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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Community spaces in the minds of traditional craftsmen in a pottery village in Japan



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Abstract

At present, the planning for the conservation or development of Japanese traditional crafts is based on administrative districts or water catchment areas. However, the conservation of Japanese traditions relies not only on the access to relevant natural resources but also on artisans' ability to manufacture crafts in specific environments. The perspectives of artisans on their work environments have a significant influence on traditional crafts. In this study, we aimed to investigate the changes in natural resource use in a village recognized for *Koishiwara-yaki*-style pottery. We employed a questionnaire and conducted interview surveys to collect data on the perceptions of the artisans working in the said village. The findings were as follows. 1) The area commonly regarded by the artisans as their place for pottery was identified. The identification of areas that are significant to local tradition can serve as a vital contribution to spatial planning. 2) The birth place of the local ceramics tradition in a local water catchment area was regarded as critically important in the preservation of the traditions of the village. 3) Several potters emphasized the value of their work environment to ver administrative support because of the historical connection between the place and their traditions. Highlighting this connection can attract historical and cultural tourism to this area.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The village of Koishiwara is renowned in Japan for its long-standing pottery tradition. Pottery production in this area requires natural resources, such as clay as the primary material, fire wood as fuel, and mountains lopes for constructing climbing

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kilns. Location is crucial for pottery production of this kind. However, traditional ceramics production areas are being threatened by modernization, including mechanization and the use of external natural resources. As artisans can now practice their craft anywhere, the efficiency of pottery production has markedly improved. Additionally, numerous villages in the study area have merged with neighboring municipalities, and administrative districts have been extended. The production areas are not as clearly demarcated as they used to be.

The current planning for the conservation or development of traditional Japanese crafts with consideration of the importance of cultural and natural landscapes is linked to administrative districts or water catchment areas. However, the preservation and promotion of Japanese crafts relies not only on the access to natural resources but also on artisans' ability to produce their crafts in a particular environment. The perspectives of artisans on their work environments are essential factors that influence their work (Yanagi, 1928; Risatti, 2007). Determining the particular area that is recognized by potters as their pottery site is critical, and the significance that potters attach to such area is essential. The results can contribute to the conservation of the unique local character of the identified area. Therefore, this study aims to identify the boundaries of a pottery heritage area in a village that is recognized by local artisans.

1.2. Literature review

1.2.1. Defining the production area

In primary industries, such as the agriculture and forest industries, the relationship between production and location is relatively easy to define on the basis of the environment. In Europe, the value of a specific location is recognized as *terroir*, and indicating the geographical location for valuation and preservation purposes is institutionalized. Famous classifications include the *Appellation d' Origine Contrôlée* in France and the *Denominazione di Origine Controllata* in Italy.

However, identifying unique locations related to goods production in secondary industries is considerably complicated because producers tend to move around over time to improve economic efficiency. Traditional crafts go against this trend because location is a crucial factor that influences their production and is typically a major factor that allows traditional crafts to survive through the ages.

Several studies have been conducted in Japan to identify these areas. Researchers have identified such areas as the original locations where artisans lived in and worked, and they have consequently tracked the development of these production areas (Suyama, 1993). Tsujimoto et al. (1989) focused on the Japanese textile industry and identified such areas on the basis of the records of local looms. However, existing studies identified production areas using aggregated points of where artisans worked. In the present work, we aim to identify the production area of traditional potters because it overlaps with the traditional craft production areas identified in previous studies.

1.2.2. Research on area recognition

Since the publication of Lynch's *The Image of the City* in 1960 (Lynch, 1960), various methods have been developed to

analyze perceptions of certain locations. Nakata and Dohi (1982) examined the differences between urban residents and visitors 'cognitive styles by evaluating environmental cognition and behavior in urban spaces. Usami et al. (2000) analyzed the relationship between the spatial preferences of visitors to towns and their behavior based on the irrecognition of the space. However, these studies mostly focused on cities.

In the 21st century, the importance of location in traditional craft production has become of value in Japan. Emphasizing the relationships between people and natural environment in rural areas, determining the changes in natural resource usage, and evaluating potters' perceptions of the areas they work in were critical for realizing the objectives of the present study.

1.2.3. Methods

In November and December 2012, we collected data using questionnaires that were distributed to 44 potters belonging to the *Koishiwara-yaki* pottery cooperative association and by conducting interview surveys. The questionnaire was developed to gather information on the histories of the households involved in the local pottery industry, as well as on their natural resource usage. A total of 41 potters participated in our study. The interview surveys were conducted to identify the views of the participants on the boundaries of the craft heritage area, as well as the spaces they regarded as important.

The steps followed during the interview survey process were as follows. First, we provided a topographical map of the area and indicated the location of the government office, two main national roads, and the participant's household. Second, we asked the participants to indicate the area they recognized as part of the pottery village and to draw the boundary lines of the area on the map. Third, we confirmed the boundary lines with the participants. Any errors that were noticed were corrected. In addition, we requested the participants to ensure that the border lines did not cross any mountain ridges. We finally requested the participants to indicate the areas they regarded as important. We used a geographic information system (GIS) to analyze and evaluate the features of the identified areas.

2. Study site and the transformation of crafts

2.1. Location of the village

The Koishiwara village is located in the northern part of the Kyushu Province in the south of Japan. The area is mountainous and far removed from urban areas. Today, the village is renowned for its traditional craft of *Koishiwara-yaki*. Geographically, the village is separated into two sides. The Koishiwara area formed by a basin occupies one side of the village while the Tuzumi valley area makes up the other side. A river runs through the center of the areas. The Koishiwara area is higher than the Tuzumi area by an elevation difference of approximately 250 m (Koishiwara Village, 2001).

Until the early 19th century, the village prospered as a key location and poststation for *Syugen-do* (a Japanese mountain ascetic practice) practitioners visiting Mount Hiko. Two national roads, Route 211 and Route 500, have recently been improved. The village has three outlets for

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