible.

Unlike *shugei*, whose etymology included no gendered roots, *jokō* explicitly names the gender of the performer (*jo* means "female"). In this case, the agent must be a woman, which means that linguistically it is impossible to overcome gender norms. This impossibility was regarded as extremely useful in incorporating women as members of the state in the fashioning of modern Japan.[18] What appeared from a female perspective as an absolute barrier was perceived from a male perspective as inviolable. In modern handicraft discourse, *shugei* and *gigei* were extremely close concepts, with *shugei* being regarded as one aspect of *gigei*. Although there are no documents which clearly distinguish between the two, there are many instances when they were used almost synonymously.

The difference between *shugei* and *kōgei*, introduced at the beginning of this article as a general word for "craft" or "art," is also relevant. According to Satō, "prior to the advent of 'fine art' (*bijutsu*), *kōgei* was the most inclusive concept" which existed in Japan, incorporating painting and sculpture as well as the genres now known as *kōgei*—ceramics, lacquer work, metal work, carpentry, stone work, weaving, etc. It came to acquire its contemporary meaning [trans. note: often, if problematically, equated to the English language "crafts" or "applied arts"] as a result of the institutionalization of *bijutsu* or fine arts, as practices were categorized differently by each of the government ministries responsible for their administration.[19] In education, while *kōgei* belonged to the field of arts, *shugei* belonged to the field of housekeeping and as such was to be exclusively learned by women. *Shugei* was thus a concept regulated by the gender of the maker, and this was not necessarily so for *kōgei*. In short, if the maker was a woman, the goods could technically be described both as *shugei* and *kōgei*. Activities such as knitting, embroidery, and dyeing thus came to be classified as *kōgei*, though there is indication that goods created through these activities were still regarded as specifically handicraft goods (*shugeihin*), even when sold as commodities on the market, as we will see in the next section.

The Discourse of Handicraft Textbooks

During their formative stage, *shugei* and *kōgei* were distinguished according to the gender factor. The gender of the maker generated a multitude of differences which span the sites of production and consumption, the production process, and the purpose of the product. It is therefore impossible to understand the lower status of handicrafts (*shugei*) as opposed to *kōgei* without a detailed examination of the variety of situations these differences have produced. Nowadays the term *shugei* does include a relatively wide range of handicrafts, such as embroidery, patchwork, and knitting, but during the Meiji period, this word incorporated many more activities. Textbooks published during the Meiji period give a good sense of the kind of activities subsumed and performed under this name.

The Meiji period witnessed the publication of a great variety of handicraft textbooks, guidebooks, and manuals, from items compiled for girls' schools, to publications targeted at the average housewife, to detailed work focused on particular skills. In the course of my research I was able to confirm that more than 280

single-authored handicraft textbooks were published during the Meiji period. This count includes textbooks generally addressing women's handiworks such as *shugei* and *gigei*, but there were also many publications that dealt with individual activities such as sewing and knitting, suggesting that each field possessed its independent system of learning. While there were some general handicraft textbooks, more than 60 percent of the total number of publications in my survey were textbooks on sewing. This was due to the fact that, unlike utilitarian sewing, which had been considered a compulsory field of activity for women from the beginning of the Meiji period, *shugei* was regarded as having less practical value and containing a strong element of ornamentation.

The three fields of making artificial flowers, weaving, and knitting also stand out. One common characteristic of these activities was that they could supplement household income, not as a hobby but rather as part-time work. Understanding the expectations of potential consumers played a crucial role in the popularization of handicrafts through print. As we shall see shortly, women's magazines demonstrated a strong tendency to present simple, handicraft-related knowledge and techniques in a condensed form. The purpose of specialist textbooks, on the other hand, was to teach handicrafts systematically and for this reason they were characterized by a higher degree of specialization. Although the techniques demanded of specialists (*ginōsha*) were not learned experientially under the supervision of "artisans" (*shokunin*), they were considered necessary for part-time workers who wished to devote themselves to domestic handwork in order to supplement the income of the family. Such specialization was not deemed necessary for women who engaged in these activities in the confines of their homes or made handicrafts for the benefit of their families. From the 1900s onward, specialist textbooks registered a remarkable growth, which suggests that *shugei* had acquired a definite recognition as women's handwork by this time. To summarize: from the 1880s, *shugei* was no longer a generic descriptive term for all handwork performed by women in everyday contexts but increasingly referred to specific crafts, where practice was associated with a degree of social recognition.

Fig 2 Members of the Artificial Flowers Section at work, 1914. Reproduced from Akiko Yamasaki, *Kindai Nihon no "shugei" to jendaa* ["Handicrafts" and Gender in Modern Japan] (Yokohoma: Seori Shobō, 2005), Repository of the Alumni Association of the Joshi University of Art and Design.

The Encouragement of Handicrafts in Women's Magazines

When women's magazines began to flourish in the 1880s, those aimed at female students prevailed. Gradually, new ones targeting housewives and working women appeared,

producing a diverse range of publications by the early twentieth century.[20] Editorials on women's learning and debates about the education of women represented the backbone of these magazines, but they were complemented by features and miscellaneous articles, including writing that encouraged handicraft work. There was a wide range of published material, from criticism of handicraft education in schools, to debates and texts that promoted handicrafts to a general audience of women, to articles which fulfilled the role of textbook introductions and commentary.

Most articles advocated the indispensability of handicrafts to women's lives, as well as their importance and purpose. However, quite unlike the readers who were already aware of the importance of handicrafts when they purchased a textbook, these articles targeted an audience that was not necessarily interested in such pursuits. They acted therefore as an advertising medium for the encouragement of handicrafts. For this reason, such magazines often contained advertisements for handicraft and private sewing schools and handicraft shops and thus provide a useful insight into the social trends that surrounded handicrafts. In 1892, an anonymous author writing in the prominent *Katei zasshi* [Home Magazine] wrote:

> Needless to say, handicrafts (*shukō*) are important as a means of financial support, but even in those prosperous houses where there is no need to earn an extra income by means of handicrafts, women should not be idle about such work. The most important handicrafts are sericulture, sewing, and weaving.[21]

Another writer, similarly, declared that knowledge of sewing was indispensable to women: "Those who do not learn this are not only extremely dependent, but are also lacking in their conduct as women. Young ladies, heed this advice and devote yourselves to learning [it]."[22]

One characteristic of this type of discourse is that it presumes a fixed social background, as the audience consisted mainly of urban women. Many magazine authors extended a critical gaze to such women's daily routine, as the following passage published anonymously in *Katei zasshi* in 1894 indicates:

> Those who can eat without plowing and dress without weaving are the gentle folk of towns. Especially among the women of the big cities there are many who have the leisure to work but do not do so, and instead pass their lives indulging in pleasures and becoming a burden for their husbands. There is a big difference between them and village women who, from an early age until their youth, become skilled in crafts such as sericulture, dyeing, and sewing and contribute not only to the economy of their parents' household but also to that of their husbands.[23]

By comparing the various craft skills of urban and rural women, the anonymous writer aims to underline the major differences between the two. Drawing on the fact that domestic work had become specialized and could be exchanged for money, the critique expressed in such articles dismisses those women who do not produce things with their own hands as arrogant and calls for a consciousness of humility and modesty.[24]

Furthermore, authors such as Hattori Tōru severely criticize upper-class urban women who do not possess this modesty:

> The skills of sewing and weaving were all along the duty of women and the reason why they did not contribute to the economy of the household. However, nowadays if a woman acquires some general education, can babble around in English, and has some knowledge of crochet and lace making she is very proud of it and tries to improve her social station by imitating the ladies of the aristocracy, happily wearing inappropriate western clothes and taking part in evening dances. What an unseemly, ludicrously unbearable sight! All this while they know nothing about marriage and useful learning or about the management of the house and the education of children. But all day long they scold their servants and are content to do a bit of crochet in their spare time and look down on skills such as sewing and weaving, considering it lower work. They eagerly enlist other people's help and have no desire to progress on their own, like the prostitute who is enclosed in a new house by her lover and indulges in a life of comfort.[25]

In short, the sustained, committed, and modest practices of handicrafts were declared indispensable to women of all social strata, while affectation was to be avoided.[26]

Of the great variety of handicrafts presented, sewing and sericulture were considered particularly important.[27] Sewing was sometimes distinguished from handicrafts and treated separately, which leads us to believe that it enjoyed independence as a category. The first issue of the serial "Guide to Handicrafts: The Art of Sericulture" (first published in April 1894) discussed the importance of its topic, the raising of silkworms and harvesting of silk at home:

> Since sericulture is the most important of women's handicrafts, even in crowded urban areas such as Tokyo, the housewives and daughters living in the Yamanote area, in houses with gardens of a few *se*, could engage in the occupation of planting mulberry trees, raising silkworms, and spinning silk which, as far as propriety goes, makes all the difference in the world when compared to the ordinary women who play cards (*karuta*), gossip, and indulge in afternoon naps.[28]

The reason why sericulture was important as a handicraft could be found in the fact that the woman "did not succumb to her heart's desires, but must follow certain rules. Even if she is sleepy she must take the lamp in the middle of the night and feed mulberry leaves to the silkworms … she must acquire the virtue of perseverance and even sit cross-legged."[29] Sericulture was thought to cultivate the feminine virtues of perseverance and attention, which were also those necessary to be a mother. It can thus be interpreted as a means of learning which imitated child rearing.

As this example suggests, authors of the era understood handicrafts as an activity deeply connected to women's psychology. The women's educator and author Shimoda Utako explained her influential understanding of this connection as follows: "The aesthetic education of girls should begin with the cultivation of the beauty of mind, never with the cultivation of the beauty of form";[30] as

an aesthetic act, handicrafts were thought to cultivate the beauty of mind. Engaging in *shugei* was linked to the cultivation of virtue and led to mental accomplishments, which were considered essential for the management of the household. One anonymous author writing in *Katei zasshi* in 1896 stated:

> Fundamentally sewing is no more than a branch of the arts (*gijutsu*), however it most appropriately displays the spirit present in all arts … the reason being that the art of sewing is an occupation which requires extreme patience, minuteness, frugality, and cleanliness.[31]

According to this passage, sewing is an essential aspect of a woman's training, without which she would not be able to discharge household tasks in all their guises. On a related note, writing a decade later the artist Kajita Jōjirō paid attention to design and considered it essential to aesthetic education, for it cultivated an aesthetic sense and a woman's mind:

> The ideal is to develop intellectual skills and refined elegance by learning design; to temper the character, and through this ideal to develop a sincere will and an aesthetic taste. If girls also gain the power of innovation as a result of this, the applications of design as an academic art are truly broad.[32]

When it comes to women, even Kajita, a craftsman himself and professor at the elite Tokyo School of Art, placed more emphasis on the character-building benefits acquired through education than on the significance of artistic crafts themselves.

Here I would like to draw attention to the fact that the "cultivation of form" and the "cultivation of mind," in other words the inculcation of technical and mental abilities, did not exist as completely separate entities. For example, as the magazine *Jokan*'s "Publication Manifesto" shows, this was one of the ideals of women's education:

> *Jokan*'s main aim is to educate chaste Japanese girls and nurture good wives and wise mothers (*ryōsai senbo*). By beginning with arts and craftsmanship, we can expect to benefit both the trunk and the branches of the tree. This will be the fundament of our country's progress in perpetuity.[33]

Arguably the most straightforward statement of the fact that the learning of handicrafts was connected to mental training is the following statement by an anonymous author writing in *Katei zasshi* in 1892:

> Handicrafts (*gigei*) are an activity which disciplines people. Handicrafts make them

Fig 3 Creations presented to the Empress on the occasion of the Taishō Exposition, 1914. Reproduced from Akiko Yamasaki, *Kindai Nihon no "shugei" to jendaa* ["Handicrafts" and Gender in Modern Japan] (Yokohoma: Seori Shobō, 2005), Repository of the Alumni Association of the Joshi University of Art and Design.

> steady. Handicrafts made them righteous. Handicrafts erase wicked thoughts from their hearts. Handicrafts deepen the feelings of empathy toward other beings.[34]

The Mother's Role

As motherly duties were analogized to such activities as sericulture, so was the importance of the mother's role emphasized as part of a broader range of handicrafts. In the December 1909 issue of *Fujin no tomo* [The Lady's Friend], an article published in the form of a letter from a female reader identified simply as "Tami" suggested that handicraft work was indispensable for mothers:

> This year I have tried again to practice for some time sewing, knitting, and bag making and realized that they are ingenious pastimes, truly beneficial for the management of the household as well … Handicrafts teach children to make use of small pieces of fabric and thus not to waste them, to preserve carefully the items they make and handle all things with consideration, as well as to make use of their hands. I believe handicrafts have multiple advantages and are absolutely necessary for housewives and mothers.[35]

According to this contributor, *shugei* can be made in between other household chores, with limited materials, and can be a useful addition to presents. It is a type of handwork with multiple advantages for housewives, also considered beneficial in the education of children as it teaches them to value things and encourages them to be persistent and make use of their hands. Learning by observing mothers' handicraft work is also perceived as a major advantage.

Magazines also emphasized how *shugei* brought domestic happiness:

> Sometimes there are unexpected troubles within the household and the members of the family suffer. Without work, women are prone to become idle. Various vices spread inside the house or there is a disagreeable atmosphere or the peace of the heart is destroyed and the health of the body is damaged.[36]

As this passage points out, handicrafts were regarded as the most effective way of cultivating an "atmosphere of learning" in the house and protecting against vice. The same author continued: "Handicrafts bring soundness to a person's mind and body and are the abode of peace and happiness for the family."[37] In this way, the behavior of the housewife was perceived as essential in creating an atmosphere of domestic well-being. To achieve this, it was necessary for women not to waste time, but to diligently pursue handicraft work.

Profit and Comfort

Many authors throughout the period described economic profit as a benefit of handicrafts, albeit with certain reservations. The *Katei zasshi* author quoted above wrote: "The occupations of women are, firstly, sewing, then artificial flowers, embroidery, and design. While it is difficult to build a house from this, it is narrowly possible to build one's self."[38] Despite the fact that handicraft work involved the production of potential commodities, handicrafts were not a priori regarded as a means of gaining one's livelihood. However, since the makers of handicrafts were housewives without an income, who were also mothers or potential

mothers, being able to earn an income in times of need, limited though it might have been, was also regarded as evidence of being a good wife.

The same author described a further economic benefit:

> Learning handicrafts is not a sign of preparing to become independent. Needless to say, when she becomes the matron of a household, the woman can fully prove her abilities as a housewife by sewing for the whole family, but also by applying here and there a little embroidery to kimono collars, by decorating the rooms with artificial flowers and natural materials which please her husband's eyes, and by making clothes for the little ones and reforming old clothes. Not having knowledge of artistic skills (*gigei*), and instead spending copiously, is a reason to feel ashamed in these modern days when people are greatly concerned with things aesthetic.[39]

Handicrafts were not, therefore, simply meant to offer independence. Magazines also promoted them as the housewife's economic contribution to the household, which took the form of producing goods domestically and comforting the family, and which eventually led to saving.

Since being inside the house was considered a housewife's ideal condition, discourses also circulated claiming that handicrafts offered comfort to women's hearts and minds: "Like drawing … which should not only bring harmony to the house, but also comfort the mind."[40] Some authors made explicit the connection between craft, comfort, and social status, as this 1903 article published by the Meiji educator Aoki Bunzō in the magazine *Jokan* indicates:

> The handicrafts traditionally studied by the women of this country were mainly classified as sewing, besides which they gradually began to learn embroidery and occasionally cloth appliqué (*oshie*), but compared to the overall population of women, the number was extremely limited and the group which learned these [crafts] was restricted to women from relatively prosperous houses. Despite this, they [the handicrafts] were, in a manner of speaking, a kind of training in obtaining comfort.[41]

Unlike sewing, a basic necessity of life, handicrafts with a strong decorative dimension were recognized as the handwork of middle- and upper-class women alone. These women were presumed to possess more spare time and thus to be able to partake in occasional, supplemental labor.

Writing in 1906 in the magazine *Murasaki*, Isono Yoshio, headmaster of the Private Women's School of Fine Arts (predecessor of today's Joshibi University of Art and Design), claimed that:

> Women possess a nature which allows them to pursue the same activity indefinitely. For example, they can easily discharge an activity such as preparing meals three times a day, which is absolutely impossible for men to continue for too long. However, nowadays in our country women are unproductive and earning money is considered a shameful thing, which means that women from the middle class and above are comparatively inactive.[42]

Conclusion

In summary, women's magazines explained the benefits of handicrafts in five distinct ways. First, by making handicrafts, women acquired virtue. Second, handicrafts were an important aspect of their roles as mothers. Third, by making handicrafts women brought happiness to their families, and created a sound domestic atmosphere. Fourth, by producing things at home, they saved money and might have the opportunity to support the household revenues, so it was also economically advantageous. Fifth, handicrafts as an activity served to comfort women's hearts and minds.

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan, during the country's reorganization under the new Meiji government, school education and women's magazines, as well as displays and fairs [which extend beyond the remit of this article] encouraged women to adopt handicrafts as domestic activities. Through practical training, schools aimed to develop the skills of girls and teach them handicrafts collectively, in a standardized manner. Magazines targeted a restricted group of readers and advocated the significance of handicrafts to a fixed social stratum for whom handicrafts were considered a mandatory activity. This system also taught women the utility of handicrafts.

As this article has made clear, the attention given to promoting women's handicrafts did not indicate either their establishment as a specialized profession or the possibility that women might find emancipation as artisans. A high degree of specialization and professional consciousness were not demanded; rather, handicrafts were to be performed for the benefit of the family. The criteria on which handicrafts were to be evaluated were the amount of time and work invested by women in them, as well as the high degree of skill they accumulated. Because of this, handicraft education and media discourse in the Meiji period always placed greater emphasis on the process of creation rather than the product, and on the benefit of cultivating the character of the creator, rather than the value of the thing created. Nevertheless handicraft work was, essentially, an activity whose aim was the production of things. In this respect, it was a form of handwork which could not be separated from the field of handicrafts as *kōgei* and it was, undeniably, a creative act.

Fig 4 Women of the Kyōritsu Women's Vocational School creating handicrafts for the Universal Missionary Exhibition, Vatican, 1924. Reproduced from: *Kyōritsu Women's Academy: A Hundred Years of History* (Tokyo: Kyōritsu Joshi Gakuen, 1986).

Notes

1 This article is a translation of Section Three of Yamasaki's 2005 book, *Kindai nihon no "shugei" to jendaa* ["Handicrafts" and Gender in Modern Japan], (Yokohoma: Seori Shobō, 2005), selected by Sarah Teasley and translated by Amelia Bonea as part of the 2011 SOAS Translation Workshop in Japanese Studies, generously funded by a grant from the Nippon Foundation. It has been edited by Teasley and Bonea for length and to conform more closely to English-language article style.

2 Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, trans. Hagiwara Hiroko (Tokyo: Shinsuisha, 1992), p. 100. (Quotation Joseph Addison, *Spectator* 606: 1712.)

3 ibid.

4 [Trans. note] The original book chapter also includes an extensive section on handicrafts exhibitions, which has been cut from the present version to conform more closely to journal article length.

5 [Ed. note] Figures 1–3 are from Yamasaki's book but were originally located in a different section of text to the one translated here. Figure 4 did appear in the original text but is from a different original source.

6 [Trans. note] For a historical overview of the Meiji Restoration see, for example, Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

7 Nakamura Masanao, *Saigoku Risshihen* [Success Stories of the West] (Suharaya Mohee, 1870), a translation of Samuel Smiles's, *Self-Help; With Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1859).

8 [Trans. note] Literally, "There shall be, in the future, no community with an illiterate family, nor a family with an illiterate person."

9 According to Section 27 of the Code, "Normal elementary education shall be divided into two equal cycles, lower elementary and upper elementary, which are compulsory for both boys and girls."

10 Sakurai Eiko, "Kindai gakkō seiritsuki ni okeru shugei kyōiku" [Handicraft Education in the Early Years of Modern Japanese Schools], *The Journal of Wayo Women's University* 13 (1968): 51.

11 For a detailed study of the elementary education of girls, see Takano Toshi, *Meiji shoki joji shōgaku no kenkyū: Kindai nihon ni okeru joshi kyōiku no genryū* [The Study of Girls' Elementary Education during the Early Meiji Period: The Origins of Girls' Education in Modern Japan] (Otsuki Shoten, 2002). Takano treats *shugei* (handicrafts) and *jokō* (women's handwork) as synonymous with regard to the elementary education of girls.

12 Aoyama Gakuin, ed., *Aoyama Gakuin: 90 Years of History* (Tokyo: Aoyama Gakuin, 1965).

13 The following dictionaries and lexicons were examined: Takahashi Gorō, *Iroha jiten* [ABC Dictionary] (1888); Ōtsuki Fumihiko, *Nihon jisho genkai* [Genkai Dictionary of Japan] (1889–91); Yamada Bimyō, *Nihon daijisho* [Great Dictionary of Japan] (1892–3); Mozume Takami, ed., *Nihon daijirin* [lit. Great Forest of Words of Japan] (1884); Fujii Otoo, Kusano Kiyotami, eds, *Teikoku daijiten* [Great Imperial Dictionary] (1896); Hayashi Mikaomi, Tanahashi Ichirō, eds, *Nihon shinjirin* [lit. New Forest of Words of Japan] (1898). For each of these publications I used Hida Yoshifumi, et al., eds, *Meijiki kokugo jisho taikei* [Compendium of Meiji Dictionaries of Japanese], (Ōzorasha, reprinted during 1997–9).

14 Satō Dōshin, *Nihon bijutsu tanjō: Kindai nihon no kotoba to senryaku* [The Birth of "Japanese Art": "Terminologies" and Strategies in Modern Japan] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1996), p. 39. [Trans. note] Satō's argument is available in English as Dōshin Satō, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty*, trans. Hiroshi Nara (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2011); see n. 19 for details of the Japanese publication.

15 Satō, p. 55.

16 On the Ministry of the Imperial Household, see Satō, pp. 55–6.

17 Satō, pp. 56–7.

18 For a fuller account of women in relation to the state in this period, see the full-length book from which this article is drawn: Yamasaki (2005).

19 Satō Dōshin, *Meiji kokka to kindai bijutsu: Bi no seijigaku* [Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty] (Yoshikawa: Kōbunkan, 1999), p. 37; the English translation is Dōshin Satō, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty*, trans. Hiroshi Nara (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2011).

20 The magazines I have examined are: *Nihon no jogaku* [The Education of Japanese Women], *Jokan* [Women's Mirror], *Katei zasshi* [Home Magazine], *Murasaki*, *Fujinkai* [Woman's Sphere], *Jogaku zasshi* [Women's Education Magazine], *Jogaku shinshi* [New Magazine for Women's Education].

21 "Katei ni okeru shukō" [Domestic Craftwork], *Katei zasshi* 2(15) (October 1892): 39–40.

22 "Saihō no shōka" [The Song of Sewing], *Katei zasshi* 75(10) (April 1896): 322.

23 "Shugei annai: Yōsanjutsu" [A Guide to Handicrafts: The Art of Sericulture], *Katei zasshi* 27(12) (April 1894): 314.

24 "Katei ni okeru shukō" [Domestic Craftwork], pp. 39–40.

25 Hattori Tōru, "*Joshi shakai no shokusan jigyō*" [Promoting Enterprise among Women].

26 "Kasei to saihō" [Housekeeping and Sewing], *Katei zasshi* 75(10) (April 1896): 34.

27 [Trans. note] Yamasaki's book contains a detailed discussion of sericulture and its relation to motherhood and the public image of the Meiji empress.

28 "Shugei annai: Yōsanjutsu" [A Guide to Handicrafts: The Art of Sericulture], *Katei zasshi* 27/12 (April 1894), p. 314. [Trans. note] *Se* is a Japanese unit of area equal to 99.174 square meters.

29 "Katei ni okeru shukō" [Domestic Craftwork], pp. 39–40.

30 Shimoda Utako, "The Aesthetic Education of Women," *Jokan* 12(1) (December 1905): 13.

31 "Kasei to saihō" [Housekeeping and Sewing], pp. 34–5.

32 Kajita Jōjirō, "Fujin to zuan" [Women and Design], *Fujinkai* 1(1) (1 July 1905): 206–9.

33 "Hakkan no shushi" [Manifesto of Publication], *Jokan* 1(8) (August 1891): 108.

34 "Katei ni okeru shukō" [Domestic Craftwork], pp. 39–40.

35 Tami, "Shufu to shugei" [Housewives and Handicrafts], *Fujin no tomo* 2(12) (10 December 1909): 536. This is a contribution from a woman reader.

36 "Katei ni okeru shukō" [Domestic Craftwork], pp. 39–40.

37 ibid.

38 ibid.

39 ibid.

40 ibid.

41 Aoki Bunzō, "Joshi no shugei ni tsuki" [About the Handicrafts of Women], *Jokan* 18(15) (September 1903): 42.

42 Isono Yoshio, "Joshi to shugei" [Women and Handicrafts], *Murasaki* 2(2) (February 1906).