

**Special Issue 2**

**Exporting Art and Craft of Japanese Lacquer.**

**A Quest for Singularity, c. 1860-1935**



## **Editor's Note for the Special Issue : Exporting Art and Craft of Japanese Lacquer. A Quest for Singularity, c. 1860-1935**

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This special issue examines the export and technological exchange related to lacquer and lacquerware between the Meiji and Shōwa periods, analysing how Japanese craft objects transformed through their expansion in global markets. Bringing together four scholars specialising in economic history, music history, and intellectual history, this collection offers a multifaceted perspective on the subject.

Research on lacquerware during the Meiji to Shōwa periods remains relatively underdeveloped, making this special issue a significant contribution to the field. In particular, it foregrounds the notion of ‘the exchange of technical and artistic expertise’ as a novel analytical perspective. It is well known that manufactured goods including handicrafts played a crucial role in Japan’s exports during this period. Among consumer goods, exports were traditionally categorized into three groups: art, craft, and miscellaneous goods (雑貨 *zakka*). Economic historians have mainly focused on the last category, given its substantial export volume, while craft —especially lacquerware, which strongly embodies craft traditions—have largely remained outside the purview of export history in economic studies.

In contrast, the study of Japanese craft objects has been primarily undertaken within the distinct discipline of craft history, *kogeishi* (工芸史) as a branch of cultural history and art history. These studies have often examined how the meanings of ‘craft’ (工) and ‘art’ (芸) evolved, shedding light on how Japan promoted its craft exports. However, the emphasis has largely been on the ‘art’ aspect, with ‘art, and ‘craft’ frequently treated as separate analytical categories. For instance, much of craft history has focused on how Japanese export crafts were displayed at international expositions and sought recognition as art objects, exploring how they were received and classified within the emerging disciplines of art and craft in Japan.

On the other hand, research on the crafts has focused on governmental and regional policies, the activities of export promotion offices and commercial display halls, and the ways in which Japanese producers sought to distinguish their goods from low-cost exports by enhancing

technical skill and value. However, these studies have rarely incorporated a comparative international perspective. Many regions—beyond the industrialized world—developed “craft” as a category of trade goods during this period. At world expositions, such objects were exhibited in national pavilions or within galleries dedicated to “industry” and “manufactures.” A crucial question remains unanswered: how did Japan position its craft objects within this global landscape? Furthermore, rather than merely presenting finished products, did Japan highlight lacquer techniques as transferable technologies, facilitating their application in foreign industries? These questions point to important new directions for future research.

As such, this special issue underscores the potential for economic history to engage more substantively with craft objects, a category that has traditionally received little attention in the field. A key challenge is to analyse the export dynamics of each craft category in greater detail while also examining how the technical expertise associated with these objects evolved and was transferred across different export destinations.

This collection seeks to bridge the divide between ‘craft’ (工) and ‘art’ (芸) in craft studies through a focus on lacquerware and to uncover aspects of craft history that have been overlooked in conventional frameworks. The issue begins with a historical overview of lacquerware research from the Meiji to Shōwa periods. It then explores the expansion of lacquerware exports by analysing shifts in its uses, changes in raw material procurement, distinctions from other exported goods, and the reorganization of domestic production centres to meet export demand.

The first article, by Tomonobu Minami, examines the shift in lacquerware’s primary export markets—from Britain and France to the United States in the 1920s and later to Asia in the 1930s. The second article, by Miki Sugiura, investigates how Japanese craft objects became integrated into the European discourse on *Kunstgewerbe* and industrial art by analysing expositions, museums, and collectors. Specifically, through a study of the Hamburg Museum of Arts and Crafts and its first director, Justus Brinckmann, the article explores how lacquer techniques were evaluated within the framework of European decorative arts.

The third and fourth articles provide fresh case studies on lacquerware exports and international exchanges in craft expertise, forming the core of this special issue. The third article, by Satsuki Inoue examines the emergence of lacquered domestic pianos in Japan during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, focusing on the collaboration between the newly established Nippon Gakki Co. (Yamaha) and lacquerware workshops in Hamamatsu specializing in export-oriented lacquerware. The fourth article, by Hiroko Goto, traces the activities of Japanese lacquer artisans in Paris, analysing the interactions between Japanese lacquer craftsmen and French decorative arts ateliers and revealing how their networks intersected.

This special issue originates from the Comparative Economic Research Institute's ongoing project, *Craft History: Place and Narrative Creations of Exported Goods, 1850–1930*, which began in 2023. This project seeks to explore Japan's export of crafts—from production to exhibition, commercialization, and transmission—through a global lens.

The initial inspiration for this research came from Ido Misato (Kyoto Institute of Technology), whose inquiries encouraged broader collaboration among scholars across disciplines. The project has developed in close connection with the Agora Research Group at Kyoto Institute of Technology, culminating in a related symposium held in November 2023 at Kyoto Institute of Technology. We are deeply grateful to the symposium participants, Yutaro Shimode, Mariko Shimode, Seiji Namiki, Yoshiro Ono, Misato Ido, Matori Yamamoto, Kazutoshi Tsuda, Kazue Akamatsu, Monika Bincsik and others for their invaluable insights and feedback.

In addition, we would like to express our profound gratitude to Keiko Suzuki for her unwavering guidance and constructive comments throughout this special issue. Lastly, the special issue would not be possible without the support of colleagues and staffs at the ICES, including Akiko Tamura, Kenji Miyazaki, Tadashi Sakai and Yasutaka Tominaga.

We hope that this special issue will contribute to a further dialogue between economic history and craft studies while shedding light on the complex historical dynamics that shaped Japan's lacquerware exports and international exchanges in craft expertise.



# The Shifts in the Export Markets of Japanese Lacquerware, c.1860-1935

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## Abstract

This paper identifies the market transition of Japanese lacquerware exports during the prewar period (1860-1935) and analyses its factors and characteristics. The paper divides its discussion into three periods. From the end of the Edo period to 1881, demand for lacquerware increased, especially in the European and U.S. markets, and the Japanese government's trade promotion policies and international expositions contributed to the expansion of exports. After 1882, however, export expansion was limited by the “poor-quality manufacturing” problem. After 1911, World War I led to an expansion of exports to North American markets and the Japanese imperial sphere (colonial markets), but quality problems remained an obstacle. It should also be pointed out that many production areas converted to domestic demand as the domestic market grew. Through these issues, this paper provides an overall picture of prewar Japanese lacquerware exports.

**Keywords:** Export, Lacquer, Lacquerware, Trade Statistics

**JEL Classification Codes:** N65, N75, N85.

## 1.Introduction

This study examines the evolution of the market for lacquerware exports in pre-war Japan. It first examines changes in the value of lacquerware exports by market. It also examines the quality and use of exported products and trends in export production areas based on various reports to clarify the factors behind these changes.

Lacquerware exports in the prewar period have traditionally been discussed from two main perspectives: first, historical analyses of the lacquerware craft (Sawaguchi, 1933 Isobe, 1946; Japan Urushi Association, 1976). These studies mainly focused on the technical history of the lacquerware industry, summarising the trends in lacquerware production areas. In particular, the Japan Urushi

Association (1976) provided a detailed analysis of technical innovations in lacquerware and the educational activities, research, and teaching institutions that supported them. Some of these studies also partially addressed lacquerware exports, the subject of this study, in terms of overviews and trends in production areas. However, the focus of prior research has been exclusively on lacquerware crafts and production areas, with less attention paid to the evolution of export markets.

The second perspective in existing studies is a focus on the exports of miscellaneous goods/ general merchandise, *zakka* (雑貨). In pre-war Japan, goods produced by small- and medium-sized industries were widely exported to the global market. Some see lacquerware exports as part of such exports of 'miscellaneous goods' in pre-war Japan (Small and Medium Enterprise Research Association, 1960). However, these concerns relate to the expansion of exports of miscellaneous goods in general, and are limited as analyses of lacquerware, including the types and production areas of lacquerware.

As mentioned above, few studies have analysed lacquerware exports based on product characteristics. Therefore, this study examines lacquerware exports based on the following points: First, to quantitatively examine the export market for lacquerware, this paper examines the evolution of the export market based on product-by-product, country-by-country trade statistics. However, there are limitations to analysing lacquerware exports using trade statistics. Specific products referred to by the term lacquerware vary in quality, price, and use, ranging from crafts to daily necessities. However, in trade statistics, these are collectively referred to as 'lacquerware' and cannot be classified.<sup>1</sup> To clarify the relationship between exported lacquerware, including its origin and product characteristics, reports from the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Commerce and Industry were used to supplement this information. This paper is divided into three periods based on prewar lacquerware export values and market transitions: from the opening of ports at the end of the Edo period to 1881 in Section 1, from 1882 to 1910 in Section 2, and from the 1911 to 1936 in Section 3.

## **2. Expansion of lacquerware exports to Europe, c.1850-1881**

First, we examine the export of lacquerware before and after the opening of ports at the end of the Edo period, around 1850s. Lacquerware exports were also recorded during the period of national isolation during the Edo period in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Nagazumi (1987), who collected and organised the cargo of foreign ships, the export of lacquerware could be confirmed from the 1680s, when export inventory records existed. Various types of lacquerware were exported from Nagasaki annually, but the quantities were not very large and varied considerably annually (Arai, 1975, p. 155).

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<sup>1</sup> Industrial statistics, such as the Statistical Tables of Commerce and Industry, set out categories based on use, such as 'eating and drinking utensils', 'furniture' and 'other'. However, as with trade statistics, it is not possible to distinguish between crafts and commodities.

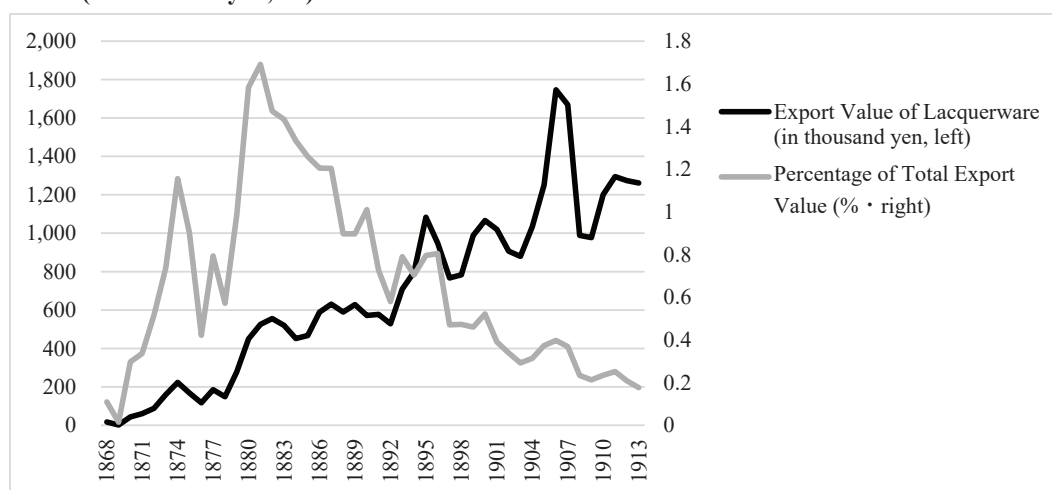


As for production areas, examples of the sales of Aizu, Shizuoka, Wakayama (Kuroe), and Ishikawa (Yamanaka) lacquerware to Dutch and Chinese merchants in Nagasaki were found in 1717 (Handa, 1970, pp. 658-662). While copper and marine products were the main exports from Japan, lacquerware also constituted part of the exported goods.

Trade under the Ansei Treaty began in 1859 (Ansei 6). In the first year, Nagasaki was the centre of trade, but from the following year, the largest part of trade took place in Yokohama (Ishii, 1943, p. 43). As many studies have pointed out, raw silk and tea accounted for the bulk of exports by the end of the Edo period. Lacquerware exports were observed in the early 1860s at the port of Yokohama. In 1867 (Keio 3), 126,500 dollars of exports were recorded, accounting for 1.3% of the total exports. This was second only to the three major exports of raw silk (53.7%), silkworm egg paper (22.8%), and tea (16.7%) (Ishii, 1943, pp. 85, 87). Lacquerware also enjoyed a certain status in exports during the opening of ports at the end of the Edo period.

Next, the status of lacquerware exports during the first half of the Meiji period (1868–1881) is analysed using trade statistics. As illustrated in Figure 1, the value of lacquerware exports increased from 1868 to 1874, followed by a period of stagnation, and then sharply increased from 1878 to 1881. The share of lacquerware exports in the total value of exports also rose in tandem with this increase. In 1868, the share of lacquerware exports was around 0.1%, which was significantly lower than the previous year's share of trade at the port of Yokohama. However, this share steadily increased, reaching 1.7% by 1881.

**Figure 1: Trends in Pre-War Lacquerware Export Values and Their Percentage of Total Export Value (in thousand yen, %)**



Note: Includes exports to Korea and Taiwan.

Source: Ministry of Finance, Bureau of Customs, Japan, "Returns of the foreign trade of Japan for the twenty-two years from 1868 to 1889 inclusive" (1890). Ministry of Finance Customs Bureau, "Returns of the Foreign Trade of the Empire of Japan" (various years). Government central of Korea, "Chosen table of trade and shipping" (various years). Government central of Taiwan, "Taiwan table of trade and shipping" (various years).

The growing demand for lacquerware in the West was the first factor contributing to the increase in exports during the early Meiji period. Lacquerware was considered a unique Japanese craft, and small boxes and trays decorated with Japanese-style ornaments held a particular appeal for foreigners. Foreign merchants competed with each other to purchase such lacquerware, regardless of the price (Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, 1884, p. 484).

In addition, the growing demand for lacquerware in the West was sponsored by the government's trade promotion policy. The Japanese Government supported participation in overseas expositions and the activities of direct export trading companies to develop overseas markets in order to promote the acquisition of foreign currency, and at the Vienna Exposition of 1873, the Government procured and exhibited items from antique dealers 道具商 in Tokyo, of which lacquerware was a major product. For the exhibition, the government-supported Kiritsu Kosho Kaisha was set up with the guarantee of the Exposition Secretariat and the legal and financial support of the government (Tsunoyama, 1997). Kiritsu Kosho Kaisha subsequently set up branches in Paris and New York where lacquerware was sold. The company handled high-end lacquerware made by a group of the best artisans of the time (Japan Urushi Association, 1976, p. 262).

In addition to these government-supported direct export trading companies, various Japanese merchants and traders established shops abroad. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce on the overseas activities of Japanese merchants in 1884 listed lacquerware merchants in Shanghai and Hong Kong (Tsunoyama, 1984). In addition to overseas expansion, merchants from domestic production areas opened shops in port cities. From around 1869-1870, merchants from Aizu and Shizuoka set up stores in Yokohama for the export of lacquerware. Meanwhile, exports of lacquerware manufactured in Ishikawa (Yamanaka) and Wakayama (Kuroe) were observed from the port of Kobe (Japan Urushi Association, 1976, p. 262).

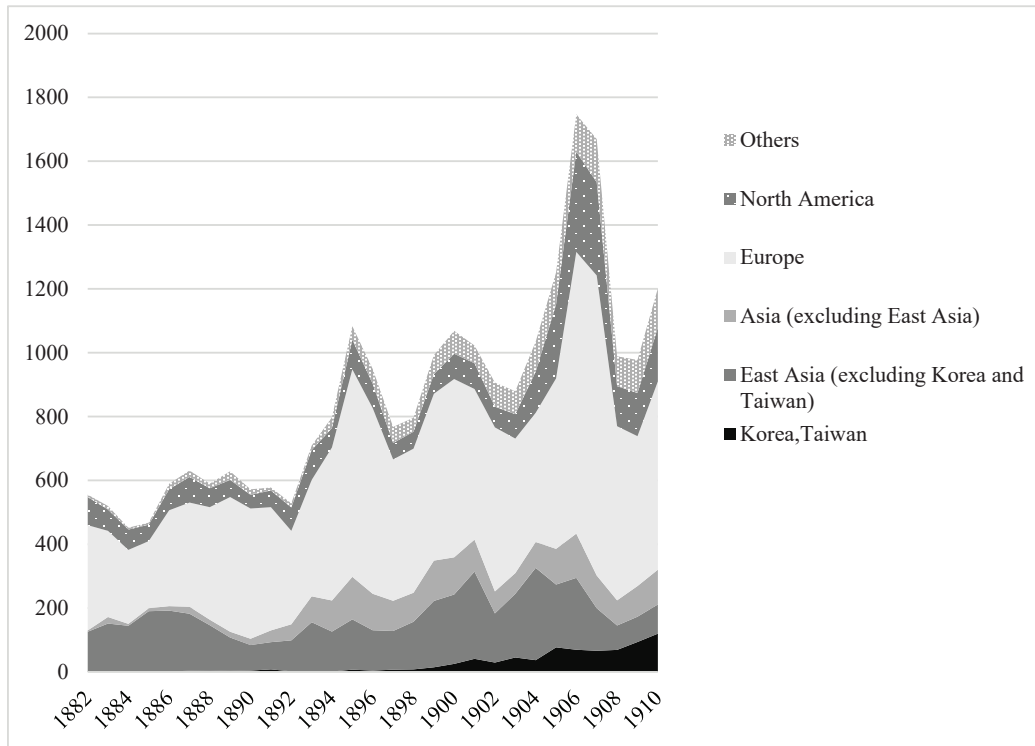
### **3. Formation of export production areas, 1882-1910**

#### ***Export Expansion and the problem of poor-quality manufacturing***

This section examines the export of lacquerware from 1881 to 1910. Trade statistics by product and country for the exported lacquerware market are available from 1882 onwards. Figure 2 shows the export destinations of lacquerware organised by region. First, by examining trends in the 1880s, the export market remained stagnant in terms of value and market. By market, Europe accounted for approximately 50% of the total, Asia for approximately 30%, and North America for approximately 15%. Within Europe, the UK was the largest market, accounting for about 50% of the total European market. The German and French markets each accounted for approximately 20%, and the UK, Germany, and France together accounted for approximately 90% of the total. The details of the Asian market are not known, as there was no division between China and Hong Kong until 1888; however,

in 1889, the Hong Kong market accounted for less than 80% of the total Asian market. Much of the trade in Hong Kong appears to be intermediary, but the actual nature of this trade is not clear from the statistics. According to the report, many of the shipments to China and Hong Kong were from Westerners living there, rather than local demand (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1891, p. 246).

**Figure 2: Trends in Lacquerware Export Destinations (1882-1910, in thousand yen)**



Source: see Figure 1

As mentioned earlier, lacquerware exports exhibited a stagnant trend during the 1880s. As Figure 1 shows, the share of lacquerware in total exports peaked in 1881 and fell thereafter. Its share continued to decline, falling below 0.1% in the late 1910s. The following factors can be attributed to this transition: First, the diversification of export products. New export products emerged following the government's policy of reproduction and development, and the period of corporate emergence after the Matsukata deflation. Having completed the Industrial Revolution, Japan began to export light industrial goods, particularly cotton, in earnest. In addition, the exports of general merchandise by small- and medium-sized commercial and industrial enterprises increased. Among these new products, the rate of increase in lacquerware exports does not match the total value of exports.

Quality is another important export impediment. Gross overproduction was a problem for Japanese exports throughout the prewar period, which also occurred for many other commodities. Lacquerware was included here; in a report on industry in general by the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce published in 1884, two points were made about the gross overproduction of lacquerware (Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, 1884, pp. 484-485). The first was its vulnerability. Lacquerware production involves a process known as base coating. This is the process of preparing and reinforcing the condition of the wooden foundation after it has been made. Although the undercoating process is not visible after completion of the product, it was directly linked to the durability of the lacquerware. According to the report, robust but lengthy construction methods were rarely used for export items. As a result, while the final decoration of the lacquerware may have been beautiful at first glance, it was not very durable, and its shape would change drastically after immersion in water for half a day. Second, the lacquer was declining. A decrease in the number of lacquer trees in the country caused the price of lacquer to rise. The use of low-quality lacquer directly led to a decline in lacquerware quality.

Other problems were related to the drying process. Lacquerware is susceptible to drying and sometimes cracks owing to the humidity in export destinations and the high heat from fireplaces. In response to the dramatic increase in orders from abroad, companies with limited production facilities shortened their drying and priming processes, resulting in the production of poor-quality products (Sawaguchi, 1933, pp. 232-233, 238).<sup>2</sup> Excessive demand also led to ambiguous inspections of exported products. In response to the demand from foreign traders for cheap goods, the negative effects of shoddy production spread throughout the entire range of export lacquerware. The rampant export of inferior products led to a marked reluctance to buy from local consumers overseas. This was ultimately linked to a stagnation of exports.

There were also new developments in export trends in the 1890s; in the first half of the 1890s, exports remained stagnant. Foreign exchange fluctuations and the problem of overproduction continued to be mentioned as impediments to this (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1890, pp. 129-132). As a result of the effects of rough manufacturing, exports of maki-e waned in the first half of the 1890s, and exports of luxury goods were rarely observed (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1892, p. 269). Thereafter, as shown in Figure 1, exports expanded in the mid-1890s. This was due to increased interest in Japanese products following victory in the first Sino-Japanese War, the expansion of exports of framed panels (lacquered panels with maki-e lacquer) to the UK, and a surge in the market for lacquerware due to the high price of raw materials (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1895, pp. 518-

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<sup>2</sup> A response to such crude production was the production of lacquerware using paper and metal grounds, which were less prone to breakage. These were produced mainly in Nagoya and Osaka, but as they were generally more expensive than wooden basis, they were not in demand by foreign merchants seeking low-priced goods, and their sales channels did not expand (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1890, pp. 129-132; Sawaguchi, 1933, pp. 249-251).

521). The export market in the 1890s is re-examined again in Figure 2. In the 1880s, Europe accounted for approximately 50%, Asia for approximately 30%, and North America for approximately 15% of the total. While the breakdown of the European market did not change significantly compared to the 1880s, the situation was different in the Asian market; the share of Hong Kong, which was dominant in the 1880s, declined, with the Indian market accounting for approximately 40% in 1896. After the Indian market shrank, the proportion of the Southeast Asian markets increased. Lacquerware exported to Shanghai, India, Singapore, and Southeast Asia was not widely demanded by the locals and was used by the Japanese and Westerners who settled in the regions (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1912, pp. 428-429; Isobe, 1946, p. 223).

After a period of stagnation, the 1900s saw an export expansion in 1905-1906. This increase was mainly due to global economic expansion and price increases following the Russo-Japanese War. Given these rising prices, it was difficult to produce lacquerware at the prices demanded by foreign traders. Therefore, overproduction became a major concern. This meant omitting processes. For example, the nailing process was omitted and replaced with gluing, and the application of lacquer was reduced from three times to two. In 1908, lacquerware exports declined significantly as a result of the 1907 Depression in Europe and the USA, in addition to a fall in invoice prices resulting from overproduction (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1908, pp. 405-406).

### *Development of export lacquerware production areas.*

We now analyse the exported lacquerware from the 1880s to the 1900s in terms of the relationship between the products and the region of origin. First, let us examine which products were exported in terms of exported lacquerware. Among lacquerware products, boxes and trays were the first to increase in export value. Boxes were used to hold gloves, handkerchiefs, confectioneries, and cigarettes, while trays were used to hold tea, coffee, business cards, and incense (Sawaguchi, 1933, p. 239).

Of the exports from the port of Kobe in 1890, 70-80% consisted of trays, followed by small plates, and approximately 5% were luxury items such as corner shelves. Most of these trays were made in Wakayama and were generally cheaper than the domestic products. Many of the trays made in Wakayama are said to have been crude and were easily damaged when soaked in boiling water, and it was noted that 20-30% of these trays were damaged during transport to the USA (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1890, pp. 129-132). Kyoto was another production area in western Japan. Kyoto's main exports were corner shelves and trays used for ceremonies. Although Kyoto lacquerware was exported only in small quantities, it differed from other production areas in its export of luxury goods. Kyoto lacquerware was not only exported by foreign traders but also sold directly to foreign tourists (Sawaguchi, 1933, p. 251). Eastern Japan's production areas include Shizuoka, Aizu, and Yokohama (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1892, p. 269). Shizuoka was the production centre with the highest export growth. Exports of Shizuoka-made products increased rapidly from the 1880s, with an increase

in furniture exports in addition to the main products such as lacquered trays, small boxes, and small chests (Shizuoka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Shizuoka City Industry Centenary Story Compilation Committee, 1968, p. 77). Other exports expanded to include finished products such as tables, chairs, bookcases, and framed panels, in which the boards needed to manufacture tables and shelves were decorated with flowers, birds, and landscapes in maki-e lacquer (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1896, p. 602). As a result, by the late 1890s, exports from the port of Yokohama had expanded to the point where Shizuoka-made products accounted for 70% of all exports (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1897, pp. 300-301).<sup>3</sup>

An export-oriented lacquerware-manufacturing industry developed in Yokohama during the same period (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1895, p. 523). They were generally cheaper than Shizuoka-made products and were competitive, for example in exports to China and India in the late 1890s (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1896, p. 608; Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1911, pp. 422-423). Aizu, on the other hand, was for a time a major producer of exports, but its position gradually declined. It was noted that, although the products made in Aizu were robust, there were issues in terms of slow response to fashion trends (Tax Bureau of the Ministry of Finance, 1899, p. 226).

In the 1890s, Wakayama and Shizuoka were the main production areas in western and eastern Japan, respectively. This trend in export production changed with the increase in prices in the 1900s. Exports were generally less expensive than domestic products for similar uses (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1897, pp. 300-301; Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1904, p. 282). The price rise widened the price gap between export-oriented lacquerware, which demanded cheaper products, and domestic lacquerware. As a result, an increasing number of traders have switched from export-oriented production to domestic production. Likewise, in Wakayama (Kuroe), there was a marked shift, with exports accounting for approximately 40% of production at the end of the 1890s, whereas by the 1900s, most of the production was in the domestic market (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1900, p. 241).

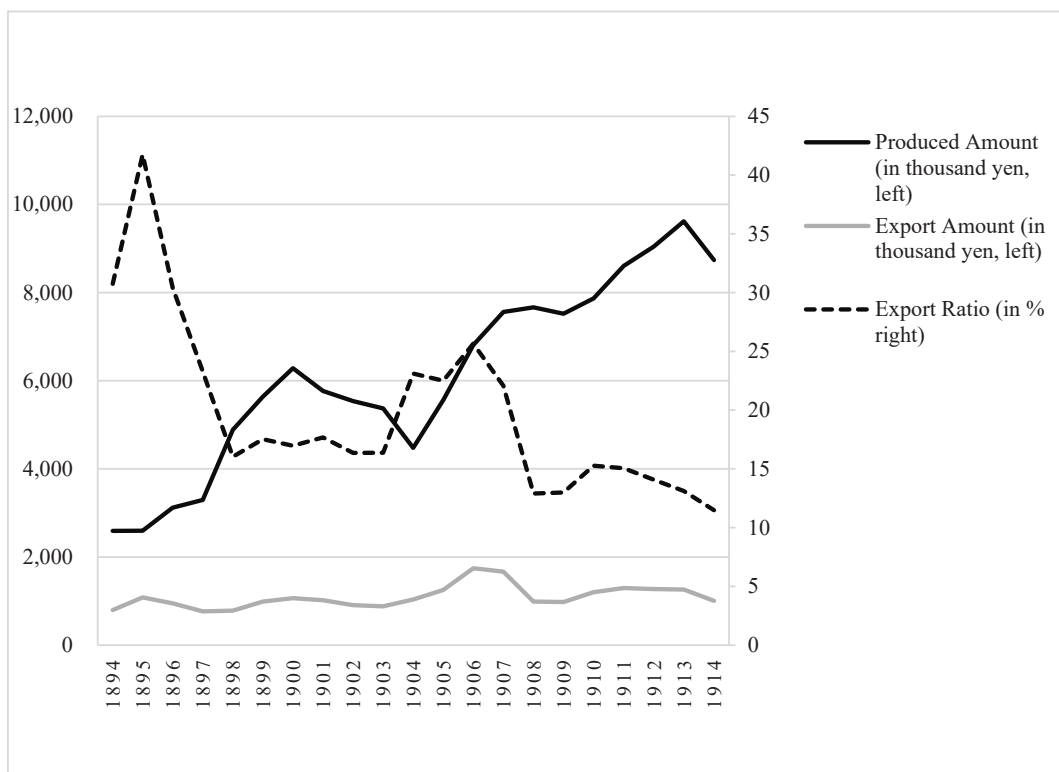
Let us now examine the overall trend of this shift in the domestic market. Figure 3 shows the production and export values of lacquerware and the export ratio. This shows that more than 40% of the lacquerware production was exported in 1895. The proportion gradually declined thereafter but increased to 25% in the mid-1900s and then fell to just over 10%. Meanwhile, the value of lacquerware production has increased continuously, indicating a steady increase in the domestic market. The development of the Japanese economy resulted in a steady increase in the demand for lacquerware. Fluctuating export markets and domestic demand showed contrasting trends. As noted by Isobe (1946), lacquerware in the export market were “novelty goods” and not necessities. Consequently, export trends fluctuate according to economic fluctuations instead of demand. By contrast, lacquerware in the domestic market was a daily necessity, and the increase in population and income generated a

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<sup>3</sup> For more details of products made in Shizuoka, see Paper 3.

continuous increase in demand (Isobe, 1946, p. 235). Within this trend, from the mid-1900s onwards, export production areas shifted to the domestic market because of the aforementioned export slump, rising prices, and the continuous expansion of domestic demand. Lacquerware as an export product lost its position as the dominance of the domestic market was confirmed. Until the 1880s, lacquerware was the mainstay of general merchandise exports, along with silk handkerchiefs, matches, and ceramics (Sugiyama, 1989, p. 198). However, compared to the growth of these general merchandise exports, the expansion of lacquerware exports was limited. Lacquerware showed a different trend from ceramics, which had similar uses for tableware but were exported 40-50% of the time throughout the pre-war period (Miyachi, 2008, p. 49).

**Figure 3: Trends in Lacquerware Production Value, Export Value, and Export Ratio of Production (in thousand yen, %)**



Note: Same as Figure 1.

Source: see Figure 1. Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, "Statistical tables of commerce and industry," (various years).

In the overall trend described above, Shizuoka gradually became the main producer of exported lacquerware. The following factors can be attributed to the expansion of Shizuoka's export lacquerware production. Shizuoka lacquerware was beautifully decorated on the exterior along with the technique of roiro-nuri (wax colouring). The base material used was what was known as kairyo-shitaji (an improved base and an inexpensive glue base to which formalin was applied to add insolubility). Improved base enabled the manufacture of inexpensive products with a certain degree of durability. In addition to this, the work of skilled artisans made it possible to meet inexpensive orders from foreign trading houses (Sawaguchi, 1933, pp. 246-248). In addition to these manufacturing techniques, they also caught up with trends in innovative products and designs, such as picture boards. This allowed Shizuoka to maintain and expand its production as a centre for the manufacture of export goods, even after many production centres had converted to the domestic market (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1906, p. 316).

#### **4. Shifts in export markets, 1911-1936**

##### ***Trends in export markets and production areas for Europe and the USA***

Let us examine the changes in export values and markets from the 1910s to the pre-war period in 1936. Lacquerware export destinations during this period can be divided into three main groups: European, North American, and colonial markets. This section first covers European and North American markets.

As mentioned earlier, lacquerware exports declined significantly after 1908 and subsequently stagnated. The World War I outbreak in 1914 altered the lacquerware market. From the 1910s onwards, the proportion of exports to North America increased, making it the main export destination.

Reports from the 1910s show that lacquerware exports were dominated by boxes, with hand towel, handkerchief and glove boxes accounting for a half of the total exports. This was followed by trays, albums, Shibayama frames (frames inlaid with shell, ivory, tortoiseshell, coral, and other materials on the surface of lacquerware to create flower-and-bird painting and figure painting), and oil-painted frames. In particular, exports of Shibayama frames expanded in the 1910s, primarily to Europe, accounting for approximately 10% of the total export value. Exports to the USA similarly centred on glove boxes and handkerchief boxes (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1912, pp. 428-429).

Before the 1910s, these products in the US market needed to be cheaper than their European counterparts to sell well. Consequently, the sales channel focused on Yokohama-made products, which were of a lower grade than those made in Shizuoka. However, from the 1910s onwards, the US market began demanding higher-grade products, leading to an increase in orders for Shizuoka-made products (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1913, pp. 488-489). With the outbreak of World War I, the booming US economy and the interruption of German-made lacquerware imports led to an increased demand

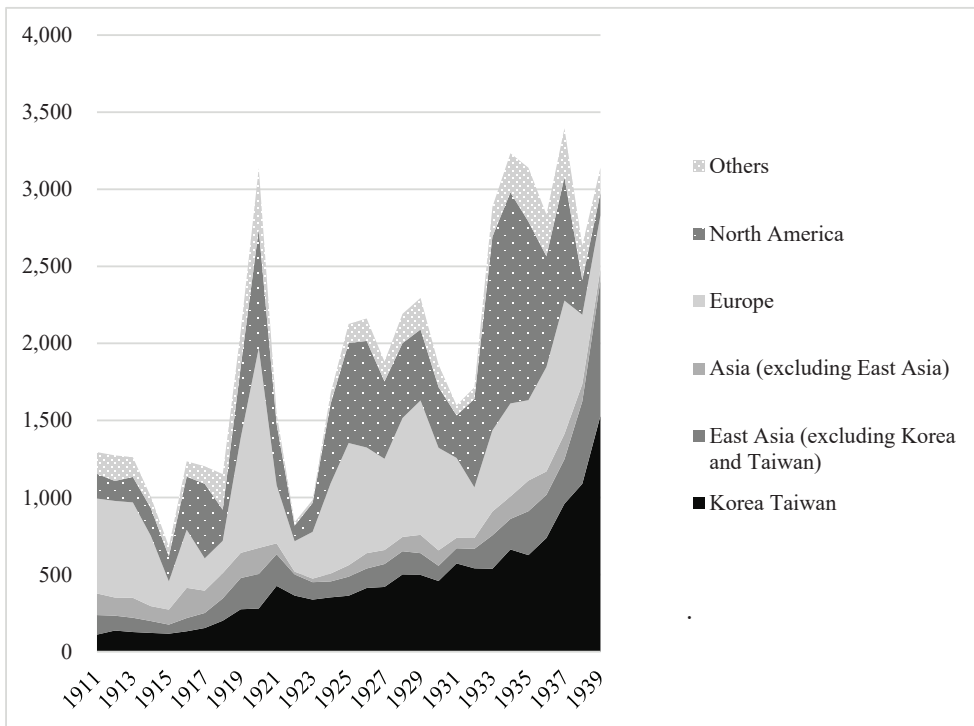


for Japanese lacquerware. In addition to products such as trays, handkerchief boxes, and glove boxes, exports of small chests, hat stands, corner shelves, and small perfume boxes increased.

There was also a growing market for daily-use lacquerware with increased exports of lacquerware salad bowls and fork-and-spoon sets (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1915, pp. 530-531). On the other hand, exports of expensive, highly artistic products did not perform well at all (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1916, pp. 402-403). In relation to these trends and production areas, Shizuoka emerged as the main production area for export expansion in the 1910s. Primary exports included trays and various types of boxes, such as handkerchief boxes, glove boxes, and confectionery boxes, as well as cigarette cases, hat stands, tables, photo frames, and finger bowls (Trade Division, Commerce Bureau, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1927, pp. 34-36).

Figure 4 shows that at the end of the 1910s, exports to Europe, particularly the UK, increased after inventories were cleared during World War I. However, in the early 1920s, lacquerware exports fell sharply due to the effects of the postwar depression. By the mid-1920s, as the effects of the depression subsided, exports to Europe began to recover. The North American market also remained strong from the mid-1920s onwards, and by the 1930s, it became a larger market for Japanese lacquerware than Europe.

**Figure 4: Trends in Lacquerware Export Destinations (1911-1939, in thousand yen)**



Source: see Figure 1.

We will now examine the relationship between these export trends and export production areas using rail freight statistics. Table 1 shows the tonnage of lacquerware arriving in Yokohama and Kobe with regard to railway freight statistics for 1922. As can be seen from this, the largest number of cargoes arriving in both cities, where Japan's major trading ports were located, were dispatched from Shizuoka Prefecture. Based on the demand for lacquerware in both cities, it became clear that the Shizuoka production area had a large share of lacquerware exports in the 1920s. However, the 1920s saw an expansion in the production of export lacquerware made in Yokohama, particularly furniture and decorative items (Trade Division, Commerce Department, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1927, pp. 24, 31). These were mainly exported from the port of Yokohama, but they have rarely been recorded in the cargo arriving in Yokohama (Trade Division, Commerce Bureau, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1927, p. 31).

**Table 1. Lacquerware Rail Transport Arrival Tonnage (Top 5 Prefectures)**

	Yokohama		Kobe	
1	Shizuoka	370	Shizuoka	140
2	Tokyo	110	Kanagawa	31
3	Fukushima	24	Ishikawa	28
4	Aichi	13	Kyoto	14
5	Kanagawa	8	Fukushima	6
	Total Top 5	525	Total Top 5	219
	Total	540	Total	236

Source: Ministry of Railways, Transport Bureau (1922) *Major Freight Transport Quantities by Rail*.

However, Shizuoka's production area was severely affected by a sharp decline in exports in the early 1920s. Until then, approximately 60% of Shizuoka's production had been exported. Under the export depression, many products were converted to the domestic market, and after the 1920s, up to 80% of products were said to have been converted to the domestic market (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1921, pp. 315-316). Some artisans involved in lacquerware production also shifted to the manufacture of lacquered products such as mirror stands, lacquered clogs, and dolls (Baba, 2016, p. 104). Even in 1925, when exports recovered, they accounted for a declining share of production, with 72% going to the domestic market (Trade Division, Commerce Department, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1927, p. 35). As shown in Figure 3, domestic demand continued to dominate from the 1910s onwards, with the share of exports in national output consistently falling below 10% from 1921 onwards. Amid this domestic demand-led production expansion, exporting regions, particularly

Shizuoka, improved their ability to respond to the domestic market while simultaneously identifying the needs of export markets and working to expand sales channels.

This assessment of lacquerware exports from the 1920s onwards is based on reports published in 1933, in which the aforementioned problem of rough manufacturing continued to be an impediment to lacquerware exports. Assessments in the Seattle and Toronto markets have pointed to cracking due to drying or vessel bending caused by climatic changes, and paint peeling (Trade Bureau, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1933, pp. 4, 32).<sup>4</sup> Reports from Belgium in the 1930s also reveal the European market's assessment of Japanese lacquerware during that period. The value of Japanese lacquerware imports to Europe was only one-tenth that of ceramics. In addition, most of the imports were boxes such as handkerchief boxes, glove boxes, confectionery boxes, and trays with brown or black flower-and-bird patterns; no high-end art lacquerware was imported. This is because the increased demand for inferior goods has discouraged dealers from importing luxury goods, such as artistically decorated lacquerware. Antique appreciation-oriented collectors stopped collecting lacquerware as its quality declined (Trade Bureau, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1933, pp. 52-53). Thus, the problem of poor-quality products, which persisted in the 1930s, was a major obstacle to the export of luxury goods.

### *Expansion of exports and transfers to the Imperial Japanese sphere*

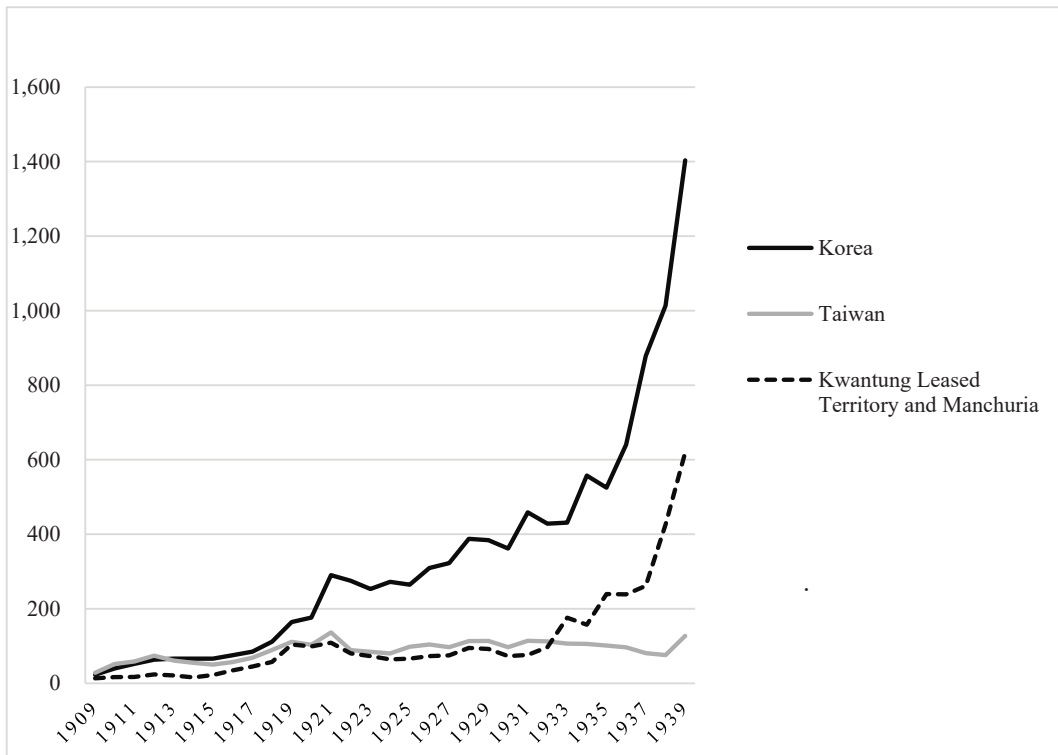
This section examines non-Western markets from the 1910s onwards. As illustrated in Figure 4, exports to colonial markets such as Korea and Taiwan expanded from the late 1910s. Unlike Western markets, which experienced fluctuations in export values, the colonial markets demonstrated a steady increase in exports until the end of the 1930s.

Following the first Sino-Japanese War, Japan acquired Taiwan in 1895, and after the Russo-Japanese War, parts of Manchuria and Korea came under Japanese influence. This expansion of Japanese power corresponded to an increase in lacquerware exports (Tax Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1906, p. 315). To capture the relationship between these spheres of influence and exports, we examined the trends in the value of exports to and from the Japanese imperial sphere, as depicted in Figure 5. In 1910, Korea was colonized by Japan. In the same year, the value of exports to Korea surpassed that to Taiwan. Following the 1931 Manchurian Incident, Manchuria became a de facto Japanese colony, which led to a rapid increase in lacquerware exports. By contrast, the transfer of lacquerware to Taiwan increased only gradually.

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<sup>4</sup> In response to the continuing problem of rough production, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry established the National Research Institute of Industrial Arts in 1927. This was intended to promote exports, and its main purpose was to devise and teach new designs for crafts, including lacquerware. (Isobe, 1946, p. 230).

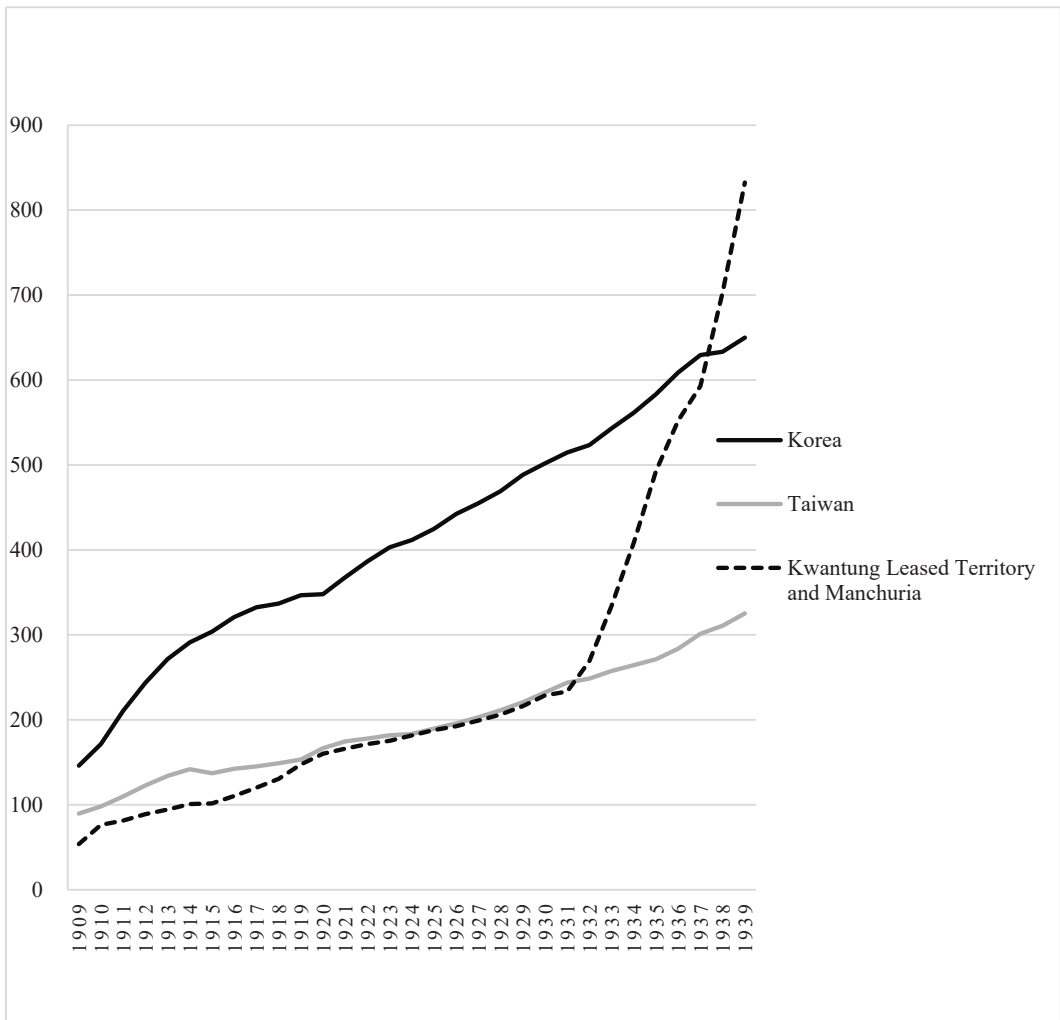
**Figure 5: Exports and Imports of Lacquerware to and from the Japanese Empire (in thousand yen)**



Source: see Figure 1

Although the demand for Japanese lacquerware in the colonial market is unclear, the Japanese immigration to the region, as shown in Figure 6, provides some insights. Prior to colonisation, more Japanese were living in Korea than in Taiwan, and this difference increased after colonisation. After the Manchurian Incident, Japanese immigration to Manchuria increased rapidly.

**Figure 6. Trends in the Population of Japanese Nationals Residing in Colonies (in thousand persons)**



Source: Hayashi (2021)

The increase in Japanese immigration following colonisation led to an increase in the number of Japanese-owned restaurants and the spread of the Japanese way of life. Unlike Western markets, lacquerware was a necessity in these areas, especially for Japanese immigrants, comparable to its status in Japan. With the increase in immigration, the market for lacquerware steadily expanded. By the 1930s, the size of the Japanese imperial sphere was comparable to that of the Western market. After the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, exports to the West declined, and exports to the Japanese imperial sphere increased steadily, making it the largest market for Japanese-made lacquerware.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper analysed the long-term export trends of lacquerware from the mid-19th century to the 1930s. During the opening of the ports at the end of the Edo period, lacquerware occupied a position second only to raw silk and tea. In the early Meiji period, the demand for lacquerware in Europe increased and the Japanese government's trade promotion policy led to an increase in the value of lacquerware exports. Lacquerware exports increased steadily, reaching a prewar peak as a percentage of total exports in 1881, making lacquerware one of the main export products of the early Meiji period. During 1882-1910, exports to Europe expanded, with the UK becoming the primary market. However, the fragility of lacquerware and the use of low-quality materials led to issues with export quality. Combined with the diversification of export products in the 1890s, this resulted in a decline in the proportion of exported lacquerware. Analysis of export production areas identified Wakayama, Shizuoka, and Yokohama as the main centres. In the 1900s, as prices soared, many production areas shifted their focus to domestic demand, with Wakayama pivoting toward domestic needs and Shizuoka expanding its export production.

World War I led to a decline in exports to Europe, offset by increased exports to North America. Although exports declined during the 1920s, they showed an increasing trend from the mid-1920s through the 1930s. However, domestic demand expanded beyond exports, maintaining the structure of lacquerware production largely for domestic consumption. Exports to the Japanese imperial sphere, including colonial markets in Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria, expanded rapidly from the 1910s onwards, owing to Japanese immigration and the spread of the Japanese way of life. Unlike Western markets, the demand in these regions was primarily for daily necessities, resulting in steady market expansion within the Japanese imperial sphere.

In conclusion, it became clear that export lacquerware of the prewar period was a product that had both a craft and a daily necessity aspect. Lacquerware as a craft was highly valued for its artistic value from the opening of the ports at the end of the Edo period, and exports to Europe. During the "Japonism boom," Japanese lacquerware enjoyed temporary success, but faced the problem of poor quality and over production, which undermined its credibility in the export market. The quality problems at the time may have been due to factors such as confusion in responding to rapidly increasing demand and the expansion of production by commercial and industrial traders who were not oriented toward long-term transactions. At the time, Japan was not able to expand its quality control efforts to prevent the spread of bad reputation abroad. While exports of lacquerware as a craft stagnated, exports of lacquerware as a daily commodity increased. Exports of these products expanded, mainly in response to demand in the North American and Asian markets. These markets demanded practicality and low prices. Exporting production areas and merchants responded to competition by

incorporating new uses and designs. The case of export lacquerware illustrates the two-sided nature of product competition, which creates technological innovation but also always involves quality issues. In the future, it will be important to analyse how the specific actors in the export industry (production areas, firms, and artisans) were involved in competition.

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# **Adding Patina: Lacquer and Japanese Bamboo Baskets as kunstgewerbe, 1873–1900**

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the transformative role of Japanese lacquer in elevating the appeal of exported bamboo basketry during the late 19th century. Initially, lacquer application was functional, serving to enhance the durability and water resistance of bamboo artefacts used for daily purposes. However, as bamboo baskets transitioned into artistic objects, particularly as flower vases for tea ceremonies, lacquer gained significance for its aesthetic contributions, including the creation of a distinctive patina. By the mid-19th century, bamboo craft achieved recognition as the work of named artisans, with lacquer techniques enhancing the material beauty of these objects. This study explores the growing recognition of bamboo baskets as craft objects between 1870 and 1900, focusing on the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (MKG) in Hamburg, a leading collector of these artefacts. By examining lacquer's role, this paper sheds light on its contribution to the global reception of Japanese crafts as industrial art.

**Keywords:** Bamboo, Craft, Lacquer, Export, Industrial Art, Brinckmann

**JEL Classification Codes:** N83, N75.

## **1. Lacquer and the Changing Evaluation of the Bamboo Craft**

This paper examines the evolving role of Japanese lacquer by investigating the process of exported bamboo basketry in the late 19th century. The application of lacquer to bamboo artefacts was initially limited when these objects were primarily used for everyday purposes. However, the status of bamboo artefacts changed when they began to be used as flower vases for tea ceremonies. These

baskets, crafted from exceptionally fine bamboo strips (*takehigo*), owed much of their durability, elasticity, and distinctive sheen called as *patina* to the application of lacquer—both during the weaving process and as a final finish. In this context, lacquer was applied not only for its functional purpose of preventing water leakage, but also for its aesthetic contribution, particularly in expressing a refined patina. By the mid-19th century, when bamboo craft was elevated to the status of the work of named artisans, techniques involving the delicate application of lacquer further enhanced the material beauty of bamboo and accentuated the effect of patina.

In Japan, bamboo has been used to make everyday items since ancient times, with the history of bamboo ware production dating back to the late Jōmon period (3000-1000 BC). By the Middle Ages, bamboo handicrafts were widely used by commoners as practical tools and containers of various sizes. While bamboo was generally valued primarily for its practical utility due to its rapid growth and widespread availability for the production of everyday items, around the 7th century, bamboo handicrafts began to cater to the urban elite, producing refined items for the imperial court, aristocratic households and ritual purposes. These included items such as *iriko* (baskets for drying fish), *aburiko* (baskets for drying clothes), cradles and *takugai* (screens for making washi paper), marking a shift towards more sophisticated bamboo craftsmanship (Miyagawa, 1998: 67). However, as these items did not require waterproofing, lacquer was not often applied.

At that time, lacquer was mostly applied on wood-base. The widespread production of lacquer and lacquerware in Japan can be confirmed by the tax law *Engishiki* 延喜式 in the 10th century. This legislation record identified fifteen to twenty regions in Japan where lacquerware was produced. By the 11th century, the wealthy class of society was using lacquerware as everyday tableware. Around this time, *kakishibu* (persimmon tannin) was developed as a cheaper substitute for lacquer. *Kakishibu* is a liquid of condensed tannin obtained by crushing and adding water or extracting and fermenting juice from persimmons. When mixed with carbon powder, it forms a coating that has waterproofing and preserving properties. During late medieval periods, lacquer or *kakishibu* became more and more applied for dining wares (Yotsuyanagi, 2018: 30-31).

The development and refinement of Japanese bamboo craft were greatly influenced by the importation of *karamono-kago* (Chinese bamboo baskets), noted for their symmetrical construction using fine bamboo strips, and the application of darker shades achieved through smoking techniques and lacquer. Although the exact date of the introduction of *karamono-kago* to Japan remains unclear, these baskets were regularly imported from the late medieval to early modern periods, inspiring

Japanese artisans to adopt and adapt their techniques, calling them as Chinese-style baskets.

The demand for these Chinese and Chinese-style bamboo baskets rose with the flourishing of the tea culture, particularly for use in the tea ceremony, where bamboo was fashioned into intricate tea tools and flower vases. Lacquer and *kakishibu* were increasingly used in Chinese-style bamboo craft as these items required waterproofing, and also for expressing darker shades and patina. The powdered tea (*matcha*) method, introduced to Japan from Song China in the late 12th century (Miyagawa, 1998: 71), required the use of bamboo to make utensils such as the *chasen* (tea whisk), which played a crucial role in stirring the powdered tea. Bamboo was appreciated for its humble, fragile and natural appearance, which suited the elite aesthetic of *wabisabi*, and widely used for items related to tea ceremony, such as flower vases and charcoal containers.

The 17<sup>th</sup>-18th centuries saw the spread of *sencha*, a Chinese-style method of brewing tea using a teapot. Although this way of tea did not require bamboo tools developed for powdered tea, this method further reinforced the demand for bamboo craft items. Sencha connoisseurs sought complete sets of tea utensils from China, which included not only baskets but also a wide range of bamboo tools such as utensil storage boxes, carrying baskets, charcoal containers, ink sticks, and tea measures (Maezaki, 2020: 4-5). Bamboo flower baskets continued to have popularity as well.

This importation of Chinese bamboo crafts elevated the social status of bamboo in early modern Japan. Under the strict caste system in the Edo period, the producers and vendors of bamboo artefacts were designated to lower castes in certain regions, in connection with their roles in managing wells and landscapes (Hayashi, 1995). This had limited the appreciation of bamboo as an artistic medium. In contrast, in Chinese *sencha* culture, bamboo was regarded as a symbol of virtue, representing steadfastness and integrity. Bamboo was seen as metaphor for remaining upright and unaffected by worldly concerns (Maezaki, 2020). Bamboo crafts were thus appreciated among the intellectual elites, elaborating their status. This change enabled artisans of bamboo artistic crafts to establish specialised artisans, most notably *kagoshi* (bamboo basket artisans), elaborate their skills and collaborate with other skills such as lacquer artisans. It is assumed that imitative production of Chinese bamboo crafts intensified since late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Maezaki 2020: 5). The production of such bamboo utensils for *sencha* tea flourished in large cities like Kyoto and Osaka, as well as port cities like Nagasaki, where artisans had direct access to Chinese tea utensils for study and imitation. Smoking bamboo techniques, lacquer and *kakishibu* were gradually applied in this process not only to reinforce protection and water resistance but also to enhance darker colours, shades and sheen that

was prominent in karamono.

The emerging Japanese kagoshi (bamboo basket artisans) were dedicated to the production of baskets that were perceived to be authentic in their Chinese style. Consequently, the majority of artisans eschewed the practice of inscribing their names or establishing discernible familial lines of craftsmanship upon their creations. However, this has changed around the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Maezaki (2020) notes, the first kagoshi to have marked their names on their works were Kobayashi Minminsai (小林毘々齋), whose lineage spanned from the first generation (?-1791) to the fourth (1878), and Hayakawa Shōkōsai (早川尚古齋) the first (1815-1897) of Osaka.

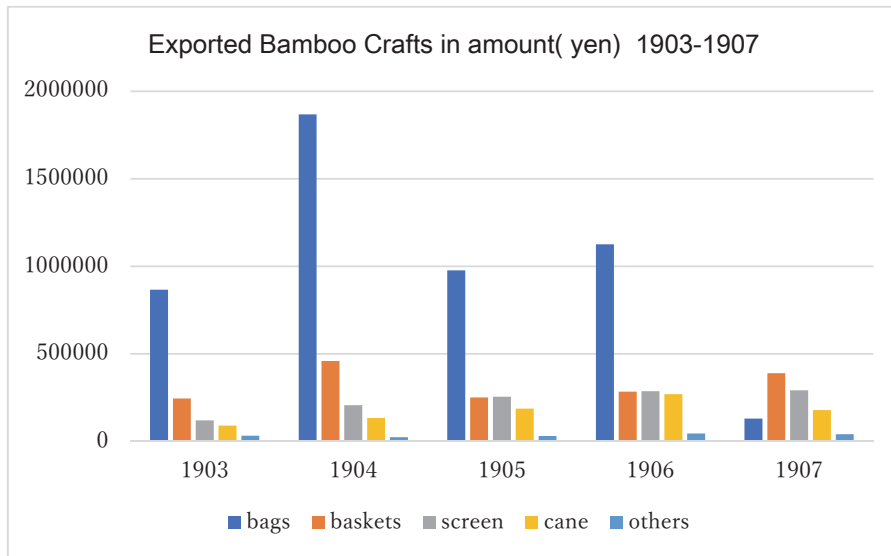
Minminsai's name is known because his skills were officially recognised by his patron, Todo Takasato, and his vassals. Todo was the daimyo of the Tsu domain in Ise, whose bamboo craft was not well developed.. After training in Kyoto, Minminsai was regarded exceptional both for his refined weaving forms and enhanced skills in colouring and sheen. An essay published in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Tsu noted "A man named Minminsai is renowned for his expertise in the art of weaving. His soup bowls and vases are crafted with such fine bamboo strips that no drops of water escape, despite not using of lacquer." (Umebara, 1961: 741-2) This observation indicates that a significant number of contemporary bamboo artisans employed the use of thick layers of lacquer to seal the gaps between the woven bamboo and prevent water leakage. Minminsai, on the other hand, achieved such precision in his weaving, using bamboo strips of the finest quality, that the need for lacquer as a sealant was largely negated. Instead, he developed a new direction in the colouring and lustre of the baskets, for which he used the lacquer.

This trend was enhanced further by later basket makers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hayakawa Shōkōsai was also celebrated for his use of exceptionally thin bamboo strips, which allowed him to create surfaces without the need for extensive lacquer coatings. In addition, Shōkōsai is known for employing a special lacquer mixture to treat the bamboo strips before weaving, enhancing their darker sheen and giving the finished product a delicate patina-like lustre. Later, the shapes of bamboo baskets began to take on more figurative or asymmetrical forms, which became known as Japanese-style baskets as opposed to Chinese-style baskets. It was these Japanese bamboo baskets, both Japanese-style and Chinese-style ones, that were highly praised in World's Fairs, especially those of Vienna (1873) and Paris (1900), whose process will be examined fully in the next section.

Bamboo craft export expanded as well. By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, exported bamboo crafts were divided into: 1) travelling bags, 2) baskets, 3) furnishing, 4) screens, and 5) canes. Of these, bamboo travelling bags were the category that had highest export amount till 1906. A dramatic decline in the

export amount of travelling bags in 1907, however, made baskets the largest category to be exported.

**Figure 1. Exported Bamboo Crafts in amount, 1903-1907**



Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, Commerce Bureau, Handbook of Important Exported Manufactured Goods [1908], Part 2, 1908-1909, p. 939.

According to a 1908 trade report, Japanese baskets exported to the United States—the largest market—included items such as wastepaper baskets, laundry baskets, lunchboxes, sewing kit holders, document cases, perfume containers, and candy boxes (MAC, 1908, pp. 939-40). There was considerable variation in price, depending on the quality of craftsmanship and the size of the basket, with wholesale prices for a set ranging from 6 cents to 6 dollars.

An emerging competitor to bamboo crafts was *kyogi* (経木), or paper-thin wood craft, which had several advantages over bamboo; it was cheaper to produce, allowed for greater flexibility in colour and design, and was particularly suitable for holiday gifts, such as Christmas presents. The report strongly recommended that bamboo craft exports adopt techniques that would enable them to incorporate colours and designs more freely to align with American consumer preferences, as was possible with *kyogi*.

While the price of bamboo baskets was depressed by competition from cheaper *kyogi* and other materials, the overall export not only facilitated such cheaper items, but supported the expansion of

artistic, articulate and profitable craft production of bamboo. As late as 1930, (Hōchi Newspaper, 1930) , a handbook of profitable sideline businesses published by a newspaper company devoted a considerable number of pages to 'artistic baskets' as one of the promising businesses of the future. The author discussed the expansion of exports of bamboo handicrafts, described as 'graceful in colour and form', from the mid-1880s and the instability of these exports after the First World War. It was noted, however, that the growth in domestic demand more than offset the decline in exports. Once again, patina was emphasised as a defining characteristic of Japanese bamboo basketry as follows, although the role of lacquer was not specified in this text: 'In general, they (bamboo baskets) are polished to a black copper colour, and many of them exhibit a refined astringency and mature taste' (Hochi Shimbun News Department, 1930: 238).

## **2. Negotiating Categories: The translation of 'Kunstgewerbe' at Vienna World's Fair, 1873**

Towards the end of the 19th century, Japanese bamboo craft was recognised in Europe as a form of industrial art or Kunstgewerbe. While Japanese craft historians have studied the display of bamboo and lacquer crafts in European and North American museums, not enough attention has been paid to the fact that they were displayed in museums dedicated to industrial arts rather than those dedicated to fine arts. The following two sections examine the process by which bamboo baskets came to be recognised as industrial art between 1870 and 1900.

Bamboo and lacquer crafts were not categorised as industrial art in the early stages of their introduction at the Vienna World's Fair in 1873, but were initially grouped under the broader category of 'woodenware'. In the Vienna World's Fair, Group 22 was the section that was related to Kunstgewerbe. The original text in German of Group 22 was as follows:

*22 Gruppe: Darstellung der Wirksamkeit der Kunstgewerbe Museen. Diese Gruppe soll die Mittel darstellen, mit deren Hilfe die Kunstgewerblichen Museen der Neuzeit auf Veredlung des Geschmacks und auf allgemeine Kunstbildung einzuwirken bemüht sind.*

The direct translation of this text is:

*Group 22: Presentation of the effectiveness of the Kunstgewerbe (industrial art) museums. This group is intended to present the means by which the industrial art museums of modern times have endeavoured to influence the refinement of taste and general art education'.*

However, the official English explanation of Group 22 explained the sentence with a stronger connection with fine arts, defining the museum of Kunstgewerbe (industrial art) as 'Museum of fine

arts applied to industry’:

*Group 22: Representation of the influence of Museum of fine Arts applied to Industry. The object of this department is to show the means by aid of which the modern museums of fine arts applied to industry (viz South Kensington Museum in London and the similar museums in Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, etc.) endeavour to improve the public taste and diffuse artistic education.*

In this explanation, South Kensington Museum (1852, now the Victoria and Albert Museum), Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna (1871) and Deutsches Gewerbe Museum zu Berlin (1868) were supplemented as the actual examples of the designated genre.

The official Japanese explanation of Group 22 made one year prior to the exhibition was as follows, when translated in English:

*Group 22: Application of the Museum of Bijutsu (the artistic poetics that encompasses the creation of music, painting, pictures and sculpture is called bijutsu in the West) to crafts (kōsaku 工作). The profits of this museum should be used to enrich people's tastes and express their awareness of the principles of art and industry.<sup>1</sup>*

Historians agree that this catalogue made in 1872 marked the beginning of the term *bijutsu* (美術). At the same time, as both Kitazawa (1997; 2023) and Amagai (2000) have pointed out respectively from the analysis of the same catalogue, that in translating, the term *bijutsu* was applied as the translation of Kunstgewerbe, Kunst, and bildende Kunst (Amagai, 2000:3).

Japanese translated phrase of Group 22 shows that it was drawn on both the German and English interpretations but leaned more towards the English version showing the connection with fine arts. Most probably, the term "fine arts" in the English phrase of "Museum of fine Arts applied to Industry" was translated as *bijutsu*, which was defined as "artistic poetics encompassing the creation of music, painting, pictures and sculpture". However, when the Japanese version and German version are directly compared, it can be interpreted that Kunstgewerbe were translated as *bijutsu*. The Japanese explanation addresses the application of such arts for crafts, described here in the neutral terms of *kōsaku* 工作, which can range from simple handcraft to industrial manufactures. The

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<sup>1</sup> 第22区 美術(西洋にて音楽画学像をつくる術詩学などを美術という)の博覧場(ムゼウム)を工作のために用うる。子の博覧場の利益によって人民の好尚を盛美にしかつ術業の理に明かなることを著すべし。澳国維納府博覧会出品心得、日本近代思想大系17『美術』(1989年、岩波書店)資料編所収。See the translation in the text.

term industry is also not represented here. The actual examples of museums shown in the English definition was omitted. The last sentence was described in the Japanese version without the word of art education which were in both German and English versions.

In the German official categorization, the definitions of Groups 24 and 25 further clarified the Kunstgewerbe meant in Group 22. Because Group 24 exhibits "objects of Kunst and Kunstgewerbe from earlier times with the aim of introducing new ideas to contemporary Kunstgewerbe"<sup>2</sup>, and Group 25 displayed contemporary visual arts (bildende Kunst), it becomes clear that Group 22 were contemporary Kunstgewerbe shown by public modern industrial art museums, which were separated both from earlier works in the private collections or contemporary visual arts. This also demonstrates the vigorous promotion Viennese World Exhibition opt for Kunstgewerbe genre.

However, this distinction that defines contemporary Kunstgewerbe is entirely lost in the Japanese version, mainly because it did not set an independent translation for Kunstgewerbe. In the Japanese version, Group 24 is explained as '*bijutsu* and their crafts of the past'. The last phrase that said 'the aim of introducing new ideas to contemporary Kunstgewerbe' in the German version was translated as 'for the purpose of expanding knowledge of 'artists', omitting the concept of contemporary *Kunstgewerbe* entirely.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Group 25 was translated as 'contemporary fine arts' produced after the 1862 London World's Fair.'<sup>4</sup> Thus, a notable discrepancy arises between the official German and Japanese classifications. That was the confusion that the new term *bijutsu* encompassed both the concepts of fine arts and Kunstgewerbe, as Amagai and Kitazawa pointed out before. However, to be more precise, the confusion arose by the exclusion of the translation of *Kunstgewerbe* entirely as we have analysed here.

This suggests that Japanese officials, while adopting Western concepts of art, were unaware of the distinct category of "Kunstgewerbe" at the time of the Vienna World's Fair. This neglect was

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<sup>2</sup> Gruppe 24: Objekte der Kunst und *Kunstgewerbe* früherer Zeiten ausgestellt von Kunstliebhabern (sic) und Sammlern“soll,der „Versuch gemachtwerden, die Schätze der Privatsammlungen, welche in derRegel nur kleinen Kreisen zugänglich sind, den Kunstfreunden zuerschließen und dem *Kunstgewerbe* neue Ideen zuzuführen.“ English translation: Group 24, "Objects of art and craftsmanship from earlier times, exhibited by art enthusiasts and collectors" to attempt to make the treasures of private collections, which are usually only accessible to small circles, available to art lovers and to introduce new ideas to the arts and crafts.

<sup>3</sup> 第二十四区 昔ノ美術ト其工作 物品ヲ出ス事一人々自家ニ蔵スル美術業ノ物品ハ常ニ其親近ヲ者ノミニ見ル故今展覧会ニ出シ万人ヲ示シ且芸術家ノ知識ヲ広ムル為ナリ

<sup>4</sup> 第二十五区 今世ノ美術ノ事ニ但一千八百六十二年ニ於テ倫頓ノ展覧会ノ後出来セシ文ノ品物ナリ



immediately corrected after the 1873 World's Fair. The translation of *Kunstgewerbe* as *kōgei* (工芸) began to appear in the official reports from 1875, where the term *Kunstgewerbe* started to be translated as either *kōjutsu* (工術, industrial art) or *kōgei* (工芸, artistic crafts) (Amagai 2000: 2). This marked a significant shift in the Japanese understanding of crafts and their place within the global discourse on art and industry. From Japan's side, attempt was first made to understand and learn the field of *Kunstgewerbe* and their museums in the 1880s-90s, leading up to the publication of recommendation for the construction of a museum.

Thus, all bamboo as well as lacquer craft ware were submitted to Group 8, woodenware in the Viennese World Exhibition in 1873. Japan submitted 622 items to this group, of which, 218 items were made of bamboo. Besides bamboo, there were 52 items made of straw and 121 items made of wicker and rattan. Thus, more than 60 % of the Japanese items in woodwork were basketries and knitted works. The Japanese oriented to showcase the techniques related to these items. Among bamboo works attention was paid to demonstrate various knitting methods and forms as well as the colouring, distinguishing rusty-coloured and soot-coloured bamboo works from normal ones. Also in lacquer, not only the lacquerwares but also the technology for diverse colouring, layering and *maki-e* techniques of lacquer together with the application of metallic powders were demonstrated.

Notably, this World's Fair marked the first encounter of Brinkmann, who later became director of the Hamburg Museum of Arts and Crafts, with Japanese bamboo baskets, as he served as a jury member for woodwork.

### **3. Transforming Bamboo Baskets into Kunstgewerbe: Justus Brinkman and Japanese bamboo collection at MKG**

The question now arises: who was responsible for recognizing Japanese crafts, including bamboo crafts, as *Kunstgewerbe*, given that they were not categorized as such at the Vienna World's Fair? In the case of bamboo crafts, the answer can be identified with relative clarity. The Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (MKG hereafter), under the leadership of its first director, Justus Brinckmann, who established its renowned collection of bamboo baskets between the 1880s and 1890s, played a significant role. Housing 200 bamboo baskets by 1894, the museum's collection is among the most significant of its kind, both nationally and internationally, alongside notable collections in Switzerland, Britain and the United States (von Achenbach: 20).

What distinguishes this collection is its exclusive emphasis on bamboo baskets, highlighting their aesthetic value rather than providing a comprehensive survey of Japanese bamboo craftsmanship. This curatorial vision is largely attributed to Brinckmann, who served as the museum's founding director from 1874 and is often recognized as one of the very few European museum directors to have appreciated the artistic quality of Japanese bamboo baskets. By incorporating bamboo baskets into the museum's collection, Brinckmann conferred upon them a definitive status as Kunstgewerbe. This section explores the process by which this recognition was achieved.

The bamboo basket collection in Hamburg has been treated separately from the lacquerware collection. This separation was consistent with Brinckmann's collecting approach and continues in the current cataloguing of the museum's holdings. In fact, the Hamburg museum's lacquerware collection is significantly larger than its bamboo basket collection. By 1889, fifteen years after the museum's founding, it housed 6,050 objects, of which 116 were lacquerware items (purchased for 8,426 Mark), while only six were bamboo baskets (purchased for 50 marks). Another prominent Japanese collection, the sword guard (*tsuba*) collection, consisted of 44 pieces (purchased for 9,328 marks), underscoring the relatively modest scale of the bamboo basket collection.

The lacquerware collection, by contrast, was systematically assembled to encompass a wide range of functions, forms, design, and techniques dating from the 15th to the 19th century. The current description of the lacquerware collection of MKG highlights examples such as a 16th-century cosmetic box adorned with gold and silver *maki-e*, a 17th-century hand-held box with poetic illustrations, a sake vessel by Koami Nagashige (1599-1651), and a full set of outdoor dining ware including bowls and dishes (Fortagne, 2014). Furthermore, the Museum collection includes numerous crafts from the Rinpa school and a collection of 380 tea ceremony ceramics, some of which have lacquer repairs. Yet, it is precisely in contrast to this expansive lacquerware collection that the bamboo basket collection was established as a distinct entity. From the annual reports between 1883 and 1994, bamboo baskets were consistently classified separately from lacquerware. This distinction differs from the classification at the Vienna World's Fair.

**Figure 2 Kagoshi exhibition displaying bamboo basket collection of MKG, Hamburg in 2019**



Source: Bild-Regional, [www.bild.de](http://www.bild.de)

Furthermore, the Hamburg museum's collection primarily focuses on the work of a single basket maker: 60 of the baskets are by Hayakawa Shōkōsai I (1815-1897), one of the earliest basket makers from the late Edo to early Meiji period to sign his works. While Shōkōsai attached his name even to pieces intended for the domestic market, the Hamburg Museum played a significant role in establishing his international recognition. Although Shōkōsai's name was passed down to his sons, Brinckmann deliberately chose not to acquire works by Shōkōsai II or Shōkōsai III. As a result, few pieces created after Shōkōsai I are included in the collection.

Most of the other baskets are unsigned, and their production dates are difficult to trace. As will be discussed later, Brinckmann clearly aimed to collect 'old' baskets, though most of the items in the collection are thought to have been made in the mid to late 19th century, making them contemporaneous to their acquisition. Additionally, the collection categorizes the baskets into two broad groups: 'Chinese style' and 'Japanese style.' However, this distinction does not necessarily correspond to the time of their creation or makers, as Shōkōsai himself produced works in both styles. The categorization is instead based on the symmetry of the basket's form and handle, with Chinese-style baskets typically exhibiting more symmetrical features.

The museum's annual reports from 1883 to 1893 show when, in what quantities and at what prices the bamboo artefacts were purchased. These records show that the acquisition and collection

of objects for the museum began as early as 1869, five years before its official opening in 1874. However, no bamboo artefacts were purchased until 1883. Therefore, as other researchers have noted, the objects donated to Brinckmann after the Vienna World's Fair did not include any of the bamboo baskets that were acquired a decade later, when the museum was more established.

**Tabel 1 Purchase of Basket crafts at MKG, 1869-1894**

Year	Pieces	Price(M)	Price/piece
1869(1877)-1883	0	0	
1884	2	167,99	83,99
1885	17	311,00	18,29
1886	1	10,00	10,00
1887	0	0	-
1888	0	0	-
1889	1	10,00	10,00
1890	1	15,00	15,00
1891	146	1898,00	13,00
1892	1	5,00	5,00
1893	20	560,50	28,03
1894	n.a.	n.a.	

Source: JWHA 1883-1895

As the table shows, the acquisition of bamboo baskets between 1884 and 1894 was highly irregular, with around three quarters of the collection's nearly 200 items acquired in 1891. After the purchase of two particularly expensive bamboo baskets for 80 marks in 1883, items costing around 10 marks each were acquired, followed by the purchase of 20 baskets in 1893. This allows us to divide the 10-year acquisition period into two phases: the early phase (1884-1886), when the first 20 items were collected, and the later phase (1891-1893), when nearly 170 items were collected in rapid succession.

As mentioned above, Brinckmann did not begin his collection of bamboo baskets until about ten years after the end of the Vienna World's Fair. Later evidence suggests that the collection was initiated by a chance meeting around 1883. Alfred Lichtwark, Brinckmann's art collaborator and a renowned art educator, recorded that Brinckmann was probably looking for sword guards (tsuba) in Paris in 1883 when he came across a jumble of Japanese export goods stuffed into a potato sack-like bag. Among these items, mostly of indifferent quality, were 'some of those beautiful Japanese

baskets which could only have been invented by someone with the soul of a poet' (von Achenbach, 2009: 13-14). Lichtwark notes that Brinckmann immediately ordered the purchase of all available items of this type, acquiring many. Indeed, it is reported in the annual report that they obtained about a hundred. However, Brinckmann likely selected only one or two of these acquisitions for the MKG collection in 1884, as shown in the table. Brinckmann appears to have sold most of his acquisitions to other museums. In 1885, he acquired 17 baskets for the museum but offered to sell 50 to the Kunstgewerbe museum in Berlin for prices ranging from 10 to 60 marks (von Achenbach, *ibid*, p.17). He also acted as an intermediary for acquisitions by the Grassi Museum in Leipzig and the Danish Art Industry Museum in Copenhagen (von Achenbach, *ibid*, footnote 23).

The curatorial intentions of the early phase of the collection are detailed in the 1886 annual report, which describes the purchase of several old basketworks as 'the most important acquisition' (JWHA 1886, p. 24). The significance of this acquisition is explained from four main perspectives. First, it addresses the underrepresentation of such works, noting that only a few examples had previously been presented. In this context, Shōkōsai is erroneously presented as 'the most traditional basket weaver of the 17th century'. Secondly, the age of the baskets is emphasised, with the Japanese pieces being considered particularly important because "older basketry of European origin is almost impossible to find".

Thirdly, the technical skill is emphasised. The report praises the craftsmanship of the baskets, noting features such as the permanent connection of feet, handles and grips through weaving, without the use of rivets, nails or wire, and the reinforcing mechanisms that prevent buckling. The flexibility in the way the handles and their attachments are woven is also noted, and the baskets are described as 'perfect examples of the true style for such work, dictated by the material and purpose'. Finally, it is emphasised that these techniques and the use of soft materials alien to European basketry, such as rootstocks and irregularly grown tendrils, are particularly instructive for Hamburg craftsmen. Overall, the curatorial intention at this stage was to emphasise the universal significance of these works in the wider history of basketry and their exquisite craftsmanship, which offers valuable insights into Hamburg's basket makers.

It was only after the demonstration of the utility of the baskets at the Hamburg trade and industry exhibition in 1889 that the bamboo collection was further expanded. According to the annual report in 1889, the exhibition showcased the invigorating influence of 'our collection of ancient Japanese baskets'. Nothing demonstrates this influence more than the basket maker Henning Ahrens receiving gold medal making replicas of baskets from Japanese collection. As figure shows, Ahrens presented a series of

baskets, not necessarily distinctively European at the exhibition, but it was the replica that received the first prize (Figures 3 and 4). Brinckmann stressed the inspiring influence of the Japanese collection and the Museum's intermediary role in delivering Japanese techniques that made Ahrens and other basket makers in Hamburg possible to create new basket weaving designs and to adopt Japanese techniques such as braiding at the rim or applying technique used for bamboo for leather (MKG, JHWA 1889: 46).

**Figure 3 Exhibition of Henning Ahrens at the Hamburg Trade and Industry exhibition, 1889**



Source: MKG collection

**Figure 4 Shōkōsai's bamboo basket (left) and Ahren's replica made for 1889 Exhibition (right)**



Source: von Achenbach 2019, p.1

#### 4. Adding Patina: The Role of Lacquer in the Bamboo basket

At the same time, Brinckmann did not fail to point out what was still missing from the works of Hamburg basket makers, and stressed the worth of ‘new’ basket collections. The key for this was patina. Comparing Ahren’s basket with the original, Brinckmann noted that:

*What he (Ahrens) was still missing from the exhibition, the dark, chestnut-brown or bronze-coloured patina, which was also used on the **new Japanese baskets** of a better quality. He (Ahrens) is now trying to catch up after the instructions obtained from the museums in Japan (MKG, JWHA 1889: 46).*

It is interesting that he stressed here the close contacts with Japan, that Ahrens was getting instruction from the museums in Japan. This way Brinckmann forecasted and reasoned the coming additional purchase of the Japanese basketworks.

In the 1891 annual report, Brinckmann provided a full-page overview and review of the newly purchased 146 bamboo baskets in the previous year (MKG, JWHA 1891: 36). As is typical of Brinckmann’s other essays on Japanese arts at this period, he elaborates first how baskets, mainly flower baskets are used within Japanese housing by the Japanese. He then praises the basketries from three aspects. The first is the inventing and free sense of beauty Japanese basket-makers have, inspired by shapes of fruits or vegetable or recreating animals such as insects or lobsters. Secondly, he highlights the artisan’s technical mastery in basketry, focusing on how structural features enhance both function and beauty: Larger vessels are reinforced with vertical rods and intricately plaited beads to prevent crushing; Or, the varied handles—ranging from side, double, and bow designs—are both elegant and functional, seamlessly integrated into the basket’s structure; These durable handles enhance the vessel’s utility and aesthetics, showcasing the artisan’s innovative craftsmanship and attention to detail. Such detailed observation into the structural aspects of the works became the source of admiration. These praises differed significantly from the earlier report in 1885. While the earlier report emphasized the universal importance and classical oldness of Japanese baskets, this report concentrates on the creativity and technique of the contemporary baskets. Furthermore, although this purchase included at least 13 baskets made by Shōkōsai I in the late 1880s, and Brinckmann’s attitude to collect Shōkōsai I’s works continued, the report no longer mentions about Shōkōsai.

Finally, the third and the last element of the baskets that was newly stressed was its colours—namely patina. He wrote:



*Artificially adding colour to the raw materials is rarely done. But the baskets are given a darker, often reddish brown or black colour by pickling or smoking. The patina of old baskets that have been processed for a long time, which have nothing to do with deceitful purposes but rather a delicate liking for the warm, shiny colouring, corresponds to the raw material, such as the siliceous skin of bamboo and Spanish canes (JWHA 1891: 38).*

While Japanese lacquer applied for the bamboo baskets is not directly mentioned here, it was clear that authenticity of the colouring and the patina became an important factor in the extensive purchase of the baskets in 1890. To prove this, the bamboo baskets in MKG collection are limited to into a narrow range of baskets with patina-like darker coloured sheens.

Brinckmann and basket makers like Ahrens were likely unaware of the application of lacquer in Japanese basketry during the late 1880s. However, they recognized the importance of understanding this technique, advocating for communication with Japanese ‘museums’. The specific institutions Brinckmann sought to contact remain unclear.

This interest in lacquer was not confined to Hamburg nor Germany. It was during this period that Japanese lacquer began to be studied extensively in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Their focus was not solely on traditional decorative techniques like *maki-e*, but rather on lacquer’s ability to create surfaces with varied colours and sheens (Kato, 1999). Artisans and educators from art schools were invited to participate in cultural exchanges. This era also marked the beginning of Eileen Gray’s (1884-1937) and Jean Dunand’s (1877-1942) works with lacquer, in collaboration with Japanese lacquer artists such as Seizo Sugawara (Fortagne, 2014).<sup>5</sup>

It is no coincidence that the largest lacquerware collection in Münster, Germany, was established in conjunction with painting and varnishing manufacturers. The museum’s origins trace back to the collections made during the 1930s by employees of the Cologne-based paint factory Herbig Haarhaus, founded in 1871. In 1968, BASF acquired both the company and the museum, which is now under the ownership of BASF Coatings. Between 1900 and the 1930s, a synthesized understanding of lacquer emerged, culminating in Oskar Schlemmer’s iconic 1930s definition of lacquer:

*Urushi (lacquer) shines, flows, and finally hardens like stone. Urushi has no colour, is as transparent as glass, as bright as water; and ranges from yellow, gold and brown to deep black,*

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<sup>5</sup> See paper by Goto in this Special Issue.



*like natural Japanese raw urushi that is obtained without the aid of chemicals. By mixing colour powder, you can add any colour you like to urushi that shines, flows and hardens* (Baumeister and Schlemmer 1989: 19).

These artists' experiments included articulating the surface texture and colours using lacquer (Kopplin, 1998, p.9). Brinckmann's appreciation of patina in the bamboo craft collection is strongly connected to this. Patina was initially associated with the fresco and oil paintings as is seen in art dictionary of Filippo Baldinucci (1681) (Starn 2002, p. 85). By the 18th century, according to Krumbiein (2012), the term was more commonly associated with the colour changes on bronze and copper--known as *verde di bronzo*--resulting from metal oxidation. Today, 'patina' has a much broader application, referring to any aging process affecting the surfaces of artworks. Brachert extended this definition to encompass all surface alterations and crust formations on materials used in the creation of art (Brachert 1985). Lacquer was connected to this larger process of appreciating allure and lustre made by natural colouring and chemicalization.

At the same time, lacquer was linked to the expanding contemporary technology of 'surface design' for consumer goods. By the turn of the century it was important how the surface of consumer goods was designed - whether it was a simple box, cutlery or a car, the expression of the surface began to add value. This was even more the case with artistic crafts using natural materials. The technology involved was not limited to painting or coating, but materials that could create the desired surface and nuance through layering, such as lacquer, gained attention. This attention was shared both in Japan and in Europe. One of the most prominent branches of lacquer technique that developed in Japan in the 20th century was *kanshitsu* 乾漆 (dry lacquer), the creation of a surface through lacquer using fabric without the use of a wooden mould.

## 5. Conclusion

By considering the role of lacquer in bamboo crafts, which are often categorised separately from lacquerware, this paper highlights the additional appeal of lacquer demonstrated in the process of the export of Japanese crafts. The recognition of Japanese bamboo baskets as *Kunstgewerbe* (industrial art) between the 1880s and 1900 was the result of a complex, mutual process involving both Japanese and European institutions, particularly the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (MKG). While the 1873 Vienna World's Fair introduced Japanese crafts to a global audience, it is

important to note that Japan did not initially classify its crafts under the European concept of Kunstgewerbe. At Vienna, Japanese artisans and officials presented their bamboo and lacquer works in categories distinct from Kunstgewerbe.

Following the Vienna World's Fair, Justus Brinckmann played a critical role in redefining Japanese bamboo crafts within the framework of Kunstgewerbe. In this process, the focus of appreciation shifted from viewing these baskets as representations of classic bamboo techniques to recognizing their contemporary innovations, which had the potential to elevate both bamboo basketry and related crafts in Hamburg.

A crucial element in this transformation was the emphasis on patina, which became central not only to the appreciation of Japanese bamboo crafts but also to the understanding of lacquer in Europe. Patina, originally associated with the aging of frescoes and metals, was redefined in this context to signify a refined aesthetic in crafts, highlighting natural colour transformations that enhanced allure and lustre. This concept of patina also addressed aging and durability, offering a deeper aesthetic and material perspective that resonated across both bamboo and lacquerware.

In conclusion, the significance of modern Japanese lacquer and bamboo crafts cannot be fully grasped through the lens of their reception abroad or their classification as art in museums alone. Rather, understanding their development requires engaging with the Kunstgewerbe movement, which emphasized the integration of artistic elements into industrial production. By examining Justus Brinckmann and the MKG Hamburg's bamboo craft collections, this paper highlights the synchronicity in the evolution of lacquer and bamboo crafts in both Europe and Japan. While it demonstrates how one branch of Japanese craft was incorporated into Kunstgewerbe through a specific museum's vision, it also reveals the interconnections between different branches of craft production, as well as between objects, techniques, and materials. Without resorting to essentialism, this study underscores the dynamic exchanges that shaped global conceptions of artistic and industrial value.

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# Lacquer and Early Japanese Piano Manufacturing, ca. 1900s

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## Abstract

This paper explores the previously neglected relationship between lacquer craftsmanship and early Japanese-made pianos. Before WWII, Japanese pianos were generally finished in black lacquer. In 1900, Torakusu Yamaha (1851-1916), founder of the Nippon Gakki Seizo Kabushiki Kaisha (since 1887, now Yamaha) in Hamamatsu, Japan, began full-scale piano production following his visit to the US the previous year. He incorporated *maki-e* and other arts and crafts elements into the pianos he displayed at both world and domestic exhibitions. The utilisation of traditional lacquer techniques, which provided a distinct and appealing exterior finish, was a key factor that enabled Japan to produce and export pianos shortly after 1900.

**Keywords:** Piano, Lacquer, Export, Hamamatsu, Yamaha

**JEL Classification Codes:** N85, N75.N95

## 1. Introduction

**Figure 1.** The 1903 Yamaha grand piano



Source: Minato City Local History Museum

The intersection of lacquer craftsmanship and domestic piano production in prewar Japan represents a unique and underexplored area of study. The 1903 Yamaha grand piano, designated as a cultural property by Minato City in Tokyo in 2022, with its distinctive black lacquer finish and intricate gold *maki-e* embellishments (Fig. 1), exemplifies the confluence of longstanding Japanese craftsmanship and Western musical instrument design. This paper explores the development of Japanese piano manufacturing during the Meiji period with reference to the role of lacquer work in producing these instruments.

Japan's journey into domestic piano production began around 1900, when the nation was beginning to embrace Western music. Concert programmes during this period reflect this nascent stage of musical acceptance. However, instrument production advanced rapidly, outpacing the cultural reception of Western music. Because musical instruments are rooted in different cultures, adopting instruments from one country to another was challenging. Remarkably, Japan not only overcame these challenges but also managed to mass-produce and export pianos from the Meiji period onwards.

Before World War II, Japanese pianos were typically lacquered in black. The lacquer was primarily imported from China and Southeast Asia (*Nichigaku shaho*, 1 January 1951). The origins of this practice—when, why, and by whom lacquer was first used in piano production—remain uncertain. Moreover, the relationship between the history of lacquer craftsmanship and piano production during the Meiji era has been largely overlooked. This paper aims to address these questions and gaps by examining early domestic pianos within the context of Japan's musical instrument manufacturing. It explores the development of Japanese piano manufacturing in the Meiji period, with special attention paid to the role of lacquer craft in this process.

## **2. Foundations of Japanese Piano Manufacturing: The Minato City Piano and its Imperial Legacy**

A distinctive feature of early Japanese piano manufacturing was its origins in reed organ production. The repair of an American-made Mason and Hamlin Company reed organ marked the commencement of reed organ production in Hamamatsu. Torakusu Yamaha (山葉寅楠 1851–1916), who later founded Nippon Gakki Seizo Kabushiki Kaisha (now Yamaha Corporation, hereafter Nippon Gakki), began manufacturing reed organs in 1887. In 1890, Yamaha presented his first piano at the 3rd National Industrial Exhibition. For this occasion, he acquired a complete set of internal piano parts from S. Moutrie and Co., a British-owned piano company operating in Shanghai with a branch in Japan. Yamaha's company only constructed the external wooden piano case, which, together with the internal components, was assembled and exhibited as the Yamaha Piano. Although it was awarded 3rd prize, the piano was only an 'assembled piano' at this stage, not the fully original creation, which distinguished later Japanese piano production (Inoue, 2020).

In 1899 Yamaha travelled to the US as a commissioned investigator for the Ministry of Education,

where he studied the state of musical instrument manufacturing. After the materials he acquired during this visit arrived in Japan, Nippon Gakki commenced the full-scale production of upright pianos in 1900. As piano manufacturing progressed, Yamaha delegated responsibilities to two apprentices: Naokichi Yamaha (山葉直吉) and Koichi Kawai (河合小市).

Naokichi Yamaha (1881–1938), whose maiden name was Ojima, joined the company in 1890 (or 1892). His father, Yakichi Ojima, was a fish merchant by occupation but was also an accomplished shamisen player who had advised Yamaha on matters of tone and pitch since the beginning of his reed organ production. As Yamaha's senior apprentice, Naokichi Yamaha played a key role in piano production and later became the first head of the Piano Department, where he trained many skilled technicians. After marrying Yamaha's niece Haru, he adopted the Yamaha surname.

Kawai (1886–1955), who later established the Kawai Instrument Manufacturing Company, also demonstrated remarkable aptitude. Born to a wheelwright, Kawai displayed exceptional dexterity and ingenuity. After joining Nippon Gakki in 1896, Kawai quickly rose to prominence and successfully produced a complete set of piano action parts in 1906. This achievement marked a significant milestone in Nippon Gakki's efforts to produce piano components in-house, and heralded a new era in Japanese piano manufacturing.

Naokichi Yamaha documented early piano production in a memo, commonly known as the 'Naokichi Memo', which recorded the production numbers and shipments of Nippon Gakki pianos manufactured up to 1907. Although the original memo was destroyed in a fire and the surviving copies contain numerous variants and errors, recent scholarship by Okunaka and Kizaki compared these manuscripts in detail, making it possible to utilise this source more reliably (Okunaka and Kizaki, 2024).

The Naokichi Memo includes a description of a grand piano with serial number 1522, which was completed in 1903:

*Grand A No. 1522. Commenced production in September of 1902 for exhibition at the 5th National Industrial Exhibition in Tennoji, Osaka, which opened in March of 1903. The piano was completed in March of the following year and exhibited. During the exhibition, His Majesty the Emperor and Her Majesty the Empress visited and honored the piano with a purchase. In September 1903, the piano was delivered to the Imperial Household Ministry, unpacked, reassembled, reconditioned, and presented, after observing the process I withdrew (Okunaka and Kizaki, 2024, p.20).*

The Grand A. No.1522 piano is in existence and designated as a cultural property by Minato City in Tokyo in 2022. This piano features 85 keys and is lacquered in black with gold *maki-e* patterns on

its sides. The cast iron frame inside is adorned with a chrysanthemum arabesque pattern on a gold background. The *maki-e* patterns include *yusoku-mon* 'yo motifs such as *onaga-karasumaru-mon* and *hoo-maru-mon*. The “Ohashi Piano Materials (大橋ピアノ資料)”, archived at the Hamamatsu City History Museum, contain a design matching the *maki-e* pattern on the 1522 piano. Both the chrysanthemum pattern on the metal frame and the *maki-e* design bear similarities to those in the “Ohashi Piano Materials”. Given the scarcity of surviving materials related to Japanese musical instrument manufacturing, further investigation of these documents promises to advance research in this area.

The 5th National Industrial Exhibition, where the 1522 piano was exhibited, represents the final and most extensive national exhibition of Japan. Held from 1 March to 31 July 31, 1903, in Tennoji Imamiya, Osaka, the exhibition attracted 4.35 million visitors and featured numerous pavilions, including foreign participants. Emperor Meiji and Empress Shoken visited the exhibition eight and seven times, respectively (Imperial Household Agency, 1974; Meiji Jingu, 2014). The emperor visited the Annex of the Pavilion of Education, where the 1522 piano was displayed, on 29 April, followed by the empress on 30 April. During their visits, the emperor and empress made many purchases amounting to approximately 40,000 and 20,000 yen, respectively, ‘for the encouragement of various trades’. With one yen equivalent to about 20,000 yen today, these purchases would equate to roughly 800 million yen for the emperor and 400 million yen for the empress in contemporary currency. The 1522 piano was among the empress’s acquisitions. It was purchased for 1,000 yen, as recorded in the Imperial Household Archives. Other items purchased from the 9th section (Education, Science, Sanitation, and Economy), where the 1522 piano was exhibited, included a *koto* (Japanese instrument), flower basket, and violin.

Although the exhibition was held in Osaka, the 1522 piano was not immediately transferred to the Imperial Household Ministry. Instead, it was returned to Nippon Gakki in Hamamatsu for reconditioning before shipment to Tokyo. According to the Imperial Household Archives, in September 1903, Naokichi personally travelled to the Imperial Household Ministry in Tokyo to unpack, assemble, and adjust the piano. On 23 December, Empress Shoken presented the 1522 piano to her daughter-in-law, Crown Princess Sadako (later Empress Teimei) (Meiji Jingu, 2014, p. 211). Crown Princess Sadako, who studied music under Nobu Koda, a professor at the Tokyo Music School, became fond of this piano. As a member of the Kujo marquis family, the crown princess later transferred the piano to the Kujo family residence in Akasaka at an unknown date. In 1930, the instrument was donated to Hikawa Primary School by the Kujo family, who resided near the school.

Nippon Gakki’s exhibition at the 5th National Industrial Exhibition included several reed organs, one grand piano, and two upright pianos. Initially, these instruments were slated for display in the Shizuoka Prefecture section of the Education Pavilion; however, owing to space constraints, Yamaha invested 700 yen to construct a dedicated display area of 24 tsubo (approximately 80 square meters) (Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, 1904, p.106). This space, furnished with chairs and tables



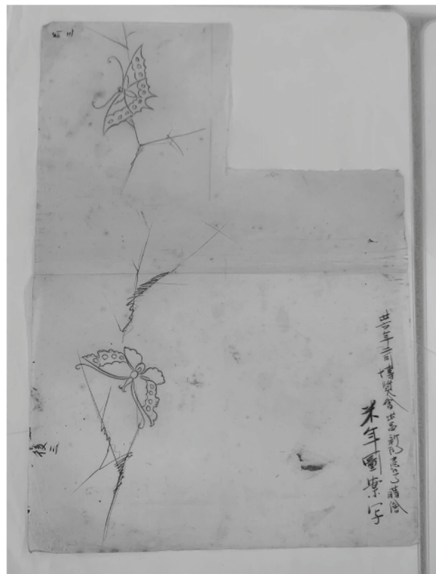
also produced by Yamaha who had a furniture production branch, became a rest area for the emperor, empress, and other members of the imperial family during their visits to the expo. In recognition of his efforts, Yamaha received a letter of appreciation from the vice-president of the exhibition (Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, 1904, p. 671).

The 1522 piano featured *yusoku-mon 'yo*, a traditional motif used by the aristocracy since the Heian period, and a chrysanthemum pattern closely associated with the imperial family. Yamaha likely selected this design in anticipation of, or at least hoping for, an imperial purchase.

At the 5th National Industrial Exhibition, the reed organ and piano exhibited by Nippon Gakki earned 1st and 3rd prizes, respectively. The piano was particularly noted for being ‘robust in production and neat in form’ (Secretariat of the Fifth National Industrial Exhibition, 1904, p. 203). Following this success, Nippon Gakki was invited to exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904, where they showcased Grand Piano No. A1 and a reed organ.

The ‘Ohashi Piano Materials’ housed at the Hamamatsu City History Museum include additional noteworthy designs related to exposition entries. One particularly intriguing design features a butterfly motif with the inscription ‘Copy of the design of the *maki-e* by Beinen for the new type No. 1 piano to be exhibited at the exposition in February 1902’ (Fig. 2). Beinen refers to the Japanese painter Beinen Oya (大矢米年 1879–1966), who was born in Aichi Prefecture and trained in the Shijo School of Painting under Beisen Kubota (久保田米僊). Beinen specialised in portrait and landscape painting and was invited to collaborate with the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory (浜松蒔絵漆工場) during this period.

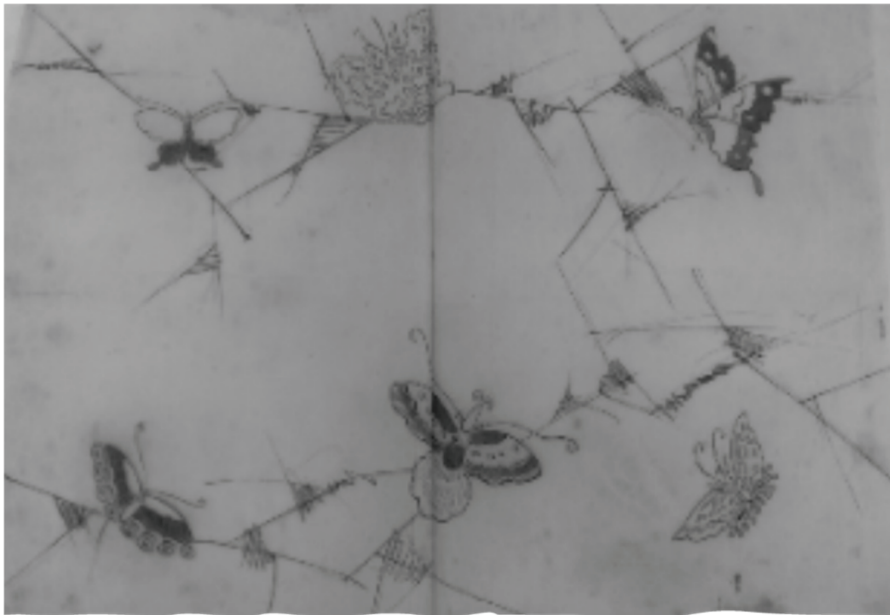
**Figure 2. Copy of the design of the *maki-e* by Beinen for the new type No. 1 piano to be exhibited at the exposition in February 1902**



Source: Ohashi Piano Materials

Notably, this is the only design within the ‘Ohashi Piano Materials’ that explicitly attributes the original artwork to a specific artist. A similar butterfly design can be found in the collection, closely resembling Beinen’s design (Fig. 3). It is believed that these designs, based on Beinen’s original drawing, were developed by Nippon Gakki for the exterior decoration of pianos.

**Figure 3. Butterfly design**



Source: Ohashi Piano Materials

The notation ‘February Exposition, Meiji 36 (1902)’ does not refer to the 5th National Industrial Exhibition of 1903, but was most likely a *maki-e* design for a special piano that, like the 1522 piano, had been in production since 1903 to be exhibited at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904. While the 1522 piano was adorned with the aristocratic *yusoku-mon’yo* pattern, likely intended with the Japanese imperial family in mind, it is believed that a butterfly motif, a natural symbol, was selected for the St. Louis Exhibition to better appeal to Western audiences.

The Naokichi Memo includes the following entry regarding the grand piano exhibited at the St. Louis World’s Fair:

*‘Grand A I. 1537. Dispatched in January 1904 to the St. Louis World’s Fair, St. Louis, USA. Purchased by an American’* (Okunaka and Kizaki, 2024).

The piano was shipped from the Hamamatsu factory in January 1904. The St. Louis World’s Fair, which opened on 30 April of the same year, was an event of great international significance. It

commemorated the centenary of the Louisiana Purchase by the US. The exhibition, the largest of its kind to date, attracted approximately 20 million visitors from 44 countries. In the Musical Instrument Manufacturing Competition, the Baldwin Company of Cincinnati was awarded the top prize. Despite the ongoing Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese government actively participated in the exhibition, seeking to present Japan as an increasingly modern society. In addition to featuring traditional arts and crafts at previous expositions, Japan showcased various exhibits related to its education system and industrial products, including pianos and reed organs (Inoue, 2022). Nippon Gakki was the only company to exhibit in the musical instruments section, where both its grand piano and reed organ received silver medals.

A contemporary review in the local magazine the *Music Trade Review* noted:

*Among the myriad other articles in the Japanese section of the Manufactures' Building, (.....), are a small grand piano and a reed organ, both of Japanese manufacture. The piano bears upon its fall board and plate the name of Yamaha & Co. It has seven octaves. The tone is thin and uninteresting to American ears, although by no means unpleasant. The case is ebonized and polished. Around the sides are stencilled Japanese ornaments in gold. Otherwise, it is, like the organ, an almost slavish copy of instruments made in this country (Music Trade Review, 1 October 1904).*

This critique highlights the challenges faced by early Japanese piano manufacturers in distinguishing their products on the international stage. At the time, most of the internal components of Japanese pianos were imported, making differentiation difficult. However, this critique also underscores the pivotal role of traditional *maki-e* craftsmanship in enhancing the aesthetic and cultural value of Nippon Gakki's pianos. The grand piano's success in receiving the silver medal may largely be due to the exquisite craftsmanship of its black lacquer finish adorned with gold *maki-e*. Yamaha's strategic emphasis on traditional Japanese artistry proved a highly effective approach.

### 3. Lacquer Production in Hamamatsu

The reference to the design as a 'copy of Beinen's design' suggests the existence of a *maki-e* lacquer factory in Hamamatsu around 1902, where Beinen was employed as a painter when Yamaha was preparing pianos for the exhibition. However, Hamamatsu's lacquer industry has since completely vanished, and the memory of its existence has faded from public consciousness. Notably, neither the Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art nor the Hamamatsu City History Museum has a single piece of Hamamatsu lacquerware in its collection. This raises questions regarding the state of Hamamatsu

lacquerware production.

Japan's lacquer crafts, which flourished during the Edo period, experienced a temporary decline in the early Meiji period (1868–1912) due to significant political, economic, and cultural upheavals. However, after observing meticulous displays of Japanese lacquerware and other traditional crafts in European and American museums, government officials recognised the need to protect and promote these traditional arts upon their return to Japan. Partly because of Emperor Meiji's initiatives to support the arts, the lacquer craft industry was revived in the latter half of the Meiji period. By the 1880s, lacquerware production was being promoted throughout Japan. At that time, traditional industrial products such as raw silk, ceramics, and lacquerware, alongside tea and copper, significantly contributed to Japan's foreign currency earnings (Toyoda, 1982, p. 4).

Within Shizuoka Prefecture, Shizuoka City's lacquerware was the most well-known. The 1902 *Shizuoka Prefecture Industrial Report* was published to advance the prefecture's lacquer industry. It identified four key manufacturing sites: Shizuoka, Hamamatsu, Kanbara, and Kasai. The report provided detailed information on the history of lacquerware, current state of manufacturing, sales, export destinations, and consumer preferences. Regarding the history of Hamamatsu lacquerware, the report noted that:

*Lacquerware production in Hamamatsu is said to have originated over a century ago when the lord of Hamamatsu Castle, Inoue Kawachinokami, invited a lacquer craftsman named Godayu Nishimura to work for him, tasking him with applying lacquer to weapons and furniture. Later, in 1821, Anraku Ichikawa relocated from Kishu to Hamamatsu, where he began producing lacquerware and brought craftsmen from his hometown. Initially, production focused on everyday furniture, but the quality of these items was too crude for consumer tastes. In contrast, Anraku's products quickly gained popularity, leading to a gradual increase in the number of manufacturers. By July 1895, Yasukichi Ichikawa had established the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Ware Factory, organizing it into three specialized departments: the Base Material Department, the Lacquer Application Department, and the Colour Decoration Department (Shizuoka Prefecture, 1902, Chap. 1, pp. 10-11).*

While some lacquerware production in Hamamatsu dates back to the Edo period, it was not until Yasukichi Ichikawa (市川安吉) founded the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory (浜松蒔絵漆工場) in 1895 that the industry gained prominence under the name 'Hamamatsu Lacquerware (浜松漆器)'. The factory's distinctive features included its departmental structure, employment of skilled experts, continual improvements, and a focus on training apprentices. A closer examination of Ichikawa's

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Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory demonstrates the intricacies of the once-flourishing industry.

Ichikawa (1864–?) was born Namijiro, the second son of Seihachiro Matsushima, a prosperous farmer in Hatori Village, former Toyoda County (Kamo, 1916; Kawakami, 1954). The Matsushima family, long-established and wealthy, highly valued education. Namijiro's elder brother, Kakutaro, played a prominent role in the village's political and economic affairs, including the founding of a school (Hamamatsu Municipal Chuo Library, 1989). Growing up in this environment, Namijiro developed a deep love of learning and became proficient in both Japanese and Chinese classics.

In 1883, Namijiro was adopted by Yasuhei Ichikawa (市川安平 1838–1907), a lacquerware merchant from Tamachi Hamamatsu, and subsequently changed his name to Yasukichi Ichikawa. Ichikawa's adoptive father Yasuhei was born in Hamamatsu. Yasuhei Ichikawa's father, Anraku Ichikawa, originally from Kuroe Village, Nagusa County, Kii Province, was a lacquerware trader who moved to Hamamatsu and was adopted by the Ichikawa family. Yasuhei Ichikawa devoted himself to the lacquerware trade, earning the trade name 'Wan'yasu (宛安)' (Yamada, 1891, pp. 491-501). By 1892, Yasuhei Ichikawa had become one of Hamamatsu's wealthiest residents, ranking 10th in the city tax contributions among 2,875 households (Meiji 25).

Upon his adoption, Ichikawa became concerned about the lack of educational institutions for merchant children in Hamamatsu. In 1893, he cofounded the private school Funyogakusha, which later became Hamamatsu Gakugei High School (Ichikawa, 1899, pp. 2-3; Shin-ai High School, 1987, pp. 20-21). Initially, the school offered remedial education for boys, provided by Yasukichi Nakamura, and sewing instruction for girls, taught by his wife Mitsu Nakamura. Despite the school's success, Ichikawa sought to create an institution where disadvantaged students could learn while working. In July 1895, he established a lacquer industry as the industrial department at Funyogakusha, located at 60 Tokiwa Hamamatsu, where three factory buildings produced *maki-e* lacquerware, footed trays, bowls, and furniture (Ichikawa, 1899, p. 3).

In July 1896, Ichikawa expanded the factory, organising it into four departments: woodworking, lacquering, *maki-e*, and design, each led by specialists. It is believed that the name 'Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory' was adopted at this time (*Shizuoka Prefecture Statistics*, 1899, notes the factory's founding in October 1896). Sales were managed through the Wan'yasu shop in Tamachi.

In September 1896, the company won 1st prize at the 2nd Hamana County Crafts Exhibition. By October 1897, the *maki-e* department had expanded further, with branches opening in Yokohama and Tokyo to produce goods for both the domestic and international markets (Ichikawa, 1899, pp. 3-4).

The apprentice school established by Ichikawa was a pioneering initiative in which boys could learn while working, laying the groundwork for the systematic training of apprentices in the lacquerware industry. This model was later adopted in various regions, with a private lacquerware school opening in Shizuoka in 1902 (Kanagawa Museum of Cultural History, 2024, p. 247).

At the Hamamatsu Maki-e Factory, Ichikawa invited renowned *maki-e* and lacquer experts from

Tokyo to focus on producing high-quality art lacquerware. Among them was Beinen, who became a highly respected artist within the factory. Although the exact date of Beinen's arrival in Hamamatsu is unclear, he was not mentioned in Ichikawa's 1899 writings, with the first reference appearing in the 1901 factory introduction in *Tokai jitsugyo shimpo*.

The Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory gained significant recognition, winning numerous awards at expositions and becoming a supplier to the Imperial Household as well as a major exporter. An 1899 pamphlet titled *Hamamatsu miyage (Hamamatsu Souvenirs)*, which detailed the local industries, noted that the factory 'employs sixty-five craftsmen, produces lacquerware, exports to the US and France, and also opens sales channels in Japan'. This number likely includes apprentices. By 1902, according to Shizuoka Prefecture records, the factory employed 20 craftsmen and had 50 boarding pupils.

At the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory won a gold medal for 'Incense Boxes and Others' (Group XII, Class 69) and a silver medal for 'Lacquer Ware Boxes and Others' (Group XV, Class 98), (*Kampo*, No. 5638, 24 April 1902).

A 1901 article in *Tokai jitsugyo shimpo* described the factory's dual focus on improving lacquerware and training craftsmen. It highlights that the designs were 'by Beinen, a disciple of the famous Beisen, known for his work surpassing that of his teacher', and emphasises the factory's specialty in creating flower-and-bird paintings, and figure paintings using coloured lacquer, which were in high demand both domestically and internationally. The school curriculum for apprentices included two hours of calligraphy, six hours of reading, two hours each of arithmetic, geography, and science, and two hours of painting, totalling 18 hours per week (No. 40, pp. 10-12).

Another article in *Jitsugyo no Nihon* in 1902 (Vol.5, No.22, pp. 64-65) also discussed the factory's coloured lacquer work. It notes that Izan (Kusunosuke) Inoue (井上為山), a master of coloured lacquer from Kishu, was brought to the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory to enhance the quality of its lacquerware. The article praises the coloured lacquer applied by Beinen and his apprentices, describing it as vividly elegant and rare, akin to traditional painting.

Table 1 lists the awards and purchases associated with the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory, drawing primarily from Ichikawa (1899) and Hamamatsu (2022) (No. 45 'Outline of Hamamatsu Lacquerware Company', March 1903). Prices listed are corroborated by records from the Imperial Household Archives' records of account books (*Goyodoroku*) and Records of Special Purchase (Imperial Archives, 1897, 1898, 1900-2).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory also secured the 3rd prize at the Exposition of Lacquer and Lacquerware of Prefectural Union in Kyoto in 1898, where Yasuhei Ichikawa 'Chrysanthemum-patterned long square box' was purchased by the Imperial Household Ministry. Furthermore, Koko Akiyama received the 6th prize for distinguished service for *maki-e* lacquerware exhibited by the factory, and 5th prize for distinguished service was awarded to Yasuhei Ichikawa for his role in establishing the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquerware Factory and providing apprentice training (Okai, 1899).

Table 1. Awards and purchases won by Hamamatsu *Maki-e* Lacquer Factory, 1896–1902

年	和暦	月	事項	備考
1896	明治29		静岡県浜名郡第2回工芸品共進会 1等賞	
1897	明治30	5	創設廿五年記念博覧会有功銅牌	
		5	静岡県生産物品評会進歩1等賞	
		9	東京上野美術協会第12回協議会2等賞	
		9	宮内省御用品被仰付	「狗児柳二鷺梅形盆 2枚」 10円
1898	明治31	5	第2回五二会全国品評会有功賞銅牌	
		5	同会出品物宮内省御買上被仰付	
		5	府県連合漆器漆共進会銀盃贈与	
			同会出品物宮内省及農商務省御買上被命	
		11	天皇陛下静岡行在所御駐轡ノ際県下重要物品陳列、数点御用命	
1899	明治32	4	第3回五二会全国品評会有功賞銅牌	「色蒔絵漆器」
			同会出品物宮内省御買上被命	
		5	東京上野第4次漆工協議会1等賞	
			同会出品物農商務省参考品トシテ御買上	
		8	第2回東海実業区五県連合五二会品評会功労銀牌	
1900	明治33	4	パリ万国博覧会金牌	「香箱其他」
		4	パリ万国博覧会銀牌	「漆器箱其他」
		4	全国貿易品博覧会銅牌	
1901	明治34	5	東京上野第5次漆工競技会出品物宮内省御買上	「黒蠟色漆絵小箱」 15円
1902	明治35	9	東京上野第6次漆工競技会天皇陛下行幸ノ際数品御買上	「黒色紅葉吹寄硯箱」 50円（市川安吉）
				「黒蠟色群蟹手箱」 25円（市川安吉）
				「彩色絵硯箱」 85銭

Year	Month	Competition	Works
1896 M29		1st prize at the 2nd Hamana County Crafts Exhibition, Shizuoka, Japan.	
1897 M30	May	Validated bronze medal at the 25th anniversary exposition.	
		1st prize for advancement at the Shizuoka Prefecture Product Fair.	
	Sep	2nd prize, Tokyo Ueno Art Association, 12th Council.	
		2nd prize at the 12th Competition of the Tokyo Ueno Art Association. Exhibits ordered by Ministry of Imperial Household	Two plum-shaped trays with puppies, willow trees and a heron, 10 yen
1898 M31	May	Bronze medal at the 2nd Gonikai National Fair. Exhibits ordered by Ministry of Imperial Household	
		Silver cup at the Promotional Exhibit of Lacquer Ware and Lacquer at Union of Prefectures / Exhibits purchased by the Ministry of the Imperial Household and the Ministry of Agriculture.	
	Nov	The emperor's visit to Shizuoka, where the lacquerware was displayed as an important item in the prefecture. Several items were ordered.	
1899 M32	April	Bronze medal at the 3rd Gonikai Product Fair. Exhibits ordered by Ministry of Imperial Household	Lacquer ware with coloured lacquer decoration
	May	1st prize at the Fourth Lacquer Work Competition in Ueno, Tokyo / The exhibits were purchased by the Ministry of Agriculture as reference items.	
	Aug	Silver Medal for Merit, 2nd Tokai Business District 5 Prefectures' Gonikai Product Fair, Japan.	



1900 M33	April	Gold medal, Exposition Universelle in Paris.	Boxes for incense, etc.
		Silver medal, Exposition Universelle in Paris.	Lacquered boxes, etc.
		Bronze medal at the National Trade Fair.	
1901 M 34		The 5th lacquer craft competition, Ueno, Tokyo / exhibits purchased by the Ministry of the Imperial Household.	Small box with lacquer painting on a black-wax-colour - lacquered* ground, 15 yen
1902 M 35		The 6th Tokyo lacquer craft competition, Ueno, Tokyo / Several items were purchased by His Majesty the Emperor when he visited the venue.	A wax coloured (roiro**) writing box with patterns of scattering of autumn leaves and petals (fukiyose***) by Yasukichi Ichikawa, 50 yen; A writing box depicting a flock of crabs on a black wax ground, by Yasukichi Ichikawa, 25 yen; A writing box painted in various colours, 85 sen.

Source: made by the author.

Note \*Black wax-colour-lacquering (*Kuroroironuri*) is a method of lacquering in which a coat of non-oily lacquer is applied and polished with charcoal to produce a glossy finish.

\*\*Wax-colour-lacquering (*roiro*) is a finishing technique used in lacquerware, and refers to a flat, rich, glossy black colour like a mirror surface.

\*\*\**Fukiyose* is a pattern that shows leaves and petals blown by the wind and collected in one place.

Around the time Yamaha began manufacturing pianos, lacquerware production thrived in Hamamatsu, leading to the recognition of ‘Hamamatsu lacquerware’. Yamaha commissioned Beinen to create *maki-e* underpainting for pianos intended for international exhibitions. Although Masakichi Suzuki of Nagoya had already won a prize for exhibiting violins at the Chicago Columbian Exposition in 1893, the 1904 St. Louis Exposition marked the first time a piano or reed organ was exhibited at an international exposition. Yamaha must have meticulously prepared for this occasion.

According to the 1902 *Shizuoka Prefecture Industrial Report*, Hamamatsu lacquerware for export to Britain, the US, Russia, Canada, and other countries, was custom-made according to the specifications of foreign trading houses in Yokohama based on samples, price limits, and other conditions. In contrast, products for the domestic market often have standardised shapes, allowing for advanced production. This contrast highlights the instability of the export business compared to the more predictable domestic market (Shizuoka Prefecture, 1902, Chap. 3 and 13).

In June 1902, the Hamamatsu Lacquerware Joint-Stock Company was established to preserve the lacquerware industry amid economic challenges. Key figures in this venture included Ichikawa, Inoue, and Yamaha, who was among the investors alongside Meizen Kinpara and Tokichi Nakamura (*Kampo*, No. 5688, 21 June 1902). An advertisement for the Hamamatsu Lacquerware Joint-Stock Company described it as the ‘original inventor of white and purple lacquer’, prominently featuring the name of ‘painter Beinen Sensei’. The advertisement also emphasised the company’s role as an apprentice organisation dedicated to training skilled craftsmen, indicating that apprentice training continued even after the transition to a joint-stock company (Hamamatsu City, 2022, p. 539).

The Hamamatsu Lacquerware Joint-Stock Company, along with Ichikawa, also exhibited at the 5th National Industrial Exhibition in 1903, receiving commendations for their *maki-e* hand-box and a



peony painting.<sup>2</sup> The examination report for the Shizuoka Prefecture section noted that ‘the main production area of lacquerware in Shizuoka Prefecture is Shizuoka City, followed by Hamamatsu Town, Hamana County’, and commented on the enthusiasm of the Hamamatsu Lacquerware Joint-Stock Company in *maki-e* production, stating that ‘although it has somewhat improved in recent years, it is still in its infancy’ (Bureau of the Fifth National Industrial Exhibition, 1904a, p.19).

The relationship between Yasukichi and Yasuhei Ichikawa warrants further discussion. Initially, Yasuhei Ichikawa strongly supported his son’s educational endeavours, investing in the establishment of Funyogakusha (Shin-ai Gakuen High School, 1987, p.6). When Ichikawa established the lacquerware department within the school, its products were sold at his father’s Wan’yasu shop. Additionally, Yasuhei Ichikawa financed the opening of the Hamamatsu Sewing School for Girls in 1903, which absorbed Funyogakusha’s sewing department.

However, their relationship appears to have deteriorated when the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory encountered financial difficulties. In 1903, Yasuhei Ichikawa adopted a new son, Senzo Tsuboi (坪井千造 1879–1957). Senzo, a descendant of Kyushichi Tsuboi, a lacquerware merchant and purveyor to Yoshinobu Tokugawa, was born in Nihonbashi, Tokyo. Known for his exemplary business acumen, Senzo Tsuboi caught Yasuhei Ichikawa’s attention, who agreed to adopt him. In 1907, Tsuboi succeeded Yasuhei Ichikawa, taking on the name Yasuhei Ichikawa II, and expanded the business, opening a branch in Miyuki-dori in Kajicho (Matsuura, 1940, p. 26). The complex relationships between Yasuhei, Yasukichi, and Yasuhei II Ichikawa have led to confusion in some historical documents, necessitating careful consideration when interpreting these sources.

Despite Ichikawa’s efforts to reorganise the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquerware Factory as a limited partnership, the company faced further challenges. Inoue left in February 1903 (*Kampo*, No. 5875, 5 February), and the company was ultimately dissolved on 28 January 1905 (*Kampo*, No. 6482, 10 February). Subsequently, Ichikawa continued operating on a smaller scale under the name Hamamatsu Lacquerware Factory (浜松漆器工場).

Sawaguchi (1933) noted that ‘Hamamatsu lacquerware was produced by a small-scale factory organisation around 1897, but it closed down after that, and now only a small amount of lacquerware remains’. The article summarises that ‘the lacquer coating of musical instruments became famous’ (p. 186), indicating a shift from the production of traditional lacquerware at the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory under Ichikawa to the application of lacquer coatings on musical instruments by Japanese manufacturers. Indeed, despite the decline of traditional Hamamatsu lacquerware, the lacquer department of the Nippon Gakki factory reportedly employed ‘more than 50 female workers,

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<sup>2</sup> The note stated: 蒔絵手箱 浜名郡浜松町 浜松漆器合資会社 (*Maki-e* hand-box Hamamatsu-cho, Hamana-gun, Hamamatsu Lacquerware Joint-Stock Company).

牡丹絵額 浜名郡浜松町 市川安吉 (Peony painting frame, Hamamatsu-cho, Hamana-gun, Ichikawa Yasukichi)

and 20 *maki-e* craftsmen, mostly male, were regularly employed' by 1909 (*Tokyo nichinichi shimbun*, 26 February).

Regarding apprenticeship training, Yamaha likely drew inspiration from Ichikawa's Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory. In 1906, Yamaha established the Nippon Gakki Apprentice Training School and introduced a formal apprenticeship system. The system was designed to train keyboard technicians in the assembly, tuning, and voicing of reed organs and pianos. Boys who graduated from primary school were employed as apprentices, learning practical skills during the day and attending English, mathematics, Japanese, and physical education classes at the company's night school. Although the programme was discontinued in 1929, it is remembered as a distinctive training approach. Apprentices who emerged from this system became the backbone of Japan's keyboard instrument manufacturing industry before and after World War II.

#### 4. Piano Lacquering

The previous section confirms that Hamamatsu lacquer workers moved into piano lacquering, which raises the question of why Yamaha decided to lacquer pianos in the first place. A booklet titled *About the Lacquering of Kawai Pianos*, likely published by Kawai Instrument Manufacturing in the 1950s, provides some insight:

*When pianos were first made in Japan, there were no skilled Western-style finishers available. Consequently, a Chinese technician trained by the British in China was hired. Although his skills were excellent, the process was time-consuming, taking four weeks to paint a single piano. This created a bottleneck in production. In response, they experimented with using traditional Japanese lacquer. The result was a finish far superior to the Western style, though initial attempts resulted in a thick coat that affected the piano's tone and volume. After further research, a thinner, smoother lacquer coat was developed. (Kawai Instrument Manufacturing, c.1950s.)*

This account aligns with Koichi Kawai's remarks during a 1955 radio interview where he reflected on the early challenges of piano manufacturing in Japan:

*Pianos have a kind of special finishing method that comes from abroad, and that's why we first employed a skilled finisher of S. Moutrie, who was taught in Shanghai, a Chinese finisher (.....). In the past, they used to apply the coating material in a really hard way (.....) and production did not increase at all because they were really inefficient. (.....) We therefore studied the unique, precious and excellent lacquer coating of Japan, which we should be proud of in*

*the Orient and in the world. We studied it while the Chinese was here, and when it was ready, we decided to adopt lacquer coating for piano finish, and the Chinese was asked to leave temporarily.*

*The method used by the Chinese was very time-consuming and the surface quality was poor. The surface was not as flat and beautiful as that of a lacquered piano (.....). Since then, pianos have been lacquered in a uniquely Japanese way. This has continued and is still being done today (Kawai, Radio Interview, 1955).*

Thus, according to Kawai, Nippon Gakki initially employed a Chinese technician skilled in Western-style finishing but transitioned to the Japanese lacquer method due to inefficiencies. Production was slow in the early years; according to the Naokichi Memo, only two pianos were produced in 1900, six in 1901, and eight in 1902, with production not reaching 117 units until 1907 (Okunaka and Kizaki, 2024, p. 22; Miura, 2012, p. 200). Lacquer adoption significantly improved efficiency.

While Nippon Gakki typically used black lacquer for the piano exterior, the Naokichi Memo records four pianos produced before December 1907 that employed special lacquering techniques such as *nashiji-nuri* (pear-skin lacquer) and *tame-nuri* (transparent lacquer). These were all upright pianos with the following records:

September 1904, No. 1552, Nashiji lacquered No. 4.  
 April 1905, No. 1584, Nashiji lacquered No. 4.  
 September 1905, No. 1600, Nashiji lacquered No. 4.  
 November 1907, No. 1837, Tame-nuri No.1.

In his radio interview, Kawai highlighted the pride Japanese musical instrument manufacturers in their unique lacquer finishes:

*We were proud of our lacquer work, such as the nashiji coating, which was as beautiful and shining as that used on traditional writing boxes or tiered serving boxes. We also used cloisonné lacquering, where wires shaped like autumn leaves were embedded in a thick lacquer coat, creating a robust and visually striking finish. This type of decorative lacquer was one of our key selling points.*  
 (Kawai, Radio Interview, 1955)

The *nashiji*-lacquered piano was exhibited at the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle, which attracted 3.7 million visitors. Although Seattle was a centre of anti-Japanese sentiment at the time, the high quality of Japan Pavilion's exhibits helped shift public perception. The pavilion

featured a grand piano and reed organ by Nippon Gakki, and violins by Suzuki. According to a report by a forestry engineer who visited the exhibition, the pianos and violins displayed were so visually impressive that one could scarcely believe they were made in Japan. These instruments received high praise when played by local musicians (Watanabe, 1909, p. 35). Both the piano and reed organ received Honorary Grand Prix Gold Medals, while the Suzuki violin was awarded a Gold Medal. Notably, the international jury for the exposition did not include any Japanese members in the instrumental jury, making these awards particularly significant.

In 1910, Yamaha exhibited a piano with a cloisonné *maki-e* finish at the Japan-British Exposition in London. This event, jointly organised by Japan and Britain, effectively served as a showcase of Japan in Britain. Western musical instruments were exhibited by Matsumoto Gakki of Tokyo, Nippon Gakki of Hamamatsu, and Masakichi Suzuki of Nagoya, with Nippon Gakki displaying a reed organ and piano, and Suzuki showcasing a range of stringed instruments, which earned the Honorary Grand Prize. Yamaha saw the Japan-British Exposition as a crucial opportunity to expand sales channels in Europe. He asked Suzuki, who was in the UK as a contractor for the Ministry of Education, to negotiate with British musical instrument dealers and a German music wire company (Inoue, 2022, pp. 70-71).

Nippon Gakki made early and consistent inroads into overseas markets. By 1904, its annual reed organ production had reached 7,000-8,000 units and its export volume of reed organs had reached 500. Nippon Gakki had also established branches in Shanghai and Tianjin. In 1908, the company further expanded its presence by opening a branch in Dalian, positioning itself for broader continental expansion. Although plans to build a musical instrument factory in Shanghai did not materialise, these developments marked significant progress in establishing a foothold in international markets.

The perception of Japanese piano manufacturing in the US can be gleaned from consular reports. In a 1912 report, Consul General Sammons of Yokohama noted:

*Two large factories where complete pianos are manufactured are located in Yokohama and in Shidzuoka, and these, with another firm which assembles pianos from parts imported from England, control the market. The factory of Nishikawa & Son, at Yokohama, turns out 200 pianos annually in addition to some 1,300 organs and a large number of string instruments. The Yamaha Co. at Shidzuoka, manufactures annually 400 to 600 pianos and 8,000 small organs.*  
(.....)

*The cases are all made in Japan, but wires, leather, and wool felt are imported. A considerable number of Yamaha pianos are exported annually to England, Australia, and Canada, the value reaching almost \$25,000 per year* (Sammons, 1912).

There was no mention of exports or future demand prospects for American pianos in Japan. At that time, Japan already had two significant domestic piano manufacturers, Nippon Gakki and Nishikawa, with substantial export activities. Therefore, the US did not view Japan as a promising market for American-made pianos.

Conversely, the US had a keen interest in the Chinese market. A 1909 report by the US Consul in Shanghai, Gause highlighted the competitive threat posed by Japanese musical instrument exports, particularly reed organs. Regarding pianos, Gause observed:

*It is interesting to note the efforts being made by the Japanese to introduce their pianos in this market. They have succeeded in producing handsome pianos, which they offer to dealers at about half the catalog price of American pianos. They are gradually overcoming the faults found in their instruments and are making some headway, though small, in this market (Gause, 1909).*

When Yamaha visited a US piano factory in 1899, he observed that the workmen were extremely diligent and that the Japanese workmen were far behind. However, he noted in his diary that the factory itself was ‘no different’ (Inoue, 2022, p. 55). By this time, Japanese piano factories had already adopted American-style machinery. Lacquering, therefore, played a crucial role in differentiating Japanese pianos in the global market.

The Overseas Business Trainees Scheme, a publicly funded programme under the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, dispatched 857 trainees between 1896 and 1927. This system aimed to cultivate human resources capable of driving the ‘reproduction and development of industry’ and ‘expansion of overseas trade’. Trainees were selected from a wide range of fields, including arts and crafts, stock trading, iron manufacturing, and agriculture (Tachibana, 2022, pp. 49-50).

One such trainee, Kojiro Tomita (富田幸次郎 1890–1976), who later headed the Asian Department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, spent time in Boston from September 1906. His research focused on ‘Lacquerware Sales and Coating Material Manufacturing’. Born in Kyoto to a family of *maki-e* artists and a graduate of the Kyoto Municipal School of Arts and Crafts, Tomita initially trained in a furniture factory before moving to the renowned piano manufacturer Mason and Hamlin in April 1907, where he trained in piano finishing. Mason and Hamlin, founded in 1854, was known for producing high-quality pianos, making Tomita’s decision to train there particularly significant, as it underscored the need for piano finishing expertise in Japan at the time.

Tomita’s research, published in the *Agricultural and Commercial Bulletin* in September 1909, compared Japanese lacquer and American varnish in detail. He noted that lacquer required more skilled labour and specialised facilities, such as a humidity- and shade-adjusted room, while varnish, though slower to dry, was easier to apply and more practical for mass production. Tomita concluded that lacquer was not suitable as a piano finish in the US due to these constraints and the potential for lacquer

rash (Tomita, 1909, pp. 59-76).

In November 1913, Takuro Fukushima (福島琢郎), recommended by the Tokyo School of Music, was sent to the US as an overseas business trainee. His research focused on ‘Piano and Organ Assembly and Tuning’. Fukushima’s first report, ‘Japanese Musical Instruments and the U.S. Market’, described the differences in piano designs across Boston, Chicago, and New York, noting that pianos made in Boston were lighter and often decorated with inlays or *maki-e* rather than German-style carvings. He observed that Japanese pianos excelled in these aspects and had a promising future if volume and robustness were improved. He also proposed that Japan process front panels domestically and export them to capitalise on the popularity of Oriental taste in Boston (Fukushima, 1914).

While this paper primarily focused on Nippon Gakki in Hamamatsu, it is important to note that Nishikawa Gakki also practised piano lacquering in Yokohama. Nishikawa Gakki, a pioneer in the manufacture of reed organs and pianos in Japan, was a rival of Nippon Gakki. During the post-World War I economic downturn, Nishikawa Gakki invited veteran technician Thomas Baker from the US to assist with their operations. A detailed article in the *Music Trade Review* on 12 February 1921, titled ‘The Piano Industry in the Orient’, describes how George P. Bent (1854–1930), a prominent American piano and reed organ manufacturer, visited Baker at the Nishikawa Gakki factory in Yokohama. Bent, surprised by the state-of-the-art machinery and the factory’s workforce of approximately 200 people, noted:

*I was impressed most of all by the finish used on the pianos and violins, a Japanese lacquer. The polish is fine and never checks. It seems to me that it would be very nice for our American manufacturers to investigate. Solid oak - no veneers. (Music Trade Review, 12 Feb.1921)*

This description highlights the high regard to which Bent held Japanese lacquer finishes, even encouraging American manufacturers to explore the technique. The use of lacquer for musical instruments was evidently a standard practice not only in Hamamatsu but also in Yokohama, capturing the attention of American piano technicians.

## 5. Conclusion

Under the direction of Torakusu Yamaha, Nippon Gakki Manufacturing in Hamamatsu began full-scale production of upright pianos in 1900 and grand pianos in 1902. At the 5th National Industrial Exhibition in 1903, a grand piano purchased by the Empress Shoken attracted attention. Building on this success, Nippon Gakki made its debut at an international exhibition at the 1904 St. Louis World's

Fair, where it was awarded the prestigious Silver Medal of Honour for a grand piano with black lacquer and gold *maki-e* decoration. The design for this *maki-e* decoration was based on the work of Japanese painter Beinen Oya, highlighting the involvement of the Hamamatsu Maki-e Lacquer Factory, where Oya was employed. Founded in 1895 by Yasukichi Ichikawa, the factory aimed to modernise lacquerware production and pioneered the training of apprentices. Its lacquerware won prizes at national and international exhibitions and was purchased by the Imperial Household. However, financial difficulties led to its reorganisation as the Hamamatsu Lacquerware Joint-Stock Company (浜松漆器合資会社) in 1902 and its eventual dissolution in 1905.

By the time Yamaha began piano production, advanced and artistic lacquerware techniques initiated by Ichikawa were already flourishing in Hamamatsu. Drawing on this local expertise, Yamaha incorporated lacquer finishes into its pianos and differentiated high-profile instruments for exhibitions with *maki-e* and other artistic elements. This link enabled the lacquer tradition of Hamamatsu to be transferred to instrument finishing.

Initially, Nippon Gakki employed a Chinese technician who had been trained in Western lacquer techniques under British supervision at the Moutrie in Shanghai. However, challenges with efficiency and surface quality led the company to adopt traditional Japanese lacquer techniques. Consular reports from the United States around 1910 indicate that domestically produced pianos had begun to meet domestic demand and were also being exported within less than a decade of production. Lacquer finishes and decorative elements became key selling points in these exports.

This is evidenced by the work of Kojiro Tomita, who in 1906, as an overseas trainee of the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, studied lacquerware sales and lacquer production in Boston. During an internship in piano finishing at the prestigious Mason and Hamlin company, Tomita concluded in his report that lacquer was unsuitable as a material for use in American piano making. Another trainee, Takuro Fukushima, who studied piano and organ assembly and tuning in Boston, suggested in his report the export of piano exteriors finished with *maki-e* designs.

After the Second World War, the widespread use of lacquer in Japan became unsustainable, and piano exteriors were finished with synthetic lacquers, leading to the complete abandonment of lacquer techniques in piano production. Today, even piano technicians are rarely aware that pre-war instruments were lacquered, and research on pianos has tended to focus on their internal structure rather than their exterior.

However, it is important to recognise that around 1900, when Japan first began domestic production of the complex Western instrument, the piano, Hamamatsu pioneered the application of traditional lacquer finishes and decorative techniques to piano exteriors. This innovation played a key role in the successful 're-export' of these instruments as unique Japanese products. Although Japanese piano manufacturing advanced rapidly in subsequent decades, with greater self-sufficiency in parts production, the founding efforts of the early 1900s relied heavily on traditional lacquer craftsmanship.



Future interdisciplinary research encompassing music history, art and craft history, and industrial history is essential to further explore this topic.

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# **Katsu HAMANAKA:**

## **A Decorative Artist in Paris and His Time**

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### **Abstract**

This paper offers a detailed account of Katsu Hamanaka's career as a decorative artist active in Paris from 1928 to 1940. It evaluates information related to Hamanaka, who incorporated Japanese lacquer techniques into decorative art within the French Art Deco movement. This paper also discusses the ambivalent reaction of the Japanese lacquer industry to his work, referring to the differences in the position of lacquer art in France (decorative art) and Japan (crafts). Additionally, it explores how the Japanese lacquer industry struggled with the conflicting goals of promoting exports and preserving traditional crafts, with nationalism ultimately causing a shift toward the latter.

**Keywords:** Katsu Hamanaka, Japanese lacquer art and industry, Art Deco decoration

**JEL Classification Codes:** N83, N84.

### **1.Introduction**

This paper focuses on Katsu Hamanaka (1895–1982), a decorative artist active in Paris, by analysing the process of his application of Japanese lacquer art in decorative art in Paris and the Japanese response to it. This analysis shows the differences in the position of lacquer art in France (decorative art) and Japan (crafts). The Japanese notion of lacquer art as a traditional craft prevented its further expansion.

When discussing Parisian lacquerware and Art Deco decoration, the collaboration between Seizō Sugawara and Eileen Gray should be mentioned, as it was the starting point for lacquer application, design innovation, and atelier collaboration. However, Sugawara did not initially have many connections to the Japanese lacquer art world; the Japanese art world was instead watching Jean Dunand and Katsu Hamanaka.

Many profiles of Hamanaka circulating inside and outside of Japan are highly inaccurate,

particularly the background of his training in lacquer art, which is often explained through the secondary use of inaccurate French sources. For example, the Galerie Chastel-Maréchal's information on Hamanaka states that he 'studied under the great Japanese lacquer artist Katsutarō Yamazaki (this is thought to be a misspelling of Kakutarō)' and 'travelled to France with his wife in 1924, where he met the lacquer artisan Seizō Sugawara and developed traditional Japanese lacquer techniques'<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the information on Hamanaka in the 'Jules Leleu' archives at the Musées Municipaux de Boulogne-Billancourt has incorrect dates and does not indicate how Hamanaka entered the world of lacquer art<sup>2</sup>. The 1952 issue of *Etude d'Outre-Mer* by l'Institut Colonial de Marseille seems to be the source of misinformation in France; in it, Hamanaka is described as 'a student of Professor Matsuda and Professor Yamazaki of the Tokyo Imperial School [*sic*]' who 'worked under the guidance of Mr. Kunii and Mr. Sawaguchi, directors of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, and who was also a disciple of the Japanese lacquer artisan, Mr. Sugawara'. This description is highly inaccurate, as Hamanaka hardly knew Professor Yamazaki and Mr. Sawaguchi, and neither Professor Matsuda nor Mr. Sugawara were his master.

Some descriptions of Hamanaka in Japan are also inaccurate. For example, the statements that Hamanaka 'became interested in furniture making while he was a teacher in Sapporo' and that 'when he first came to Paris, he studied gold, silver, ivory, etc., but eventually he decided to pursue lacquer crafts' (Tokushima Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan et al., 1997, p.58) are incorrect. Goichi Sawaguchi's *Research on Japanese Lacquerware* describes Hamanaka as a 'young designer' who assisted Jean Dunand (Sawaguchi, 1966, p.64). Given the current situation, the facts of Hamanaka's career should be correctly explained.

## 2. Early Phases in the 1920s

### *Hamanaka's Background in Japan*

Katsu Hamanaka (originally Masaru Hamanaka 濱中勝) was born on 3 May 1895 as the eldest son of Katsue Hamanaka (濱中勝衛), at No. 11, Kotoni Village, Sapporo County, Hokkaido<sup>3</sup>. He studied at Sapporo Normal School (札幌師範学校), where an art club called 'Noma-kai (野馬会)' had been formed by students in 1905. The club's teaching adviser was Suishū Sugawara (菅原翠洲), appointed to the school in 1904. Sugawara studied under Gahō Hashimoto (橋本雅邦) of the Kanō School at the

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<sup>1</sup> Galerie Chastel-Maréchal, 'Katsu Hamanaka (1895–1982)' (<https://chastel-marechal.com/katsu-hamanaka/>), 31 December 2024.

<sup>2</sup> 'Katsu HANANAKA' in the 'Leleu' archives, Musées Municipaux de Boulogne-Billancourt. It seems to have been written based on the interview with Hamanaka in 1951.

<sup>3</sup> Gaimu-shō Gaikō Shiryō-kan, 'Ryoken hakkyū kiroku maikuro firumu' [外務省外交史料館「旅券発給記録マイクロフィルム」]

Tokyo School of Fine Arts and brought the brushwork of Japanese painting to Hokkaido (Imada, 1970, pp.48-50; Sapporo-shi Kyōiku Iin-kai, 1994, p.794)<sup>4</sup>. Hamanaka took an entrance exam for the Tokyo School of Fine Arts when he graduated school in March 1916 but was rejected (Hamanaka, 2010a).

After graduating, Hamanaka was posted to Kushiro. Even after becoming a teacher, he was unable to suppress his desire to create art and faced difficulties. In April 1919, the principal of Hamanaka's school transferred him to his old school as the principal. In September 1919, Hamanaka became the principal of Biruwa Elementary School in Teshikaga Village. However, residents complained that 'Principal Hamanaka is an artistic and bohemian man ... he is more interested in his artistic spirit and his yearning for nature than in education, and often skips school to go hiking', and after six months, he was sent back to his last post in Kushiro (Sarashina, 1949, p.157)<sup>5</sup>. The following year, Hamanaka became a founding member of the Seikū Art Association (青空画会) in 1921. At the second exhibition in 1922, Hamanaka exhibited three works in the Western-style painting section (Kushiro-shi, 1972, pp.199-200).

When the mandatory teaching period for graduates from normal schools ended, Hamanaka did not intend to continue teaching. He held an art exhibition in Kushiro in April 1924 and received his passport from Hokkaido on 17 June 1924<sup>6</sup>. The passport issuance record lists his destination as 'European countries' and the purpose of the passage as 'art and education research'<sup>7</sup>.

### *Paris 1925–1927: Encounter with Art Deco Decoration*

Hamanaka travelled to France in September 1924 at the age of 29 (*Nichiei shin shi*, 1924)<sup>8</sup>, influenced by Yoshio Aoyama (青山義雄). Although no direct correspondence between Aoyama and Hamanaka has been found, the detail is confirmed by Hamanaka's conversations with his wife and the memoirs of Musōan Takebayashi. Takebayashi states that Hamanaka met Aoyama while working as a teacher in Kushiro and 'followed Aoyama to France' (Takebayashi, 1962, p.227). Arriving in Paris via Marseille, Hamanaka first stayed at the hotel arranged for him by Aoyama, then 'moved around Porte d'Orléans, Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, and other areas, and was able to find the atelier at Cité Falguière fairly quickly' (Hamanaka, 2010b, p.18). In the summer of 1927, Hamanaka stayed in

<sup>4</sup> Hokkaidō Dejitaru Myūjiamu, 'Hirogaru tasaina hyōgen-kaiga chōkoku [北海道デジタルミュージアム「広がる多彩な表現—絵画・彫刻」] (<https://hokkaido-digital-museum.jp/hokkaido/art/ar-02/>), 31 December 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Teshikaga-chōritsu Biruwa shōgakkō, 'Gakkō no enkaku' [弟子屈町立美留和小学校「学校の沿革」] (<http://bishou-4.hs.plala.or.jp/>), 31 December 2024.

<sup>6</sup> 'Hamanaka kundō-ga-kai', *Kushiro shinbun*, No. 6217, morning edition, 2 April 1924 [濱中訓導画会]『釧路新聞』.

<sup>7</sup> Gaimu-shō gaikō shiryō-kan, 'Ryoken hakkyū kiroku maikuro firumu' [外務省外交史料館「旅券発給記録マイクロフィルム」]

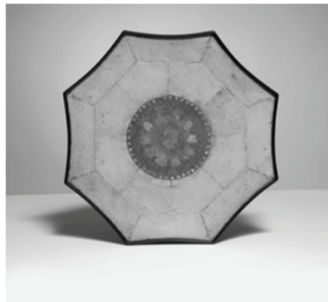
<sup>8</sup> On Page 10, in the 'Recent visitors to Europe by Nippon Yūsei service' column, it says, 'Teacher Hamanaka Katsu'.

Cagnes<sup>9</sup>, where he was introduced to Musōan Takebayashi, whose memories of Hamanaka are valuable (Takebayashi, 1959a, p.270)<sup>10</sup>.

The information above presents the available supporting evidence for Hamanaka's career up to 1927. Still, several questions remain. First, what was Hamanaka doing between 1925 and 1927? One clue for answering this question lies in Hamanaka's work during this period. Unfortunately, although Hamanaka entered his works in juried exhibitions of the Salon d'Automne every year from 1925 onwards, he was not selected in 1925-1927; hence, his works do not appear in the catalogues of the Salon d'Automne or Salon des Artistes Independants. The question is therefore unanswered. Several trays with sharkskin finish or various lacquer-coating (変り塗) finishes made by Hamanaka were auctioned recently; auction house experts judged the year of production as 1925 or 1923. As Hamanaka had not arrived in France in 1923, that cannot be correct. Hamanaka had written the year the piece was completed in the Japanese-era name; the auction appraiser may have confused the Japanese era names 'Taishō' and 'Shōwa' when converting them into the Western calendar.

The period from 1925 to 1927 saw the flourishing of Art Deco decoration, triggered by the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts (27 April-8 November). Art Deco decoration prompted the application of ivory and sharkskin to interior decoration, especially furniture. Clément Rousseau is a representative producer of this style. His works from 1925 to 1930 employed techniques of pasting coloured sharkskin over an entire surface and bordering it with varnished amber wood, as well as applying sharkskin inlay and marquetry to the wood base. Of Hamanaka's works auctioned on 28 May 2024, one is inlaid with different materials, such as unlacquered sharkskin and ivory.

**Figure 1. An octagonal tray I**



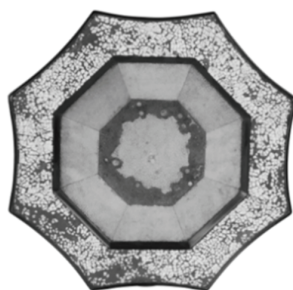
Source: From the site of Artnet, 'Katsu Hamanaka' (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/katsu-hamanaka/>)

<sup>9</sup> 'Katsu HAMANAKA' in the 'Leleu' archives, Musées Municipaux de Boulogne-Billancourt. The reward section states the following: 'Récompenses: 1927 Félicitation pour le sauvetage d'un garçon et sa mère presque noyés le 14 septembre 1927 à Cros de Cagne A.M., per la Marine Nationale Française'. Additionally, in the passage 'Hamanaka Katsu (7)' by Makiko Hamanaka in JOURNAL JAPON, No. 222, 2010, p. 20, 'In 1927, while swimming in the sea at Villefranche in the south of France on vacation, he found a boy who was drowning and rescued him ... and received a certificate of commendation for it', the location is not 'Villefranche-sur-Mer' but actually 'Cros de Cagne'.

<sup>10</sup> However, Hamanaka did not travel to France at this time (1927).



Figure 2. An octagonal tray II



Source: From the site of ADER, 'KATSU HAMANAKA (1895–1982) Plateau octogonal' (<https://www.ader-paris.fr/lot/123459/17564493-katsu-hamanaka-1895-1982-plateau-octogonal-la-bordure-en>)

Figures 1 and 2 show similar designs; these items were auctioned by Hamanaka's heirs in 2019. The lacquer used on the edges and back of the tray in Figure 2 was assessed as not original. The piece may have been repainted with lacquer, or it may not have been painted with lacquer originally; if that is the case, the piece was made before 1928. Inspired by Rousseau's works, Hamanaka may have completed the piece after acquiring the necessary technical skills. The appraiser determined that the piece was made in 1925; however, it is unclear whether he could have acquired these skills after just a few months in France.

However, as early as 9 October 1927, Hamanaka placed an advertisement in the classified section of the evening paper *Le Petit Parisien: Journal Quotidien du Soir*, which stated, 'Finishing: Ivory inlay, mother-of-pearl, and sharkskin finishing for furniture and boxes – Hamanaka'. Thus, by 1927, he had acquired sufficient skills to work as a professional artisan<sup>11</sup>.

Although the exact factors that led Hamanaka to learn these techniques remain unclear, the 1925 Paris World Expo appears to be one of them. He was impressed by the many new Art Deco decoration designs displayed at the Expo, in store windows, and in art magazines. Who taught Hamanaka these techniques? This question is as important as the instruction of lacquer craft techniques from Seizō Sugawara; however, our only foothold is the report by Yoshikichi Katayama (片山佳吉) published in the magazine *Urushi to kōgei*. That report states that when Hamanaka went to France, he first studied the craft of sharkskin and the processing of small art objects made of gold, silver, and ivory, and he 'planned to greatly advance Japanese crafts together with the late Matsudaira, the person who made these works popular at the time' (Katayama, 1933, p.20). Katayama heard this statement directly from Hamanaka; however, it is unclear who Matsudaira was. Although Matsudaira had passed away by 1933, he seems to have been a critical figure in creating the Art Deco trend after 1925. At present, Matsudaira remains unknown.

<sup>11</sup> *Le Petit Parisien: Journal Quotidien du Soir*, 9 Oct., p.6.

### ***1928: Encounter with Sugawara and Learning Lacquer work***

Hamanaka had acquired the finishing techniques essential to Art Deco decoration by 1927 and encountered Seizō Sugawara in 1928. Thus, the Sugawara-Hamanaka relationship may be interpreted differently.

Based on his interview with Mrs. Makiko, Mitsuyoshi Atsuta describes the following: During his lifetime, Hamanaka told his wife Makiko, ‘What prompted me to start lacquer art was a conversation with Mr. Sugawara at the Japanese restaurant Botan-ya’. Sugawara said that ‘lacquer work is profitable’. Hamanaka asked him if it was really so profitable, and Sugawara reaffirmed, ‘Yes, it is’. Hamanaka responded, ‘I’m interested, too’, and Sugawara replied that he would teach him about it if he wished. Atsuta then added his description: ‘From the time he arrived in Paris until he began lacquer art, Hamanaka spent four years of trial and error to decide what his field of specialty would be’; ‘Later, Hamanaka visited Sugawara’s atelier and saw lacquer art at work, and he decided to try lacquer art himself’ (Atsuta, 2016, p. 249f). Thus, after trial and error while searching for a field of activity, Hamanaka became interested in and began to learn lacquer work because it was profitable.

However, as seen from the above analysis of Hamanaka’s creative activities from 1925 to 1927, he had already devoted himself to mastering the finishing techniques necessary for Art Deco decoration; therefore, his words ‘I’m interested, too’ seem to have a slightly different meaning. Hamanaka wanted to master lacquer work to expand the range of finishing techniques he could use in Art Deco decoration. In other words, he did not enter the world of ‘lacquer art’ but remained focused on Art Deco decoration throughout his career.

Hamanaka’s first visit to Sugawara on Guénégaud Street lasted about an hour. During that time, Sugawara taught him how to use Japanese lacquer and other tools (Hamanaka, 2010b, p.18). Although Mrs. Makiko claimed that Mr. Sugawara was not particularly caring, and that the time he spent teaching Hamanaka was far too short compared to the time he spent teaching Gray and Dunand, this seems to be only a half-truth.

Mrs. Makiko states that Sugawara told Hamanaka to get a book *Jitsuyō nuri-urushi* (Practical Lacquer Coating) from Japan. However, there is no book in Japan with this title. The actual title is *Jitsuyō sikkōjutsu, Jikken-ōyō-tsūzoku-sangyō sōsho dai 6 hen* (Practical Techniques for Lacquer Work, Experimental Applicative Popular Industry Series, Vol. 6), written by Kichijirō Ishii and Kiyokata Ichinohe. This book was published in 1907, when Sugawara began teaching Gray lacquer art while working for Gaillard. Sugawara himself likely referred to this book as he sought out new variations in colours and in the technique of ‘burnishing varied coating’ (研ぎ出し変わり塗り) with the intent to realise the design and texture Gray was seeking.

According to P. Adam, after Gray had started lacquer art, she ‘tried to create different colours and tones’. She was particularly interested in producing the colour blue using lacquer (Adam, 2008, P.53).

To find out more information about blue lacquer, Sugawara reached out to someone from the lacquer arts department at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, probably Shōka Tsujimura, who had accompanied him to France in 1905, and was given *Jitsuyō sikkōjutsu*. The formula for blue lacquer is described in Chapter 3, ‘Raw Material Properties of Lacquer Liquid’, Section 10 ‘Creation of Coloured Lacquer’ of the book.

Sugawara’s introduction of the book as a textbook to Hamanaka is a decisive moment in the artist’s career.

First, *Jitsuyō sikkōjutsu* informed Hamanaka of the current state and challenges of the Japanese lacquer work industry. In the first chapter, the authors warn that the Adt family has established a ‘large imitation lacquerware factory’ in Germany and France, where moulded *papier-mâché* pieces are coated with varnish and decorated with *maki-e*-style painting<sup>12</sup>. The authors indicate that if lacquerware such as trays were adapted to local weather and climate, and if efforts were made to create lacquerware out of paper or metal rather than traditional, fragile wooden materials, it would not be difficult to ‘restrain the monopoly’ of Adt. The authors conclude that the way to increase exports and create a prosperous lacquer industry depends on ‘the efforts of enterprising businessmen’, and that the time for the revival of lacquer work was quickly approaching and must not be missed (Ishii and Ichinohe, 1907, pp.4-7).

In Chapter 2, ‘Interpretation of Lacquer Work’, the authors divide lacquer work into two major categories: lacquer-application processes (*kyūshitsu* 髹漆) and decorative lacquer-painting processes (*shitsuga* 漆画), such as painting or metal inlay. They explain the categories as follows: *Kyūshitsu* is a general term for applying lacquer to a material, which can be wood, metal, or ceramic. *Shitsuga* includes various types, including *maki-e* (蒔絵), *sabi-e* (錆絵), and *chōshitsu* (彫漆 carved lacquer), such as *tsuishu* (堆朱). However, the lacquer painting on silk paper method invented by Zeshin Shibata (柴田是真) during the Meiji period should be seen not as lacquer work but as picture art. Furthermore, the slow development of the lacquer work industry is ascribed to a few talented artisans who possessed both painting and lacquer work skills. The authors then explain the four types of under-coat (漆底) and the various methods of decoration on the upper-coat (髹飾), such as *kakiai* (柿合), *hana-nuri* (花塗), *roiro* (蠟色), and burnishing varied coating (変わり塗), as well as the types of lacquer painting and carved lacquer. Each of the following chapters explains the materials, tools, and methods for each process and shows the countries where lacquerware was exported and their export amounts.

The knowledge that Hamanaka gained from the book about the two major categories of lacquer work, *kyūshitsu* and *shitsuga*, and the methods and techniques within each category, proved extremely important in developing his artistic activities.

There was a second reason that Sugawara did not provide detailed instructions on lacquer work to Hamanaka. In 1923, Sugawara had already produced a screen with Gray that marked a turning point

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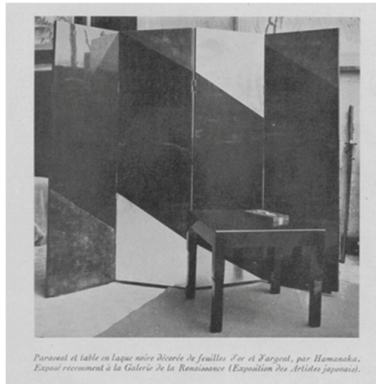
<sup>12</sup> It is a factory built at Pont-à-Mousson in the Lorraine region. Today, the Musée au Fil du Papier displays Chinoiserie products made by Saarbrücken-born Pierre Adt (1820-1900).

in modern design; he understood that what was now required of lacquerware in Europe was not an elaborate technique for lacquer application and painting.

Because we cannot directly compare Gray's screen of 1923 with Hamanaka's first lacquer screen of 1929 by viewing the works, the extent to which Sugawara gave technical guidance to Hamanaka is unclear. Sugawara did at least teach Hamanaka the 'principles' of developing techniques using the book mentioned above.

The relationship between Sugawara and Hamanaka was not that of a master and disciple, in which techniques were passed down. Sugawara provided suggestions, and Hamanaka sincerely reflected on their meanings and created something unique and novel.

**Figure 3. A folding screen at the First Salon of Japanese Artists (1929)**



Source: *Art et Industrie*, mai 1929, p.49.

(<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bd6t54135551/f299.image.r>)

**Figure 4. Hamanaka's advertisement on *Art et Industrie* magazine in 1929**



Source: *Art et Industrie*, juin 1929, p.55.

(<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bd6t54135551/f365.item.r>)

In April 1929, Hamanaka exhibited his first lacquer work, a folding screen, at the First Salon of Japanese Artists. Sugawara also exhibited a lacquer screen there; this was his last exhibition of lacquer screens (Jaffré, 2018, p.135)<sup>13</sup>. Hamanaka's work was featured in the May issue of *Art et Industrie* magazine, as shown in Figure 3, followed by advertisements in the June and December issues under the heading 'Japanese lacquer and sharkskin, oriental and modern décor, furniture, folding screens, ornaments, and art objects', as shown in Figure 4<sup>14</sup>. Since the advertisements highlighted Japanese lacquer and sharkskin, Hamanaka had likely mastered sharkskin lacquering at this point.

Hamanaka succeeded in exhibiting his work at the Salon des Artistes Independants in 1930 and then began an energetic production of decorative works. He earned his living as a lacquer artisan, like Sugawara, in collaboration with a leading designer's *maison-atelier*. Hamanaka's collaborators included Dunand and Leleu. At the end of 1931, Dunand was chosen from many Art Deco artists to become head decorator for the deluxe cabin in the luxury French liner *SS L'Atlantique*. Hamanaka later stated that, although he could not be involved in interior design as a decorator, he was known as a Japanese lacquer artisan and was entrusted with the lacquer decoration for part of the deluxe cabin by Dunand (Hamanaka, 1933a, p.13). While participating in these collaborations with *maison-ateliers*<sup>15</sup>, Hamanaka also successfully exhibited his works under his own name at the salons; had he not done so, he would not have been allowed to sign his name on the collaborated works.

### 3. Contact with the Japanese Lacquer Industry during the 1930s

At the end of the 1920s, a Japanese man named Kō Tsunoda (角田耕) came to France and trained in Jean Dunand's atelier. Japan 'discovered' Dunand when Genichiro Ashikaga (足利源一郎), who was collecting specimens for the French Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce's Exhibition Hall, came across Dunand's works and reported his descriptions to the Japan Lacquer work Association (Nihon Shikkō Kai 日本漆工会) in April 1924. Ashikaga stated that cheap oriental lacquerware was rampant in France, but Dunand's works were genuine and that he, having mastered the secret techniques of lacquering, seemed to control the depth of the lustre and the delicate texture of the lacquer coating at will (Ashikaga, 1924, p.7).

After returning to Japan in 1930, Tsunoda exhibited a lacquer screen influenced by Dunand at the Teiten Exhibition (Imperial Art Academy Exhibition 帝展); this prompted the article 'The Lacquer Art Era in Europe' to appear on the opening page of the November 1930 issue of *Urushi to kōgei*. The article states that, while representative works of *maki-e* on display at the Dunhill store in London and

<sup>13</sup> As Sugawara had seen Gray's design capabilities firsthand, it must have been quite difficult for him to design screens in his own style.

<sup>14</sup> *Art et Industrie*, juin 1929, p.55.; *Art et Industrie*, décembre 1929, xiv.

<sup>15</sup> '*maison-atelier*' means an organization in which various specialised artisans work together under a well-established designer.

Paris had a good reputation, the sales of lacquerware at the Liège International Exposition in Belgium were poor, and Japan had been left behind because lacquer from French Vietnam was being shipped to France and used for a wide range of purposes. The article also refers to Tsunoda's account from when he returned to Japan, which noted that Dunand used Japanese lacquer for interior decoration and furniture production with modern designs, but French newspapers understand lacquer work as a new industry that had arisen in France.

Following Tsunoda, Heisai (Nuitarō) Fukuoka (福岡萍哉／縫太郎), an assistant in the lacquer arts department at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, was sent by the Japan Lacquer work Association to study in Belgium, France, and Germany for a year in 1930. He posted an account of his visit to Dunand's atelier in December 1930. After describing the atelier, which consisted of a material-processing factory, a base-coating factory, an upper-coating factory, and a display room, Fukuoka made several suggestions to increase lacquerware exports: that the scattered Japanese lacquerware businesses engaged in exports join forces to build large factories aided by government subsidies; that several chief artisans be sent to major cities around the world for 3-5 years to research which items should be produced; that progressive, attentive designers be assigned to create designs that reflected the times; and that an industrial research institute for lacquer work be created within the factory, where talented engineers could research the base materials (Fukuoka, 1930, pp.11-14).

In March 1931, Kakichi Katayama travelled to Europe as a two-year-term researcher for the Japan Lacquer work Association<sup>16</sup>. He aimed to investigate the factors behind the evaluation and development of Japanese lacquerware in Europe and learn about European tastes in decorative art. Katayama is the one who discovered Hamanaka. The follow-up report by Heisai Fukuoka appeared in the June issue of *Urushi to kōgei*, along with an update on Katayama, who had finally settled in after moving to France. It stated, 'I have been told that lacquerware has been unique to Japan for hundreds of years and famous worldwide. However, other than antiques, I could not find a single piece of lacquerware I saw in Paris that could be proudly called indigenous to Japan. ...'; 'it is a clear colour, effectively omitted line, three-dimensionality, namely the dynamism of modern consciousness that perfectly matches the present taste of people worldwide, especially in Paris' (Fukuoka, 1931, p.16). Katayama, who had seen Dunand's work at the Salon des Artistes Decorateurs exhibition held in June at the Grand Palais, posted his account in the following month's issue: 'Leaving aside the technique, I was astonished at the designs, which perfectly expressed everything; Also, in Paris, only the privileged classes want lacquerware; in general, the French people had no interest in them, considering it too expensive' (Katayama, 1931a, pp.32-33).

Then, in September, Katayama reported that he had been instructing a volunteer Japanese painter to lacquer interior decorations and furniture under the design of Tsuguharu Fujita (藤田嗣治), and that

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<sup>16</sup> *Urushi to kōgei*, No. 359, March 1931, p.26.

the project had produced good results. Unfortunately, no follow-up reports on the outcomes of this project could be found. However, this ‘volunteer Japanese painter’ was Hamanaka (Katayama, 1931b, p.17)<sup>17</sup>. After dropping out of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Katayama studied under Shisui Rokkaku (六角紫水) and specialised in lacquer painting (*urushi-e* 漆絵) (Katayama, 1982, pp.11-12). Katayama was an expert in the coloured lacquer techniques that had been innovated during the Meiji period, which made it possible to produce vivid colours other than black, red, yellow, and green. He may have passed these skills on to Hamanaka (Katayama, 1982, p.11)<sup>18</sup>.

Katayama also participated in parties of the Japanese community in Paris. He recommended Hamanaka for full membership in the Japan Lacquer work Association and then returned to Japan in August 1932<sup>19</sup>.

In the February 1933 issue, Hamanaka posted a review from Paris on the lacquer works exhibited at the Salon d'Automne. Katayama also published a report on his research entitled ‘A Brief Account of Lacquer Artisans in Paris and Europe’. At this time, Sugawara and Gray became known to the Japan Lacquer work Association.

The outline of Katayama’s report is as follows: Lacquer work in France began around 1896, when Dunand, who had worked in metal crafts, gathered Indo-Chinese lacquer artisans. Lacquer artisans were invited to the Exposition Universelle of 1904. The late Shōka Tsujimura, Saburō Gotō in London, Seizō Sugawara in Paris, and two or three others travelled to Europe and introduced Japanese lacquer techniques to a great extent. One day, Mr. Sugawara accepted a request from Miss Gray, an Englishwoman living in Paris (who was devoted to creating new and innovative designs for carpets), and produced lacquerware under her tutelage. Subsequently, Mr. Sugawara began teaching Mr. Dunand, who was also a lacquerware researcher. The knowledge and techniques provided by Mr. Sugawara enabled Mr. Dunand to create his perfect lacquer works; for six years, Dunand had produced eggshell lacquer coatings, which became popular across Europe three years prior. However, because Dunand falsely claimed that he coated his products with Japanese lacquer, many of his artisans left. After a few years of self-employment, Mr. Sugawara could no longer make a profit on his work and

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<sup>17</sup> Tsuguharu Fujita returned to Paris from his trip to the United States on 1 June and left Cherbourg for Brazil on 30 October (Daily records of Tsuguharu Fujita based on the Fujita materials held at Tokyo University of the Arts) ([https://museum.geidai.ac.jp/img/fujita\\_hibi\\_no\\_kiroku\\_pdf\\_202205.pdf](https://museum.geidai.ac.jp/img/fujita_hibi_no_kiroku_pdf_202205.pdf), last accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2025). This ‘volunteer Japanese painter’ was identified as Hamanaka because Sugawara and Hamanaka were the only two individuals in Paris who handled Japanese lacquer; also, in the September 1932 issue of *Urushi to kōgei*, Hamanaka wrote that he had ‘been acquainted with Mr. Katayama for about a year’.

<sup>18</sup> When lacquer is mixed with any pigment other than *shu* (朱), *sekiō* (石黄), or *konjō* (紺青), it undergoes a chemical reaction and discolours; thus, the available colours were limited to black, vermilion, yellow, and green. However, after the Meiji period, lake pigments, which use white pigment as a base to dye the colour, were developed, making it possible to use various vivid colours.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding Katayama’s participation in the Japanese community, *Urushi to kōgei*, No.369, January 1932, p.29; regarding Hamanaka’s admission, *Urushi to kōgei*, No.375, July 1932, p.24; regarding Katayama’s return to Japan, *Urushi to kōgei*, No.376, August 1932, p.24.



began to produce items for the Rothschild family. He was a leading figure in the European lacquer work world, and no one could match him in lacquer work techniques (Katayama, 1933, pp.19-21)<sup>20</sup>.

The report then briefly described Hamanaka and Yoshihiro Miki (三木義廣), who lived in Antwerp, Belgium, and mentioned the lacquer artisans scattered across Europe and their number. While Katayama's report was partly written based on hearsay from Hamanaka, the historical record now emerging from Gray-Sugawara research shows it to be inaccurate. Hamanaka seems to have had little knowledge of Sugawara's background.

#### 4. 1933 'Maki-e and Design' implicit controversy

After completing his Salon d'Automne review at the end of November, Hamanaka received back issues of *Urushi to kōgei* and (presumably) the latest issue, No. 379, which had been published that month. No. 372 (April 1932) contained an article by Setsuji Wada (和田節治) from Namiki Manufacturing (Namiki Seisakusho 並木製作所), titled 'Personal Views on Applied *Maki-e* Products', along with photos of a table clock, a dressing table, and a cocktail cabinet produced by Namiki Manufacturing. No. 379 included photos of a single-seater chair and low table called 'Danwa-shitsu (Lounge)' that Gonroku Matsuda (松田権六) exhibited at the Teiten Exhibition, along with Tomio Yoshino's article 'Applications of Lacquer Art in the New Age' and Seiroku Noma's article 'My View of the Teiten Exhibition'<sup>21</sup>. Wada was the head of the foreign affairs department at Namiki Manufacturing and was a man of great acumen. While arranging for Gonroku Matsuda to visit Europe, Wada exhibited Matsuda's 'Danwa-shitsu'. At that time, Matsuda was a lacquer artist under exclusive contract at the Maple Company in Paris. Moreover, he was contracted to renovate the interior decoration of the famous villa built by Louis XIV and owned by the perfume magnate Coty (Haino, 2002, p.5).

Wada argued that current overseas demand for *maki-e* was limited to collectors who wanted to buy old *maki-e* as expensive antiques and traders who wanted to make quick profits by exporting cheap imitation *maki-e* items. The general public was now distanced from *maki-e* because *maki-e* craftsmen were too tied to tradition to give any consideration to the object, shape, and design to which they were applying *maki-e* and did not conduct thorough research. Modern tastes differed from those of the past; thus, things do not attract attention if they remain unchanged. All those involved in the art of *maki-e*

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<sup>20</sup> The statement that "Lacquer artisans were invited to the Exposition Universelle of 1904. The late Shōka Tsujimura, Saburō Gotō in London, Seizō Sugawara in Paris" is incorrect; owing to this error, many incorrect explanations about Sugawara were circulated in early research into Gray. This error also means that Hamanaka did not know that Sugawara had worked for Gaillard.

<sup>21</sup> In the 'Message' column on the first page of Issue 377 of *Urushi to kōgei* (September 1932), Hamanaka wrote that he had received Issues 373 and 374 on 23 July and asked for the 12 back issues (361-372) to be sent to him, if possible. Hamanaka finished writing 'From Paris to the Japanese Lacquer work World' on 4 January 1933; thus, he likely also received the November issue.



were not sufficiently faithful to its characteristic techniques. The way to solve this issue was for *maki-e* craftsmen in general to: (1) establish *maki-e* techniques that could be preserved indefinitely as Showa-era *maki-e*, (2) conduct research into vessels that could be used to process *maki-e*, and (3) expand the range of applications of *maki-e*. The techniques that should be preserved forever as Showa-era *maki-e* were not the so-called French style, which was ‘geometrically created using eggshells, red and black, or gold and silver’, but those incorporating the characteristics of Japanese *maki-e* that had existed up to that point, as well as features that could have been conceived only in the Showa era. The photographs in this magazine show the application of genuine Japanese *maki-e* to furniture, driving furniture decoration in a new direction. This application was an example of how characteristic Japanese *maki-e* could be skilfully incorporated into modern products. Wada suggested that it could satisfy users artistically and also be convenient, as it applied traditional Japanese lacquer art to furniture and vessels necessary for modern people (Wada, 1932, pp.1-8)<sup>22</sup>.

Following Wada’s proposal to apply *maki-e* to furniture, a photograph of Matsuda’s lacquered furniture appeared in the November issue, along with Yoshino’s highly acclaimed and Noma’s ambivalent reviews.

Matsuda’s furniture was the first attempt in Japan to apply the burnishing varied coating techniques (変わり塗) to furniture. These coating techniques are also known as *saya-nuri* (鞘塗), which Hamanaka had already adopted. In Paris in 1926, at that time, Gray took inspiration from *shunkei-nuri* (春慶塗) and created a table with chrome legs and a lacquer (or varnish) top. In the early 1930s, a combination of metals and lacquers became popular among decorative artists. As Hamanaka had been contracted to do lacquer work for furniture with modern designs in *maison-ateliers* as Leleu, he found that the furniture designs by Namiki and Matsuda were not elegant enough. However, Yoshino only focused on the techniques Matsuda used in the lacquer coating, praising the work and saying that it ‘opened up the worldwide scope of lacquer work’ and that ‘fortunately, this piece was purchased by a British merchant (Dunhill)’ and ‘it will soon be exported and become a source of acclaim in the glorious city of Paris’ (Yoshino, 1932, pp.2-3)<sup>23</sup>.

Conversely, Noma, who became an assistant inspector at the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum shortly after graduating from the Department of Aesthetics and Art History at Tokyo Imperial

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<sup>22</sup> The National Museum of Ireland-Decorative Arts & History has on display a cosmetic set coated by Seizō Sugawara, which features a logotype of Gray’s initials, E and G, lacquered in gold over a black lacquered surface. Although this cosmetic set was made specifically for Gray, it shows what designs and articles should have been created at that time in Japan. In contrast, Wada believed that if a genuine *maki-e* was adapted to lacquer products, even if its design was old-fashioned, such as a goldfish pattern, the products should win popularity in the European market. His view seems to follow the clichéd line of Japonism.

<sup>23</sup> Matsuda’s armchairs were acquired by the Musée Guimet in Paris through Wada’s skillful negotiations with Dunhill & Co., but they were acquired as furnishings, not as artwork. As the museum specialises in Oriental arts, “Japanese-made Art Deco” furniture was suitable for furnishing its library. Yoshino misunderstood the purchase to be a result of appreciation of the armchairs’ artistic value.

University, said that Matsuda's furniture was 'the highlight of the lacquer work exhibited at the Imperial Exhibition and holds many hints for the lacquer work of the future', evaluating that it 'opened up a bright new horizon for the lacquer work, which had been subordinate to minor crafts ... and enabled it to advance into the category of major crafts'. He determined that the artist was able to develop the work into a large-scale craft by daring to boldly coat, which has been considered a 'heretical project in the arts and crafts way', but concluded with a warning: 'I hope that the artist does not overuse his talent and make mistakes in the selection of what to choose' (Noma, 1932, pp.9-10).

Hamanaka, who was immersed in the decorative arts world in Paris, critically examined Wada's argument and appealed to the Japanese lacquer work world. The points of contention with Wada that Hamanaka implicitly criticised are as follows: First, in Paris' art and crafts world, although collectors recognise the *maki-e* techniques applied to *inros* (印籠) and inkstone boxes (硯箱) of the past, Japanese lacquer is not trusted (Wada overestimates Japanese lacquer art); Therefore, apart from imitations of past lacquer art pieces, that is, 'introductory Japanese export goods', Japanese lacquer products are not in demand on the street; This lack of demand stems from a difference in lifestyle; because of this, contrary to Wada's suggestion, even if furniture and vessels are decorated with traditional Japanese *maki-e*, they do not necessarily fit the aesthetic tastes of Parisians or are not convenient. Differences in history, customs, and national characteristics leads to differences in necessities; If these differences are ignored, 'Western clothes with *takashimada* (the most popular and traditional Japanese female hairstyle)' would be the result. Hamanaka stated that an additional step was needed to 'create something that would lead the trend', matching with Western-style clothes. He believed that if such a thing could be created, the people of Paris would follow the trend whether they liked it or not. To achieve this, researching and developing designs that suited the lifestyle of Parisians was necessary (Hamanaka, 1933a, pp.14-16).

A noteworthy aspect of Hamanaka's argument was his criticism of the current designs of Japanese lacquer products and his suggestions for improving and realising them. To make designs match well with foreign styles and environments, he said artisans must live and create in those environments. He suggested beginning by creating a three-dimensional whole design, then processing 'a flat surface in extremely light patterns or in plain', avoiding 'applying clever-looking cheap Japanese *maki-e*' patterns. Additionally, he declared that 'currently exported lacquerware, even the *maki-e* products of Namiki found in Dunhill's storefronts, are too rebellious against the beauty of form' (Hamanaka, 1933a, pp.17-18). This sparked a battle regarding Hamanaka's designs and those developed by Namiki Manufacturing crafters, which led to Hamanaka being shut out from the Japanese lacquer work world.

Furthermore, regarding the improvement and realisation of designs, Hamanaka aptly described the complex arrangement of materials used in French decorative crafts at the time and the organisation of the *maison-atelier*, which made designs into reality, as follows. First, lacquer work is a secondary rather than primary process, equivalent to the processing of other materials that make up a product,

while being limited to wood and lacquer in Japan, which was inaccurate. As ‘the world that lacquer work can open up on its own is very narrow’, it is necessary to connect lacquer work with processors of other materials and work in cooperation to create good products.

In this case, what is needed is a ‘*décorateur*’ (decorator  $\equiv$  interior designer)—a conductor who arranges each material to create a perfect design that ‘completes forms, colours, and all other aesthetic requirements’ and supervises the processing technicians. They are the ‘practical author’ who ensures that ‘international lacquer work that does not forget tradition’ is the result.

Conversely, the practical author, trusting the *décorateur*, must ‘understand the feelings and hopes of the *décorateur*, and strive to put the idea of the *décorateur* perfectly into reality’. It is the practical author’s skills and intellect that turn an idea into a tangible product or piece of work. Their lifelong mission is to faithfully express their ideas in a physical object. Therefore, each lacquer artisan, as a practical author, must use their lacquer brushes to keep up with the ever-changing times (Hamanaka, 1933a, pp.19-23).

This collaborative relationship between *décorateur* and practical author is how Gray and Sugawara functioned and the organisational form of the *maison-atelier* under which Hamanaka worked. As Hamanaka explained, the author must seek the knowledge to turn the designed image into a real piece. His work, therefore, was not simply subcontracting under a fixed division of labour, but a collaboration.

Finally, Hamanaka implicitly mocked Wada and Noma by stating that, as the domestic lacquer industry was responsible for export, a master lacquer artist should research international lacquer work and its global market, even if they are not ready to enter ‘the lacquer work that stands on the trend of the times’, with the intent to achieve ‘international lacquer work that does not forget tradition’. Lacquer art critics should follow global trends; government authorities should improve the current system, which was too lofty and impractical compared to that in Europe; enhance and establish industrial and craft-educational institutions; send researchers and inspectors overseas permanently; and strive to raise the quality of international crafts.

In response to Hamanaka’s advice, Namiki Manufacturing published a gentle rebuttal in *Urushi to kōgei*. The article, titled ‘Paris for Cosmopolitans’ (which alludes to Hamanaka’s explanation of what he means by the word ‘Parisian’ in the article cited above), was written by Shinichi Inmaki (印牧眞一), a Paris correspondent for Namiki Manufacturing. Inmaki, referring to his experience in selling lacquerware cigarette cases and lighter sets to Parisians in his store, argued that Paris could become a market for high-end lacquerware (Inmaki, 1933, pp.19-20). Dunhill and Namiki Manufacturing’s approach to the internationalisation of *maki-e* ultimately resulted in the enclosure of famous lacquer artists, preventing lacquer work from being liberated into the framework of decorative arts and becoming one of the factors leading to the prolongation of the clichés of Japonism.

Furthermore, Hamanaka’s proposal to introduce a *maison-atelier* production system was overlooked. Certainly, famous lacquer artists oversaw the *maki-e* department under the name of the

*maison* ‘Dunhill Namiki’, but this was merely subcontracted painting within the scope of Dunhill’s idea of Japonism. Gonroku Matsuda’s experience in Europe illustrates this point.

During his six-month visit to Europe in 1933, Matsuda often memorised the avant-garde and abstract designs he saw in shop windows, then went home and sketched them. However, when he showed more than 500 sketches to people from Dunhill and Namiki at a farewell party before returning to Japan, he was told to give them all to Dunhill III. Dunhill III said, ‘If you were to go back to Japan and use the sketches of these items as a reference to invent new products one after another, it would be a nuisance to us. We want to buy *maki-e* products from your country, so we would like to ask for designs and techniques that only Japanese people can make’. All his sketches were then taken and burned (Matsuda, 1981, pp.126-127). Thus, Matsuda’s efforts were in vain, and the Japanese lacquer works never created a new tradition as an element of decorative art<sup>24</sup>.

However, as Hamanaka’s article made the members of the Japan Lacquer work Association keenly aware of the need to obtain information about crafts overseas, he was appointed European correspondent by the Association in 1933. Although it is impossible to go into detail in this article, his column ‘Pari tsūshin (Paris News)’ reveals information about Hamanaka’s participation in collaborations and the actual applications of lacquer in Europe. Moreover, Japanese craft and lacquer businesspeople approached him to hear his opinions. In mid-April 1933, he received a visit from Kitarō Kunii (國井喜太郎), Director of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry’s Crafts Guidance Office (商工省工芸指導所長), and Shōtarō Nakamura (中村祥太郎), Representative of exhibitors at European international fairs (欧州国際見本市出品人総代). They discussed plans, such as a special exhibition of Japanese lacquerware, at various salons in Paris. However, there was a gap in the understanding of Japanese characteristics. For Hamanaka, the most urgent task was to create what would be acceptable to European feelings and customs in terms of three-dimensional form and two-dimensional decoration. In contrast, for Kunii, this would be insufficient if Japanese taste could not be added to something used by Europeans (Hamanaka, 1933c, p.21). For Hamanaka, the Japanese lacquer work world should reconsider this ‘Japanese taste’.

In August of the same year, he received a visit from Gonroku Matsuda, who was in France on business with Namiki Manufacturing. Matsuda was deeply touched by Hamanaka’s ‘passion and spirit’ (Matsuda 1934). Later, in December 1933, Matsuda contributed an article entitled ‘A Blind Man Searches for an Elephant’ to *Urushi to kōgei*, where he set forth his impressions of his visit to Europe.

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<sup>24</sup> Masao Shimizu was indeed exploring the possibility of expanding the scope of lacquer painting, but to do so, decorative artists as designers were indispensable (Shimizu, 1932, pp.11-13). Gonroku Matsuda recognised the need for decorative artists and tried to fulfill this role by himself, undertaking the interior decorations of Koyata Iwasaki’s residence and the Nippon Yūsen’s ships *Terukunimaru* and *Yasukunimaru* (Matsuda, 1981, pp. 107, 110-114). However, as seen in Seiroku Noma’s review of the Imperial Exhibition (Noma, 1932, p.10), the lacquer work world considered Matsuda’s effort to be a waste of talent.

Matsuda, showing some sympathy for Hamanaka's opinion, observed the differences in aesthetic merits between Western and Japanese art and the future direction of crafts as follows: 'True craft must always be based on architectural style and be the most contrasting of architectural moods', and 'It is essential to constantly pay attention to and understand the transitions of architecture over time and each style of interior decoration'. In Japan, as 'Eastern' (which he identified with Japanese) and Western architectural styles are mixed and have not yet been fully reduced, crafts are likewise a mixture of the two styles and have not yet reached a stage of reduction. In that case, even if one learns the good points of the West, if one loses '*miyabi* (雅)', they will have made a mistake in their path. '*Miyabi*' means '*hūga* (風雅)' (graceful taste) and '*shinshu* (新趣)' (novel taste), and 'the life of Japanese crafts lies here'. In contrast, the West 'sees the merit in the elaborateness of things' (Matsuda, 1933, pp.10-11).

Matsuda never explicitly stated what he meant by '*miyabi*', but in her study of Gray and Sugawara, Hinako Kawakami defines '*miyabi*' in architectural style and crafts. Kawakami astutely pointed out that Sugawara's influence on Gray was not limited to lacquer techniques; Gray's spatial designs inherited the Japanese art concept of the effects of imperfections and voids in three-dimensional forms. As Mitsuki Tosa (土佐光起), a Japanese painter of the Edo period, said in his *Honchō gahō taiden* (本朝画法大伝), 'The blank in Japanese painting is not just a blank space; it is a "pattern" that is created by using the "heart", or imagination, to complete the painting in response to the surrounding motifs' (Kawakami, 2017, pp.119-120). The effect of this blank space in the design was shared by Hamanaka's lacquer works, as shown in Figures 3 and 5-7. In Hamanaka's works, Matsuda seemed to have discovered the '*miyabi*' of the blank space—namely, the true Japanese taste.

**Figure 5. Composition: a two-fold screen with natural black lacquer and white gold leaf (1930)**



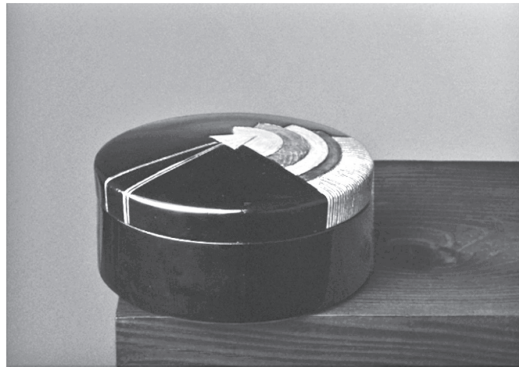
Source: From the site of Galerie Lefebvre New York, 'Katsu Hamanaka Japanese-French, 1895–1982', (<https://www.galerielefebvrenewyork.com/artists/41-katsu-hamanaka/works/>)

**Figure 6. An octagonal tray executed in black vegetal lacquer, sheets of shagreen treated with the "samenuri" technique (1930)**



Source: From the site of Galerie Lefebvre New York, 'Katsu Hamanaka Japanese-French, 1895–1982', (<https://www.galerielefebvrenewyork.com/artists/41-katsu-hamanaka/works/>)

**Figure 7. A box for the luxury branch of Samaritaine department store**



Source : From the site of Galerie Maxime Flatry, 'KATSU HAMANAKA (1895–1982) for La Succursale de Luxe de la Samaritaine' (<https://www.maximeflatry.com/selectionkatsu-hamanaka-box>).

## **5. Challenges and Turmoil after the Late 1930s**

### ***1934-37: Challenge to Shitsu-ga (Lacquer Painting)***

Until this time, Hamanaka consistently emphasised that the characteristics of Japanese lacquer were its beauty and durability as a material. He mentioned its merits only from the perspective of *kyūshitsu* (lacquer coating) and not from *shitsu-ga* (lacquer painting), especially *maki-e*, as Hamanaka had never

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met any Japanese lacquer artists involved in lacquer painting before. After meeting Katayama and Matsuda and receiving their advice and guidance, Hamanaka became involved in lacquer painting during the lacquer work process at Leleu's *maison-atelier*. At the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs in May 1933, a desk and two doors produced in collaboration with Leleu (conceptual design), Kaskoff (drawing), and Hamanaka (lacquer work) were exhibited. Additionally, Hamanaka displayed a screen under his name (Hamanaka, 1933b, p.17). Hamanaka clearly frequented the Maison Leleu for lacquering. In August 1933, Leleu commissioned Hamanaka to lacquer and decorate dining tables and office furniture for the League of Nations dining hall (Hamanaka, 1933d, p.11). Leleu also received an order from Joseph Avenol, a client who had just arrived as Secretary General, to paint a Japanese pine tree on the mirror in a small conference room. However, because Kaskoff, who was in charge of drawing, had never seen a Japanese pine tree, Hamanaka drew the sketch instead. Hamanaka installed furniture and block-shaped mirror panels in October (Hamanaka, 2009b)<sup>25</sup>. Thus, at the *maison atelier* of Leleu, Hamanaka oversaw tasks other than lacquer coating, such as lacquer painting, on the objects created by Leleu and based on Kaskoff's drawings. In 1934, Hamanaka also collaborated to create the doors, cupboards, and decorative panels for the dining room of the *apartment de Grand Luxe 'Trouville'* on the French ocean liner SS *Normandie*, and in 1935 he worked on the interior partition doors for the apartment on Victor Hugo Street. The pieces are decorated with fine *maki-e* lacquer work, which blends beautifully with the elegance of Leleu's style (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. The dining room of the apartment de Grand Luxe 'Trouville' on the French ocean liner SS *Normandie***



Source : From the site of Tessier-Sarrou, 'Retirage, paquebot "Normandie" - Appartement de Grand Luxe "T - Lot 336' (<https://www.tessier-sarrou.com/lot/143390/22411171?>)

Through these collaborations, Hamanaka learned what kind of three-dimensional shapes and two-

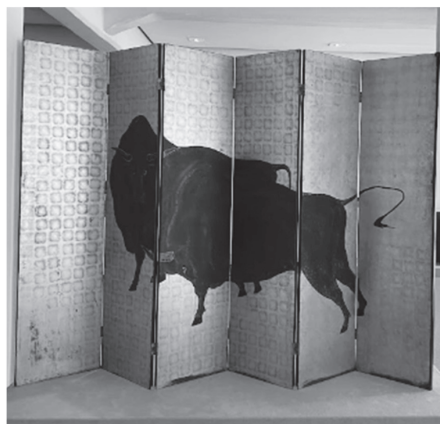
<sup>25</sup> Although Makiko's account states that the lacquering took place in 1935, Hamanaka stated in *Urushi to kōgei* that it was conducted in Geneva in October 1933 (Hamanaka, 1934, p.13).



dimensional decorations fit the European aesthetic sense. However, unless the collaboration had mutual agreement, only the master of the *maison-atelier* (i.e., the *décorateur* who created the original designs) could sign the works. A well-respected lacquer artist could enter various collaborations and be financially viable, but still not be able to sign their own pieces. Hamanaka explains the situation as follows: 'I indeed exhibit the same number of works at the Salon as Dunand, but whereas Dunand puts up a magnificent booth under his own name and with his own investment, my works are exhibited in the name of my collaborators at their booths, and I only exhibit one folding screen under my own name because my collaborators also have businesses, and so I have to refrain from displaying a large number of works as an individual' (Hamanaka, 1933c, p.20). Therefore, to become the head of a *maison-atelier*, Hamanaka needed to win high praise for a folding screen that was exhibited at each of the salons. Fortunately, in the creation of folding screens, he painted what he wanted to express under his own name without considering others' intentions.

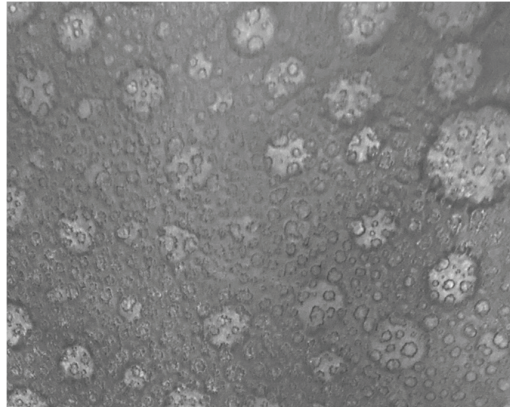
In 1934, Hamanaka began painting folding screens. These included two screens with figures of a bull and cow. One had four panels in 1934, and the other had six in 1935; in both cases, a bull and a cow were painted in lacquer on gold leaf. On the back of the 1934 work, birds and leaves were painted in *hira-maki-e* on a vermilion lacquered base. Thus, in addition to his techniques in lacquer coating, such as sharkskin lacquering and burnishing varied coatings in geometric compositions [Figures 5 and 6], Hamanaka also experimented with methods in the field of lacquer painting, perhaps discovering an environment where he could apply the Kanō school brushwork of Suishū Sugawara, from which his style originated. The design, likely based on Eitoku Kanō's (狩野永徳) *Karajishi-zu* (『唐獅子図』, *Chinese Lion*), was painted in detail not only with a brush but also with techniques of burnishing varied coating (Figures 9 and 10).

**Figure 9. A screen with figures of a bull and cow in 1934 in Karlsruhe Museum beim Markt collection**



Source: photo by the author



**Figure 10. Close-up view of the bull's body**

Note: It appears that the Tsugaru Nanako-nuri technique was applied. This is the only piece by Hamanaka that is permanently accessible, marking a turning point in his career as a painter. It is hoped that Hamanaka's work will be analysed in detail by an expert in Japanese lacquer work in the future.  
Source: photo by the author

This bull screen was created during the same time as his collaboration with Leleu on the ocean liner SS *Normandie*. In a letter from Paris posted in *Urushi to kōgei* at the end of August 1934, he wrote that although this year was, in many ways, a crucial period for his work, he could not hold a personal exhibition as he was unable to devote himself fully to his own work owing to various mistakes. His first bull folding screen was completed in autumn, and he seemingly explored lacquer-painting techniques through trial and error.

There is little documentation on Hamanaka between 1934 and 1937. However, one major question remains about the production process behind the works that won the *Grand Prix* at the 1937 International Exposition Arts and Techniques in Modern Life: a dining room cupboard with doors of floral lacquer panels and a folding screen depicting ancient dancing.

The flowers on the panels are a development of the lacquer painting he had done in collaboration with Leleu, but the dance screen goes beyond the scope of interior decoration; the painting itself stands out and seems to have been created with a different concept and motif than that he had previously used; moreover, this new motif would continue into his works of 1940.

Two anecdotes by Mrs. Makiko help us understand the circumstances under which the screen was created. First, after becoming a lacquer artist, Hamanaka attended night classes at the École du Louvre (Hamanaka, 2011). It is unclear what kind of courses he took, but the basic introductory courses at the École du Louvre were art history and archaeology. He encountered problems during the application process for the 1937 International Exposition. Hamanaka went to the Japanese Embassy to apply to exhibit at the Japan Pavilion but was told that the work would first be sent to Japan for inspection; if it passed, it would be eligible for the exhibit and sent back to Paris for exhibition. Considering the

time required for round-trip shipping by sea and the risk of damage, entering work with such a procedure was impossible. Thus, he negotiated the ability to take a photo screening instead, but this was not accepted. Hamanaka had to consult Maurice Dufrené, vice president of the Salon d'Automne, president of the Decorative Arts Department of the French Pavilion at the Expo, and an officer of the Legion of Honour. 'Since you are active in France, of course, you should exhibit your work at the French Pavilion, and I would like you to exhibit your work there', Dufrené agreed, even showing consideration by saying, 'I'll make sure to reserve enough space so that you can bring your work in on the day of the opening' (Hamanaka, 2009a, p.18)<sup>26</sup>.

These circumstances show that Hamanaka had to create works that would convey the merits of Japanese lacquer work, primarily to the French art world rather than the Japanese one. This was exactly what Hamanaka himself had been recommending: the achievement of international lacquer work that adapted to contemporary trends while not forgetting tradition. At that point, Hamanaka did not resort to his greatest advantage, the elegance of his geometric spatial arrangement; rather, he attempted a new project to combine the knowledge of art history and styles of expression he had acquired in night classes at the École du Louvre and the techniques of *maki-e* and Japanese painting into a single picture. He attempted to combine a dance composition reminiscent of Matisse with figures in Japanese-style brushwork, such as a *hō-ō* (鳳凰 phoenix), and decorated it with *maki-e*. Although not explicitly stated, the dance motifs, deer at the side, and *hō-ō* in the shadows are reminiscent of the Japanese *Iwato* myth, while the dancers and musicians are archaic figures. Regrettably, Hamanaka's *Grand Prix*-winning work was not kept in a museum. Because it cannot be seen in person, analysing the lacquer techniques he used was impossible.

His *Grand Prix*-winning work was featured on the frontispiece of the magazine *Urushi to kōgei*. The magazine evaluated it as follows: 'This is the most skilful application of the beauty of the sowing technique and something that no other art could ever hope to achieve. I admire Hamanaka's insight and intelligence, though I do not entirely agree with this as a purely Japanese art. Those who want to create something for foreign markets should take the plunge bravely. Is there a new world where one such a masterpiece can create, isn't it?'<sup>27</sup>

This, along with a contribution by Tomio Yoshino from the June issue of the same year, entitled 'The development of Lacquer Application Both at Home and Abroad and Nationalistic Sentiment', gives insight into the policy of the Japanese lacquer work world at the time. Yoshino quoted Toru

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<sup>26</sup> 'Katsu HAMANAKA' in the 'Leleu' archives. Makiko states that this person is Paul Signac, who also made an excuse for not awarding the Legion of Honor to Hamanaka after he won the *Grand Prix* and for not granting him membership in the Salon d'Automne. However, Signac cannot be the one, since he died on 15 August 1935. Moreover, Signac served as president of the Salon des Artistes Indépendants, not the Salon d'Automne, until 1934; thus, this point is also incorrect.

<sup>27</sup> The commentary states, looking at the black-and-white photograph of the panels and the screen, that 'both pieces appear to be fully burnished *maki-e*' (Author unknown, 'kuchie kaisetsu' (frontispiece commentary), *Urushi to kōgei*, No.437, September 1937, p.10).

Iwamura's words during his trip to Paris: 'What I felt most when I came to Paris was that there was a very irreconcilable gap between Westerners and Japanese, and step by step, I have been feeling more strongly that Japan had no other choice but to adopt an independent policy that enables Japan to advance', then concluding as follows: 'That is absolutely true. As our teacher, he was extremely praiseworthy for his firm insight at a time when many people who travelled abroad easily became Westernised' (Yoshino, 1937, p.8). In other words, Japanese lacquer artisans did not dare to cross the line between themselves and the West but instead followed the path of independence—nationalism. Those who want to create works for foreign markets are expected to go abroad and create bold masterpieces. In 1940, even Gonroku Matsuda, feeling superior to the West, said, 'While I was in France, I assisted in creating murals on passenger ships, instructing some of the techniques behind the scenes. There was no need to make an effort from the first, and I simply tried to use the sheath lacquering techniques left to us by our predecessors, but even this was enough to astonish foreigners' (Matsuda, 1940, p.23). This was an example of him praising his own traditions, which completely neglected the importance of design.

France's 1937 cultural policy was the opposite of Japanese nationalism. In her paper on the cultural policy of France in 1937, Kyoko Ōkubo quotes Yacob Togendhold's description of Matisse's 'Dance': 'Where does the whole decorativeness of the work come from? ... The primitive brushstrokes of the (archaic) vase have been replaced on a modern panel'. This description also applies to Hamanaka's folding screens. Ōkubo explains that this 'decorativeness' refers to the formative nature of dance, and that the French word '*primitif*' at the time meant 'the intention to praise the sanctity that only primitive things can possess, and thereby to revive the Western tradition' (Ōkubo, 2003, p.126)<sup>28</sup>. Hamanaka's work, which expressed this primitive dynamism that transcended the boundaries of various cultural nations, was in line with the French cultural policy of 1937. This, unlike Germany and Japan, which developed their view of national art history with exclusion and control, 'gathered all foreign art trends and unique art styles under the umbrella of universality, dissolving all contradictions and differences' (Ōkubo, 2019, p.79).

### ***1937-1952: The Turmoil***

Winning the *Grand Prix* brought Hamanaka closer to the realisation of *maison* 'Laque Hamanaka'. However, the gradually worsening international relations affected Hamanaka's solo exhibition in the United States. In 1938, he received a request for an exhibition at an American gallery. In 1939, he packed his pieces for the exhibition and handed them over to a shipping company. However, as Germany invaded Poland in September, and Britain and France declared war on Germany, the packed

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<sup>28</sup> The source of the quote is Yakov Yugendhold's work 'Osenny salon', *Apollon*, 1910, pp.30-31.

works could not be sent to the United States. In 1940, the German invasion of France obliged him to return to Japan. When Hamanaka finally travelled to France in 1951, he saw that everything had been lost; the atelier on 7 Cité Falguière was abandoned and in ruins. Thus, he was forced to close the first chapter of his life.

## 6. Conclusion

The complete history of Katsu Hamanaka as a decorative artist has been described above, to the extent that it can be confirmed by available documents. By examining his personal history, this paper has shown that he approached lacquer work as an Art Deco decorator, and that Seizō Sugawara gave him the most effective suggestions for applying lacquer work to decorative arts. However, the Japanese lacquer work world responded ambivalently to the application of lacquer work to the field of decorative arts in which Hamanaka and Sugawara were active in France, and did not respond to Hamanaka's proposal for collaborative production, such as that of *maison-atelier*, in which lacquer work would be incorporated into the manufacturing processes for decorative items under the leadership of a designer. By reflecting on his initial passion for painting and his genuine commitment to lacquer work techniques in screen production, Hamanaka himself succeeded in becoming a fully-fledged decorative artist who deserved to be called *maison*. The Japanese lacquer work world was hesitant to expand the range of applications of lacquer work at the expense of relegating it to a secondary position as a finishing process; instead, it sought a way to transform lacquer artisans into lacquer artists.

As the last section have shown, the real cause of Hamanaka's desistance from lacquer work was not the quality of his work, but the outbreak of World War II, which caused the loss of his capital assets just before the fruition of his *maison-atelier*. However, craft history researcher Haino has a different view. He states that European lacquer work, including that of Hamanaka and Sugawara, 'is quite different from Japanese lacquer work. European-made lacquerware was born from the influence of lacquerware exported from the Edo period and was called "Japaned Japaning" in Europe. *When Dunhill Namiki began exporting full-scale maki-e furnishings (mainly cosmetic articles), these were destined to disappear as an imitation*' [emphasis added] (Haino, 2002, p.6). It is astonishing that such a view, which completely ignores the evidence of the history of European decorative arts and mostly overlooks the essential problems that arose in the Japanese lacquer work world in 1933, was presented not before World War II, but in the early twenty-first century. The Japanese lacquer work world, which had become inward-looking and authoritarian after 1937, does not seem to have changed its character even after World War II. The praise or self-praise of Gonroku Matsuda and Namiki Manufacturing became the standard summary of prewar lacquerware exports, while Hamanaka's urging of the Japan Lacquer work Association to reconsider the importance of design in lacquerware production remains obscure. One reason why the works of Hamanaka and Gray-Sugawara are still not seen in Japanese art museums may be this narrow perspective on Japanese craft history.

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