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"Making It For Our Country": An Ethnography of Mud-Dyeing on Amami Ōshima Island

Charlotte Linton

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Abstract

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Based on one year of fieldwork on Amami Ōshima island, southern Japan, this paper explores how traditional craft industries navigate the paradox between preservation and innovation. By focusing on *dorozome* (mud-dyeing), a process used in the production of the Amamian kimono cloth *Oshima tsumugi,* I look at how the skills embedded in this traditional but financially troubled industry evolve. I discuss the internal resistance to change that craftspeople experience locally, while concurrently facing external pressure from bureaucrats overseeing cultural preservation. I use the example of the dyeing company Kanai Kougei to show how they have responded to shifts in consumer culture, countering economic downturn through embracing innovation and diversity. This case study questions the very notion of tradition, by demonstrating that traditional craft practices in Japan have incorporated innovation throughout their development, often instigated by changing political, economic or technological circumstances. I argue that the current manifestation of dyeing practices in Amami are part of the ongoing evolution of local textile traditions. These have the potential to support economic and social sustainability at the site of production, and the wants of a global market looking for more environmentally sustainable commodities.

Keywords: Amami Ōshima; anthropology; apprenticeship; dorozome; natural dyeing; Oshima tsumugi; sustainability; textiles

CHARLOTTE LINTON

Charlotte Linton is a designer and anthropologist studying DPhil Anthropology at the University of Oxford. Her research is part of an ongoing exploration into textile techniques, aesthetics and histories, focusing on the social, environmental and economic relationships that are formed during the production process. Using long-term participant observation and apprenticeship, her current research based in Japan looks at the contemporary production of textiles associated with the *Oshima tsumugi* industry of Amami Oshima. Her work questions the preservation of tradition looking at how traditions evolve to find their place in contemporary society, and the role that traditional crafts play in sustaining rural social networks, economies, and ecologies, particularly in light of issues surrounding internal migration and sustainability. A graduate of Central Saint Martins, London, and the Royal College of Art, London, before studying anthropology Charlotte worked as a textile print and garment designer in the fashion and textiles industry in London, New York and Paris.

charlotte.linton@anthro.ox.ac.uk

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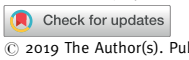

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Introduction

The narrative of the new movements cannot be told without what has been developed in the past; the role of the narrator is significant, but they have to convey both the old and the new. (Yukihito Kanai, 38.)

Arriving to work at Kanai Kougei one morning, Eriko-san beckoned me to the indigo workshop.[1] She wanted me to meet a Japanese lady who was visiting from New York City. Having lived in New York working in the fashion industry myself she thought I might enjoy speaking with Hatsuko-san, a pattern cutter at Alexander Wang – one of the city's most established contemporary fashion brands. The Japanese have a reputation in the design industry for being highly accomplished pattern cutters. We quickly discovered that some of my ex-colleagues were her friends, not an uncommon occurrence since fashion industry workers gravitate around a few international cities. Yet I hadn't imagined my past to revisit me on the small Japanese island of Amami Ōshima, as it did and continues to do so, through the interconnected world of design.

Hatsuko-san showed me the beautiful undergarments she had constructed using *Oshima tsumugi*, the local Amamian kimono cloth whose yarn is dyed by *dorozome* with mud and the boiled wood of the *sharinbai* (Yeddo Hawthorn) tree. In addition to these luxurious pieces she had made organic cotton versions using the *shibori* (tie-dye) technique, colored with *aizome* (indigo-dyeing) and *dorozome*. She had dyed these samples herself while participating in a public workshop at Kanai Kougei, and had returned to interview the *Shachō* (company president) about Amamian traditional dyeing (Figure 1). Hatsuko-san is on a mission to reinvent the brassiere. Convinced that "tight construction and un-breathable material" might be "one of the underlying causes for breast cancer", she has patented her smart design and hopes to launch her brand soon. Since 2016, she has visited Amami two to three times a year attracted by the qualities and traditions of *Oshima tsumugi* cloth. She states "I want to create something gentle to the body using a natural product from the earth", thereby avoiding "transdermal toxicity" – the transferal of chemicals into the body through the surface of the skin. She is also mindful to "preserve the original tradition [of *tsumugi*] with an open mind towards new and innovative uses."

Hatsuko-san joins a growing number of designers and consumers globally with increased ethical awareness, who are concerned about the degradation of local ecosystems and the unprecedented threat of climate change. These concerns also take into account worker welfare in

Figure 1
Kazuhito Kanai, the Shachō (company president) of Kanai Kougei, dyeing *Oshima tsumugi* yarn in the *dorota* (mud-field).

producing regions, and the risks posed to human health through the production and consumption of synthetic chemical materials. As a result of this movement, a return to 'localism' is underway, with designers seeking out what they assume to be eco-friendlier production methods. Objects of traditional craft, often associated with 'slow' production, natural materials, sustainability and community, have risen in public consciousness and are thus undergoing a revival.

Aided by improvements in social networking and communications, small-scale local manufacturers are therefore able to find a niche within an inflated market. As a result of this emerging trade, traditionally made objects are finding their way into the homes of fashionable, and for the most part, economically mobile people. My research explores the impact that this revival of traditional commodities has at their sites of manufacture. I ask, can traditional local crafts realistically offer long term sustainability for the communities at the heart of their production, especially those industries with precarious economic histories?

The kusakizome revival

To answer this question, my study focuses on *kusakizome* – the Japanese word that describes dyeing with plant or tree materials and natural mordants (fixatives) – a textile practice historically carried out in homes, workshops, and factories worldwide. Previously, organic materials used for dyeing formed significant global commodity chains, that linked colonial empires and their citizens through environment, materials and markets. But the industry was largely replaced from 1856 onwards, when synthesized aniline dyes were discovered and developed by British chemist William Henry Perkins (Beer 1959). More economically efficient and stable than natural equivalents, synthetic dyes quickly spread across the world's rapidly industrializing economies. New shades of color were in demand by burgeoning consumer markets and synthetics were able to match the speed of the booming nineteenth century global textile industry. As a result of this seismic overhaul, many local and small-scale textile processes, including specialized

natural dyeing, have been overshadowed by large scale production and worldwide distribution.[2] Their markets have shrunk considerably over the course of 150 years, nevertheless, there remains in many societies globally, a continuation of textile craft traditions that are generations in the making.

In Japanese society, textiles practices are, to a large extent, still highly valued socially and politically because they are important visual cues for national identity. This has meant that a wealth of craft-scale weaving, dyeing, and surface decoration techniques have been sustained across generations. These range from the ubiquitous, everyday *tenugui* (hand towel), *noren* curtains that hang in doorways of street businesses, or luxury kimono worn for age-related ceremonies.[3] Their production uses natural dyes and fibers, or are used in combination with chemical or synthetic substances. As such, their techniques have evolved alongside introduced industrial materials and technologies, to establish products that blend tradition and modernity.

Yet since the Meiji Restoration (around 1868), traditional handmade objects have undergone significant economic difficulties. Locally produced crafts and their supporting material, technological and economic infrastructure have faced precarious futures, mirroring what has occurred in industrial nations globally.[4] These infrastructures have been subject to global political and economic forces beyond local control. In Japan, international trade, encroaching Westernization, the upheaval of the Second World War, and postwar economic fluctuations have heavily impacted industries such as *Oshima tsumugi*. Using this example, I examine how local communities have reacted, and how historical happenings still influence the industry today.

Although objects of craft are seemingly innocuous, they may bring to light a contentious history. The enduring place of craft objects and processes in social, cultural, economic and political life in Japan at both local and national levels, has stimulated much debate on how, as traditions, they are defined and the most appropriate way to sustain them. This is a debate that has been ongoing since Japan's industrialization, where conflicting opinions in regards to the future direction of traditional crafts have been voiced by various stakeholders. These include bureaucrats and politicians, influential cultural elites, the various craftspeople involved in production and the general public. The growth of interest in sustainable commodities, has in recent years renewed fire to these debates, highlighting a paradox between the need to innovate or the necessity to preserve. Should makers respond innovatively to market demands, bolstering industry in the short-term that might result in long-term sustainability? Or should traditions be deindustrialized to preserve their historic and cultural integrity, under the instruction of external policy-makers?

In order to study this paradox, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork on Amami Ōshima, a small but hugely biodiverse subtropical island in the Ryūkyū archipelago, situated between Kyūshū and Okinawa, southern Japan. From November 2017 to October 2018 I was based with the dyeing company Kanai Kougei, a workshop where master craftsmen dye *tsumugi* yarn. This traditional work that is dyed by *dorozome*, is combined with a contemporary apparel business, where younger craftspeople offer a variety of colors associated with local techniques and materials for the reinvigorated *kusakizome* market. Based on skills accomplished working for over ten years in the fashion and textile design industry, I worked as an unpaid dyeing assistant at Kanai Kougei using a method I call *participant apprenticeship*. I was able to learn the craft of *kusakizome* first hand, offering my own professional skills in exchange for the acquisition of insider knowledge. *Participant observation* is the classic ethnographic method used by anthropologists, concerned with observing the "imponderabilia of everyday life" (Malinowski 1922, 18), where over prolonged periods connections between seemingly "insignificant points" lead to insight (Tonkin 1984, 220). *Apprenticeship* meanwhile, sees one practically learning from experienced specialists, exploring how the senses can be used epistemologically for ethnographic research. My work follows the lead of Michael Coy (1989), Trevor Marchand (2010) and Stephanie Bunn (2011), anthropologists who have shown how apprenticeship provides insight into pedagogy, expertise and knowledge transmission, but also an unparalleled engagement with materials, process and environment yielding unique qualitative data. I became embedded in the work environment at Kanai Kougei building strong relationships with my work colleagues, the Kanai family, and their business and friendship groups. This allowed me to observe and engage with the daily running of the workshop recording visitors, materials and work-flow. I gained an understanding of the building infrastructure and grounds,

recording interaction between human, animal and plant species throughout the seasons.

Kanai Kougei join a growing number of workshops across Japan offering their own products from *tenugui* to tailored garments direct to customers. But *kusakizome* is also available as a technique for hire. As demonstrated earlier with Hatsuko-san's brassieres, designers and brands of fashion and homewares both in Japan and globally are commissioning the dyeing of textiles in geographic areas recognized for their local industries. These 'narrators' from outside of the community are referencing historically important materials and processes, and their strong links with local culture and nature that emanate from the site of production, thereby framing themselves as *preservers* of culture. Increasingly, brands are becoming more transparent in regards to manufacture, possibly in response to changing conditions within the market.[5] While this may quell the concerns of conscientious consumers, it simultaneously provides a good back story for those simply looking for uniqueness, or objects with 'meaning' in a busy market place.

Thus rather than being drawn to Amami to specifically carry out an ethnography of the *Oshima tsumugi* industry, I have instead explored the challenges faced by those looking to secure a more sustainable future for their local textile traditions. In this paper, I access how Amamian traditions are being redefined and reconfigured to suit contemporary lifestyles. I push back against the dominant narrative that suggests that in order to 'survive' traditional crafts, their techniques, craftsmen, and materials need to be preserved as heritage, in effect frozen in time. Instead, I argue that the external flow of ideas, materials, technologies and people can assist in the maintenance of traditions, even allowing them to thrive. My research shows that external flows have always been at the heart of traditional production in the locally specific context, where innovation works alongside diversification to not only continue craft practices but also to offer long-term economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Amami Ōshima and Oshima tsumugi

Amami Ōshima (hereafter Amami), is the largest of eight landmasses that form the Amami Islands, with an area of 712.35 km^2 and a population of around 63,500 people (Figure 2).[6] Being a stop on the historic trading routes between mainland Japan, the former Okinawan Ryūkyū kingdom and China, culturally it borrows from these dominant forces.[7] Yet as an island it developed its own social and cultural practices: examples include a music genre, *shima-uta*; a form of religious practice led by female priestesses known as *Noro* and *Yuta*; and regionally specific *matsuri* (festivals). Until the Post-World War II period, Amami was undeveloped by large-scale industry. But being subject to serfdom, the limited agricultural land has historically been used to produce rice and sugarcane for feudal overlords. During the Meiji era (1868–1912), the once vast prehistoric forest was cleared and replaced by agroforestry (Haring 1952, 5). What virgin forest remains joins mangrove forests and coral reefs that are home to rare and endemic species of flora and fauna. This prompted UNESCO to consider it an area of "Outstanding Universal Value" making it a "major focus" for conservation.[8] As a result, since 2003 Amami – together with Tokunoshima Island and northern Okinawa – has been registered as a tentative UNESCO World Natural Heritage site. In the context of my research, the ecological sensitivity of Amami is important, since local production of textiles continues to be entwined with the natural environment.

Due to its geographic isolation and difficult terrain, Amami developed its own regionally specific, highly sophisticated textiles, *Oshima tsumugi* (Figure 3). One of the islands most significant cultural (and exportable) artifacts, *tsumugi* has existed in some form for approximately 1300 years. A kimono silk whose yarn is dyed by *dorozome,* it is hand-woven into a complex series of patterns. These include for example, the *sotetsu* (cycad), a salient prehistoric species of Amami; the island's ubiquitous red hibiscus flowers; the skin of Amami's most poisonous snake the *habu*; abstracted coral; and simplified sea turtles.

Unique patterns also developed for many of the weaving areas. For instance, a depiction of a woven bamboo rice basket called a *seru* symbolizes the village of Akina in north Amami, one of the only regions still to be growing rice today. While the Tatsugo pattern featured in Figure 9, has been subject to hundreds of redesigns, the most recent said to have been influenced by a cloth from China.

The production of *tsumugi* has changed little since the postwar period. It follows approximately 28 unique processes including: designing, starching of the yarns (for ease of handle), reeling, warping, second starching, weaving of the *kasuri* pattern into a mat using the *shimebata*

Figure 2
The Ryūkyū islands.

loom, dyeing, unraveling the binding, third starching, preparation of the warp and weft yarns ready for weaving, threading the loom, weaving by hand, inspection (Tanaka et al. 2005, 186–191). Each of these processes can be further deconstructed making it both labor intensive and complex. Each *tanmono* (role of cloth for one kimono) passes through many hands, taking one year to complete from start to finish.

Today, *tsumugi* is threatened by shrinking demand, and the island's industry that once supported the livelihoods of more than 20,000 people at peak production in the 1970s,[9] today employs around 150. The industry hangs on by a thread as many procedures in a complex production process are carried out by aging craftspeople, without apprentices in waiting. Innovative approaches must be taken by those dependent on its production for economic means, or accept the fate of becoming a *Mukei Bunkazai* (Intangible Cultural Property). This governmental scheme, introduced by Japan in 1950, recognizes historic or culturally valuable arts and crafts prioritizing the skills held by individuals or groups rather than the objects that they produce. While this may raise the status of a craft process, providing financial and infrastructural support for craftspeople and protecting it for future generations, it often strips an industry of any real money making capacity.

"Making it for your country"

Since the onset of industrialization in the late Meiji Era, the production of regional folk crafts has been sustained by government support and funding (Aso 2014). Being that crafts are useful as vessels for tradition, Japan has protected a multitude of practices from pottery, to sword forging, to textiles, even if the numbers of practitioners are low. As a form of soft power, the success of Japan's preservation strategies have become world-renowned partly due to the Ministry of

Figure 3
Contemporary Tatsugo pattern featuring hibiscus, *sotetsu* leaves, and the pattern of *habu* skin.

Foreign Affairs "concentrating its efforts on international cooperation for Cultural Heritage as one of the pillars of its diplomatic policy."[10] Yet my research has shown that the Cultural Properties scheme has its problems, and the high opinion that it garners globally is not necessarily shared by ordinary Japanese craftspeople. This became apparent early on in my research, as the likelihood of *tsumugi* becoming a cultural heritage loomed large. Nagata-san, (aged 70) one of Kanai Kougei's oldest and most talented dyeing craftsmen explained:

We will be able to keep making *tsumugi*, but if it becomes an official cultural heritage the craftsman doing it will stop; we won't be able to make an industry from it – everything will stop. It will just become about "making it for your country".[11]

The situation in Amami is corroborated by the research of anthropologist Brian Moeran (1984, 1997), who's classic ethnography of Onta pottery (*ontayaki*) in Kyūshū revealed how *ontayaki* is constrained by its *Mingei* (folkcraft) categorization. Using ethnographic apprenticeship, becoming an accomplished potter himself, Moeran's participant potters revealed their frustrations with the freedom he had to craft unique designs. They claimed they were 'bound by tradition'– and could not divert from "traditional Koishiwara ware" because Japanese customers would say it wasn't "proper" and they wouldn't "sell a thing" (1997, 122). This research was updated when anthropologist Alyssa Paredes (2018) compared the community thirty years later. She studied how modernization – using advanced manufacturing technology – is still considered a threat to tradition. She outlines the 1971 discussion around the "Problem of Mechanization", where potters debated with local authorities to introduce machinery that would support commercial production. The potters were subject to the Mingei ideology that everyday objects must be affordable, but this did not account for inflation or rising business taxes (Paredes 2018, 140). The potter's requests were denied, as it was argued that machinery would damage the pot's handmade quality and be detrimental to social cohesion in this tight-knit community.

In 1995, *Ontayaki* become a *Mukei Bunkazai* meaning it is now subject to strict regulations in make, materials and design. Parades says:

The guidelines streamline the understanding of an unfixed culture into its most legible form.

Through the regulations, cultural life in Onta begins to make sense as a form of 'property' belonging less to the potters than to the state (Paredes 2018, 146).

As Nagata-san suggests, producing *Ontayaki* today is "making it for your country". These discussions have existed for decades affecting a multitude of traditional practices. In textiles, this is illustrated by the cultivation of Tokushima's *Awa* indigo, preserved in 1978 as an Intangible Cultural Asset (Ricketts 2006, 9). Roland Ricketts, an American artist who apprenticed with Tokushima's growers and dyers has stated that because craftsmen receive government funding, producers:

cannot deviate far from what is considered "traditional." This greatly limits the degree of mechanization in the farming and processing of indigo, raising the price of the dyestuff they produce and making it difficult to attract younger farmers to this extremely labor-intensive work (Ricketts 2006, 9).

In personal communication with Ricketts I learnt that it is the composting of indigo leaves– *sukumo* – that is protected as unique to Japan, whereas cultivation is open to technological advances i.e. the use of mechanized leaf-cutters, chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Yet, even if farmers were able to increase their yield, they'd struggle to compost large quantities as they wouldn't be able to utilize modern tools. Instead they rely on wooden variants as specified by the "Organization for the Preservation of *Awa* Indigo", who act on behalf of the Department of Culture.

Oshima tsumugi is already subject to a variety of rules to maintain its 'authenticity' as I will discuss below, but Kanai Kougei's Shachō (Kazuhito Kanai, 60) pointed at the current predicament of *tsumugi* as follows:

As a part of Japanese traditional culture, kimono culture will not disappear. However – I think [*tsumugi*] will cease being an industry, as it has been. Perhaps it will become a *Mukei Bunkazai* (Intangible Cultural Property). If that happens, because it's no longer an industry there will be a lot of new regulations around it. In that case, we won't be able to pursue profit from it as a business in the future (Shachō).

Making it yourself

Alongside his wife Eriko-san, the Shachō started Kanai Kougei in 1982, around the beginning of the downturn. The workshop is of particular interest because in the 1950s there were 60 *dorozome* workshops in Amami. Today, there are only 5 and only 2 of these including Kanai Kougei are prospering. Throughout the boom period, during the 1960s and 1970s, the Shachō learnt *dorozome* at one of several workshops in his village of Toguchi. Although he had talent, he moved to Osaka where Eriko-san trained in the knit industry and he started a concrete carpentry business in response to the real estate boom. After this business went bankrupt and Eriko-san became pregnant with Yukihito-san (now the vice-president of the workshop), he returned to Amami at the age of 23 to start Kanai Kougei. He constructed the workshop on family land, while Eriko-san secured a million yen (about 7000GBP) from an Amamian business association supported by the State to furnish it with equipment. From here they built the workshop's reputation to employ 8 full-time dyers.

Without the constraints of family obligation – being a first generation craftsman – the Shachō has always been a future thinker. Although Kanai Kougei has experienced ups and downs that parallel the wider industry, early on he sought out alternative streams of income. He attributes the workshop's on-going success to their ability to innovate:

… apart from me most of the others had never physically left Amami Oshima. Back when everyone was making good profits, I travelled around all over most of Japan – and it was then I realized that we needed to do public workshops, and so on. But the vast majority of the others were just doing their main *Oshima tsumugi* work, never leaving their workshops. I guess in the past maybe that was the *shokunin* (craftsman) mentality … I don't know …

Opening the business at the start of the downturn, the Shachō was careful not to rely on the success that the *tsumugi* business had experienced since the 1950s. He made efforts to network, improving local and national connections, cementing his reputation. He also recognized that *dorozome* might have a life beyond *tsumugi*, seeing how craft processes were being commercialized across Japan, blurring the boundaries of production and consumption. Since *tsumugi* was still profitable, this angered his contemporaries, who saw such deviations as "an interruption to

[their] work". At Kanai Kougei, this was through *dorozome* and *aizome* workshops offered to tourists and locals, who could (and still) pay only 3000JPY (about 21GBP) to 'make it themselves', for as little as an hour to a whole day, working alongside the professional craftsman. While some want to participate in their cultural history to better understand unfamiliar craft techniques, others are simply looking for activities to occupy free time, much needed on an island where the beach is the main draw.

Consequently, the Shachō diversified, welcoming the flow of ideas, materials, technologies and people from outside of Amami, even in the face of significant criticism from the *tsumugi* community who were reluctant to change. Being concerned that the extraction of the *dorozome* process would undermine *tsumugi*'s complex manufacture, Amami's *tsumugi* community have instead made efforts to diversify their product range (with neck-ties, wallets, handbags etc.) and reach new markets (in the US for example). But these attempts – which have been carried out since the 1980s by producers, the *tsumugi* union, and the local prefectural authorities that recognize *tsumugi*'s cultural and economic value – have by and large been unsuccessful.

"Orders by colors"

Kanai Kougei struggled through the 1990s as the burst of Japan's financial bubble saw kimono sales plummet, as dispensable income dried up. The Kanai's encouraged their children to seek employment elsewhere. Alongside Yukihito-san, the eldest child who left for Tokyo in his 20s to become a sound engineer in the music industry, the Shachō and Eriko-san's three daughters also followed alternative careers. Ai-san is a fashion stylist in Tokyo, Yuka-san is an employee of the Yakult Corporation in Amami, and Maiko-san became a hairdresser before returning to assist her mother at Kanai Kougei in the mid-2000s, when the public workshops for tourists really took off.

By now employing just three full-time *tsumugi* dyers, in 2004 Yukihito-san returned to Amami from Tokyo. He was concerned by the precariousness of work in the music industry, but he also missed Amami. Not being trained in *tsumugi* dyeing, nor encouraged to learn by his family (his father believes he lacks the temperament![12]), Yukihito-san recognized there was a demand for apparel-related work and created a job for himself:

> Until I returned to Amami, the Shachō dealt with apparel just a little — he was turning down most of the jobs. Why? Because [artisans] cannot be bothered to deal with people from outside. It was then when I noticed that there was no one here who is capable of handling communication … I thought it would turn into work if I returned with colors, because apparel takes orders by colors.

Although the Shachō had been developing business networks beyond Amami, he was not always able to follow through with 'special' orders. As social media and email have become the dominant forms of communication between client and manufacturer, Yukihito-san stepped in. It was also around this time that environmental awareness and sustainability begun to creep into fashion discourse (see Fletcher 1998; Fletcher and Goggin 2001). Natural dyeing, on first impressions, seems more environmentally friendly, and fashion brands in Tokyo had begun to pursue alternative methods of coloring textiles. Yukihito-san had been experimenting with *kusakizome* to develop a color palette, dyeing with plant, tree and mineral materials, teaching himself using the skills he had absorbed from a lifetime around the workshop. *Dorozome* was the base using wood from local *Sharinbai* trees (creating black, brown and pink). He supplemented these with other local or bought in materials: Amamian *fukugi* or Common Garcinia (yellow); Indian indigo and German chemical indigo (blue); *akane* or Indian madder root (red). By over-dyeing and using a variety of mordants more colors can be achieved. Without any promotion, only through word-of-mouth of his city contacts, the business grew. This, Yukihito-san claims, is reflective of the horizontal (heterarchical) relationships that exist in the design industry (i.e. "I saw the dyeing work a friend of mine had done at yours. Could you do mine as well?") rather than the strictly vertical (hierarchical) nature of the *tsumugi* industry.

As a result of this policy of inclusiveness, Kanai Kougei dyes individual garments sent by non-design professionals, but also cloth and yarn for Japanese design giants Issey Miyake and Yoji Yamamoto. This democratizing of process, giving access to anyone who wants something dyed (or indeed to dye it themselves) is particularly interesting since little profit can be gathered through this approach to manufacturing – that is why factories typically have 'minimum orders'. But taking this approach, small profits *can* be made, and an heterarchical attitude might

foster further social, economic or marketing opportunities. As such, a symbiotic relationship has formed between Kanai Kougei's *tsumugi* dyeing and its apparel work, with income from the latter supporting the dyeing of 70% of all Amami's *tsumugi* yarns annually (Figures 4 and 5).

Since Kanai Kougei has developed strong relationships with the kimono cloth makers, at present, the volume of orders for *tsumugi* yarn is high and consistent, based on a perfect production technique. Payment is made on delivery of goods, usually face-to-face, meaning there is always cash flow to keep the company functioning. In contrast, apparel has a higher unit price meaning more profit can be pursued. But invoices are typically paid 2–3 months later, with some companies defaulting on payment, protected by the safety of distance and the difficulty of pursuing legal action. Apparel is also more changeable between seasons, and production is more challenging since the base textiles being dyed are more varied and inconsistent, which leads to greater mistakes. While this current model seems to work, it is a delicate, precarious balance.

Before developing my argument further to show how innovation and diversification can sustain tradition, it is essential to understand how the revitalized *kusakizome* business has been able to succeed. Due focus must therefore be given to *Oshima tsumugi* to provide a detailed overview of what *tsumugi* is, and to demonstrate its significance within the community from an historical perspective. As such, the reconfiguration of *kusakizome* into a contemporary production method relies on the authenticity, institutions and social networks surrounding the *tsumugi* industry. This is what anthropologist Lucy Norris calls 'embedded infrastructure', being the internal and external relational connections between technology, people and materials that exist in "traditional textile towns" (2019, 7). The heritage of *Oshima tsumugi* is the foundation on which the workshop's reputation is built, and the marketing of the technique draws upon. By taking a wider view that encompasses larger political movements, advances in technology, and the movement of materials and people across time, one can begin to understand the local situation as it exists today. This frames how *tsumugi* is valued locally, and how it is viewed from afar, but also how it has been possible to extract the dyeing process from the cloth's complex manufacture, to establish new economic and social value that is severed from form, yet still geographically grounded.

The tumultuous history of Oshima tsumugi

After the Meiji Restoration (around 1868) when sumptuary laws were abolished, *Oshima tsumugi* silk cloth was no longer the preserve of aristocracy.[13] Quickly commercialized and made available to those with wealth, new fashionable patterns were developed to meet growing consumer markets (Milhaupt 2014, 94). From 1877 (Milhaupt 2014), *tsumugi* was prized throughout Japan's major cities. With most female residents owning home looms (Haring 1952, 42), production spread beyond the historic weaving centers in north Amami (Yuge 2005, 126). Concurrently, around the turn of the century Amami's main export crop of black sugar (*kokutō*) was devalued by imported sugar. At a time when textiles were driving Japan's industrial revolution both financially and technologically (Clark 1979, 38), labor shifted to the textile industry.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the Japanese began to import chemical dyes from Europe to meet the demands of mass production. Dye techniques, however, were maintained locally, since the Japanese had developed their own sophisticated methods over many centuries, being "proud of both the quality and variety" (Yamanobe and Fuji 1996, 7). The impact of imported chemical dyes soon reached Amami. Masami Yuge reports that a letter published in the *Miyazaki Shinbun* (in Kyūshū) from 1900, claimed that "'artificially dyed' *Oshima Tsumugi* should be better regulated because it would encourage over production of an inferior quality textile" (2005, 126). This suggests early on that the 'historic' and 'natural' method of dyeing was being linked with quality, differentiating it from machine-era products produced in the rest of Japan. It would be fascinating to know who had sent this letter; I raise this question because the Kagoshima Prefecture Oshima Tsumugi Cooperative was established in 1901 to maintain quality and promote sales of this burgeoning textile commodity (Tanaka et al. 2005, 192). By 1929, Amami had established its own independent branch (referred here on as the *tsumugi* union) charged with overseeing production, and developing new techniques and products, drawing on local material and labor resources to protect the 'authenticity' of the product.

The expansion and development of *tsumugi* saw a resist dyeing technique called *kasuri* that has a characteristic brushed appearance borrowed from nearby Kyūshū, where producers of *Kurume gasuri* had developed a cotton cloth of national repute

Figures 4
From back left: Koji-ani and Nagata-san drying *tsumugi* yarn; workshop participant in yellow overall; Satoko-san dyeing tenugui; Kazu-san dyeing *tsumugi* yarn.

Figures 5
Close up of Satoko-san and Kazu-san using the *dorozome* technique.

Figure 6
Kurume gasuri design showing yarn bindings.

(Milhaupt 2014, 94). *Kasuri* is more commonly known as an *ikat* weave outside of Japan, and is found throughout Asia. It is constructed via a complex process of space dyeing across the length of the yarns of the warp and/or weft, the pattern securely tied off to resist the dye using a coated cotton (Figure 6). This leads an offset, blurred image to reemerge during the course of weaving, as the space-resist areas are re-aligned (Figure 7).

Design historians Yamanobe and Fuji suggest that the introduction of graph paper into Japanese weaving communities meant more pictorial designs could be developed and shared between weavers, leading to more standardized patterns (1996, 95). This was a method learnt when a number of Kyoto weavers were sent to Lyon, France, in 1872, to study the Jacquard technique, acquiring looms and equipment (Yamanobe and Fuji 1996, 4).

The invention of the Amamian *shimebata* loom (Figure 8) in 1907 also sped up production to meet rising demand (Tanaka et al. 2005, 183). Replacing the labor intensive hand-binding of *kasuri*, the *shimebata* loom instead weaves the bound areas into a '*tsumugi* mat'. The complexity of the cloth's pattern is woven into an abstract grid system that increases the scope for more detailed designs. This allowed *Oshima tsumugi* to compete with similar *tsumugi*'s being machine woven and sold in Tokyo, who imitated the small abstract patterns that had won *tsumugi* its reputation. Like the use of foreign chemical dyestuffs into existing Japanese processes, the introduction of technology from near and far lead to innovative approaches that advanced the craft; meeting both market demand in quality, quantity and esthetics.

Since the Meiji era, textile patterning across Japan was becoming increasingly ostentatious, as detail on kimono moved from the legs, up the body, to across the neck and shoulders – a trend that was thought to coincide with more people sitting at western-style tables (Yamanobe and Fuji 1996, 12). Distinguishing itself with the originality that the *shimebata* loom afforded, Amami responded with patterns reflecting its wildlife and cultural identity.

During World War II, "lavish textile production" was halted when the government issued a sumptuary law on July 7, 1940 ("The Prohibition Law of Seven/Seven"), to halt the production of luxury items and prioritize munitions manufacture (Yamanobe and Fuji 1996, 4). Amami was spared as it was argued that *tsumugi* was the islanders' "life line" and disrupting production would be detrimental to the maintenance of intangible local knowledge (Tanaka et al. 2005, 101). The anthropologist Marilyn Ivy (1995) has described the way that traditional practices and commodities in Japan have been preserved as emblems of cultural continuity. She suggests that a "double movement whereby that which was marginalized by the advent of nationalist modernity in the Meiji Period (1868-1912) – peasant

Figure 7
A *Kurume gasuri* weaver re-aligns the weft yarns as she weaves.

practices, superstitions, the folkloric – was in the same movement objectified as most essentially traditional" (Tanaka et al. 2005, 25). Preserving 'unique' craft knowledge was aligned with the government's approach to culture that, in the build-up to the Second World War, supported an increasingly nationalist agenda, shaping a Japanese identity through commodities to counter the encroachment of Westernization (Brandt 2007). As a consequence, items such as kimono and the skills they encompass, were mobilized as tools for "nation-building" and emblems of Japaneseness (Milhaupt 2014, 195).

Since mechanization took hold during the industrial revolution, nations globally have lamented the decline of their 'traditional' customs and commodities thought to be indicative of regional and national identities. Kim Brandt, who has written extensively on the emergence of the Japanese *Mingei* (folkcraft) movement (1926–1945) states that while there had always been a preoccupation with "indigenous histories … rural customs, lore and material culture" by the Japanese and Chinese literati, it was the intellectuals during the inter-war period associated with *Mingei* that joined "an anti-modernist reaction against urban industrialization" (2007, 1). It could be argued that the maintenance of a traditional textile with a biography as ancient as *tsumugi*'s, and the intangible knowledge of its artisans based within a narrow geographic area, gave it its exceptional status during the war for fear that "national-cultural identity, continuity, and community" (Ivy 1995, 26) would be lost.

Tsumugi production therefore continued but output was severely restricted, leaving the industry in a precarious position. This decline was documented between 1951–52 by American anthropologist Douglas G. Haring, who was commissioned by the occupying US army to produce an ethnographic report on Amami. Across 6 months he collected data on lifestyle, customs, industry, health and so on. This he used to ascertain sentiments towards the mainland, gage the extent of communist infiltration, and ask how the US authorities might support local social and economic development, suggesting a timescale for withdrawal. Given the

Figure 8
A weaver on the *shimebata* loom, creating the *tsumugi* mat ready for dyeing.

economic postwar destruction of Japan and the dire consequences for the nations material wealth, Haring reports that at this time the *tsumugi* industry was flagging. Ironically, his words mirror the situation that is being experienced today:

> … exports of *tsumugi* are falling off because of failure to adapt to changes in Japanese taste, and new ideas in design, perhaps new weaving techniques might revive, and expand the industry. There is a strong probability that numerous Amami handicraft products might compete in the export market, if skilled industrial designers were to concentrate upon improved quality and aesthetic appeal (1952, 39).

Yet after the war and in line with Japan's 'miraculous' economic recovery, the industry regained its pre-war output. The allied forces saw the potential of the industry for economic development, supplying US grants for investment, support that was continued upon revision in 1953 by the Japanese government who promoted the advancement of technology (Haring 1952, 38). This allowed the *tsumugi* union to introduce more chemical (aniline) colors to contrast with *dorozome*, appeasing changing consumer tastes on the mainland (Tanaka et al. 2005, 103). In addition, the *tsumugi* industry in Kagoshima (begun by Amamian migrants) recovered more quickly. As such, competition within the market improved the quality of the cloth in both producing regions, prompting more willingness to break from traditional forms and patterns (Tanaka et al. 2005, 183).

The nostalgia boom

The complexity of *tsumugi*'s construction accounts for the high cost that *tsumugi* has always commanded, from a minimum of USD60 during Douglas Haring's time in Amami (1952, 42), to today's prices in Tokyo of approximately USD3000–6000.[14] Despite its high cost a production peak of 290,000 *tans* (roles) a year was reached in 1972 (Tanaka et al. 2005, 103). This peak coincided with Amami's tourism boom, as the Amami Islands were the southernmost Japanese territory with desirable sun-and-sea pull, prior to Okinawa's 1972 reversion from the US to Japan

(Song and Kuwahara 2016). The people of Amami speak wistfully of this period, telling stories of hordes of tourists arriving by ferry to buy multiple *tsumugi tanmonos*, and creating local revenue by drinking in the *izakayas* (restaurant bars). Tanaka et al. suggest *tsumugi*'s popularity came about because postwar, the public had "a strong nostalgia for the good old days again", handwoven *kasuri* patterns were suitably "retro" thus *tsumugi* sales rocketed (2005, 184).

This nostalgia for the past and its consequent monetization has been documented by the aforementioned Marilyn Ivy but also Jennifer Robertson (1991), through the phenomenon of Japan's *furusato* movement. Translating as "old village" but in English being "closer to 'home' or 'native-place'" (Robertson 1991, 13), *furosatos* are ideal villages set within traditional rural landscapes. Tapping nostalgia for one's own "native-place", Robertson explains how *furusatos* became tourist destinations. Being symbols of "motherly love", they sought to pacify societal anxiety caused by rural depopulation, environmental destruction and urban development that occurred in the postwar period (Robertson 1991, 20–28). Concurrently, rising out of the 1970s "oil shocks" which destabilized the economy when global petrol prices rocketed, Robertson claims the Japanese were reminded of their dependence on raw materials, which prompted "a revaluation of 'tradition'" (Robertson 1991, 28–29). As such, there was a desire to attain self-sufficiency based on the "harmonious tranquility" that existed in the "old villages" before "the onset of westernization, industrialization, and urbanization" (Robertson 1991).

Robertson's argument is supported by Ivy, who describes the surge of interest in the folkloric in the postwar period. She suggests that 'a nostalgia for a Japan that is kept on the verge of vanishing, stable yet endangered (and thus open for commodifiable desire)' (1995, 65) meant a market for "vintage japan" was maximized in the advanced capitalist context of a country with sudden disposable income.

The renewed popularity of traditional local commodities could be said to coincide with the place-based tourism movement. Ivy's "vintage Japan", sold through various internal and international tourism campaigns from promoting Japan Railways in 1936 to the "Cool Japan" of the 2000s, have usually been accompanied by the 'cultural icons' of women in kimono (Figure 9) (Milhaupt 2014, 239).[15] *Oshima tsumugi* was the quintessential Amamian commodity from a small, remote island with many 'intact' cultural traditions. The combination of its ancient past, superior handmade quality, and color palette of browns, blacks and beiges matched the esthetics of the Showa era (1926–1989) (Figure 10).

The social and economic reality of the postwar period that drove the kimono industry was explained by one of my participants, Koki-san, 33. He first came to Amami when working for a Tokyo-based design firm, specializing in the development of traditionally crafted products and interiors. Born and raised in Tokyo to an affluent family, he studied fashion design at university in London. He moved to Amami in 2017 disenchanted by commercial design in Tokyo, wanting to use his hands again. He has been learning *Oshima tsumugi* techniques for a year and half:

During the 60s to 80s when it was booming … the reason why the kimono was selling a lot was because my grandparents generation … they could never afford to buy anything luxury before … they went through the war, then after the war luxury was not in their dictionary, it was about putting rice on the table … But around the 1970s to 80s those people who always wanted to wear silk and kimono, they could finally afford to buy those things because the country became rich, [but if] that generation becomes older then that means the industry also sinks.

Kimono scholar Terry Satsuki Milhaupt (2014) explains that during the war and throughout the US occupation, kimono were bartered for food and basic material goods, since Western-style clothing became increasingly domesticated. She suggests this was a time of "revolutionary change in the symbolic and material value of the kimono [marking] the moment when its meaning was transformed from an everyday garment into a largely ceremonial costume" (Milhaupt 2014, 190). Milhaupt goes so far as to suggest that its negative connotation with luxury during the war, "inadvertently laid a path for the garments resurrection as the country's national form of dress" (Milhaupt 2014, 239). As Koki-san described, when fortunes changed many families spared no expense in acquiring luxuries, meaning the purchase of formal kimono for ceremonial occasions became a marker of the rising wealth of the country.

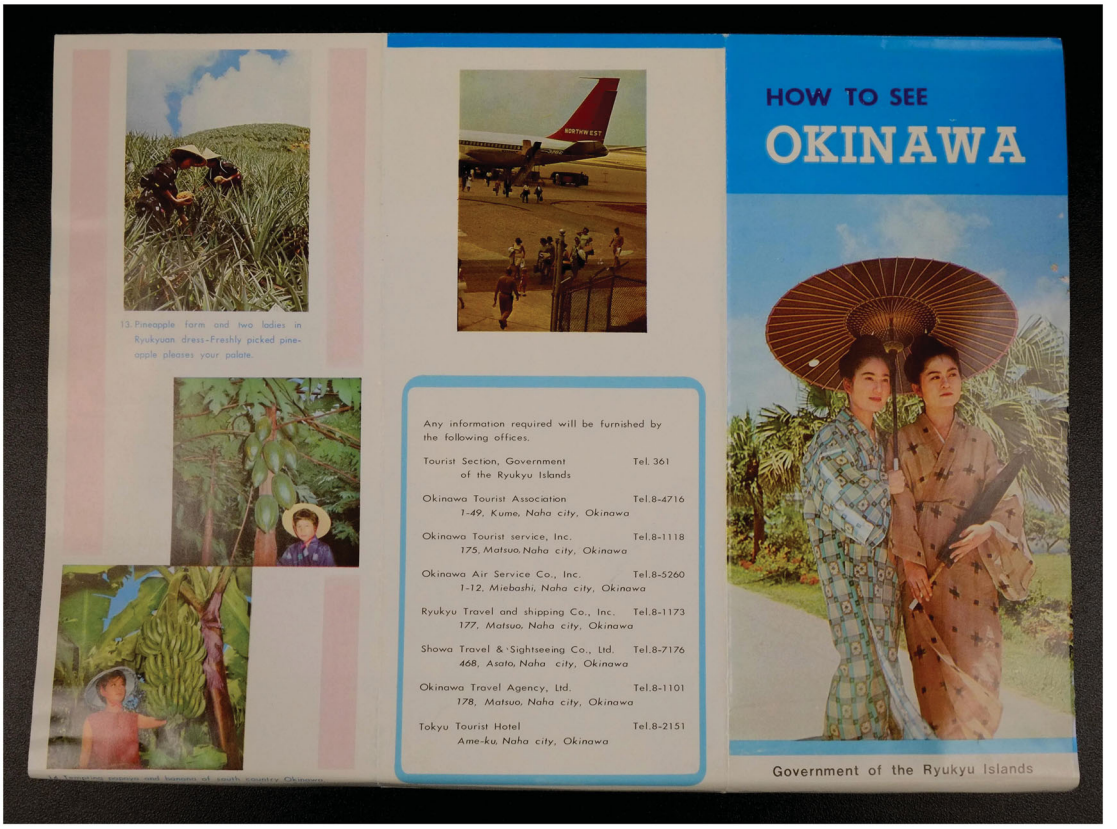

Figure 9
A promotional leaflet from Okinawa c.1960, aimed at American tourists.

Oshima tsumugi was one of Japan's most luxurious textiles, its reputation was such that '*Oshima*' developed into a generic name for the cloth. In the 1960s, it was in such demand that Korean factories began copying and selling '*Oshima tsumugi*' cheaply to the Japanese market, using industrial production and cheap labor (Tanaka et al. 2005, 193). This meant that a substandard, machine-made quality threatened to flood the market, damaging the reputation of Amami's output. Even today, there are whispers under the breath about individuals who sold Korean cloth during the boom period, trying to pass it off as the *honmono* (real thing). They were subsequently discovered and punished by gossip that still lives on 50 years later. As a result, *tsumugi* was designated a *Dentou Kougei* (traditional craftwork) by the government in 1974 (Tanaka et al. 2005, 185), renamed "*authentic Oshima Tsumugi*" and given an official seal distinguishing it from "Oshima's" produced elsewhere (Tanaka et al. 2005, 73). This seal is only applied when a cloth has undergone inspection at Amami's *tsumugi* union (Figure 11), by an inspector who is satisfied with its quality but also the authenticity of its make.[16]

During its peak *tsumugi* developed into a highly lucrative industry, bringing wealth to many ordinary islanders. A good weaver for example could earn around JPY400,000–500,000 per month (around GBP2800–3500), send their children to university, making more money than their husband. Eriko Kanai, is the key administrator at Kanai Kougei and wife of the Shachō. Both her grandmother and mother were skilled *tsumugi* weavers, and she has gained a reputation for her proficiency in dressing others in *tsumugi* kimono:

There used to be a saying "three daughters can bring a fortune" in the Showa 30s [1955–1965] Because it is an isolated island,

Figure 10
A kimono from the 1950s.

Figure 11
A *tsumugi tanmono* is approved and stamped at the *tsumugi* union.

Figure 12
Eriko Kanai wearing *Oshima tsumugi* at her friend's wedding in the 1970s. Photo: Eriko Kanai.

people used to send a male child to the mainland for him to study properly. Female children who stayed on the island weaved and earned a lot of money to fund the education of the male child. That's why there's a lot of hairdressers and delicatessens in the town of Naze. "You don't have to cook, just weave!" they were told … As for the hairdressers, the weavers treated themselves and went out to have fun once they finally finished weaving a *tanmono* and received the money (Eriko-san, 58).

It appears that weaving *tsumugi* was mostly, but not exclusively, the reserve of women, simply because of traditional divisions of labor. With most homes owning a loom weaving could be done around child-rearing and housework, while the heavy duty jobs – for example dyeing or *shima-bata* weaving– were left to men. The importance of women's labor to the *tsumugi* industry reflects the wider position of women in Amamian society. Since Amamian female priestesses (the *Noro* and *Yuta*) had authority over aspects of both spiritual life and governance for centuries, women have held relatively equal social standing to men and continue to do so today (see Haring 1952). While being careful not to overgeneralize, being the main earners in the household did not seem to cause any substantial rifts in family life. As Eriko-san says: "The Shachō acts as if he is powerful, but at the end of the day, he is in the hands of women!"

It is important to note that *tsumugi* was rarely worn by ordinary islanders prior to the boom period; *tsumugi* was for earning money, not for wearing. Nevertheless, regional nostalgia did eventually reach Amami, coinciding with the islanders increased financial mobility, meaning they too were able to afford the products of their labor (Figure 12).

Finding new purpose in tsumugi's techniques

The burst of Japan's financial bubble in the 1990s, alongside changes in fashion as Western clothing dominated, has seen loss of interest in wearing and buying kimono, meaning the *tsumugi* industry has declined year-on-year since the 1970s. Mirroring Douglas Haring's comments from the 1950s: "of failure to adapt to changes in Japanese taste, and new ideas in design", *Oshima tsumugi* has also gained a reputation for its dated Showa era esthetic. In second hand kimono shops on the mainland, *tsumugi* kimonos are found piled high in corners. Kimono that cost a small fortune when new, now sell for about JPY10,000 (GBP70). Koki-san's judgement on *tsumugi* illustrates an opinion shared by many people I spoke with in Japan, and also those learning its techniques:

I find that if *Oshima tsumugi* was representing my generation, I think I would participate in that but [the previous generation of makers] were doing it for the money right? And they were selling it to older generations, and that's their taste, and I don't really find that's like my [pause] I don't find that so exciting and that's the only reason that I wouldn't want to do it … I want to make something that excites me, but what excites me about *Oshima tsumugi* right now is just their techniques.

Given the substantial economic impact that the *tsumugi* industry had during the twentieth century in Amami, and its success in bringing notoriety to the unique culture and history of the island, it is little wonder that today such a feeling of loss is felt for the way things were. But the desire to change fortunes is most keenly promoted by those families that were once so prosperous; this is mainly the *orimoto-sans* (weaving companies).[17] These are the manufacturers of *tsumugi*, those responsible for organizing and preparing for each stage of production, and then selling *tanmonos* to mainland dealers. One *orimoto-san* told me that during the peak, they produced around 800 *tanmono* a year, employing 100 weavers working exclusively for them. Today the same *orimoto-san* produce only 100 *tanmono* a year, they employ just 14 weavers and almost all of these are ladies over 70 years old. Beyond weaving and dyeing there are many specialized procedures in between. For example, there are only 5 men working on the *shimebata* loom who are also all over 70, with no Amamian apprentices in waiting. The *orimoto-san* predicts that within 5 years they will have to close their business due to the decrease in orders, but more significantly a lack of skilled craftspeople.

As a consequence, there is a general resolve among craftspeople that the prospects for recovery are not good. This is evident in the fact that many craftspeople have not maintained the family line in knowledge transmission, being aware that the craft is not financially resourceful and subject to precarious fluctuations as described throughout this paper. Instead, many craft-working families looked to secure better futures for their off-springs through higher education, or by advising their children to seek alternative employment. As mentioned previously, this was the case at Kanai Kougei, where the Shachō and Eriko-san discouraged their own children from pursuing a *tsumugi* career. In this regard, the textile has been a victim of its own success. As Eriko-san explains:

Most places are planning to close when the artisans disappear. Quite a number of them have already shut down their businesses. That's why the jobs these factories used to handle comes to us. We are getting busier the past couple of years. Factories cannot avoid but to close down when they have no successor, and the artisans are too old to handle the amount of dyeing work.

"A sense of shared existence"

Before I continue to discuss the flow of people who I propose are revitalizing the practice of *kusakizome* and bringing new purpose to *dorozome*, I will reflect on the argument as I have presented it thus far. I have traced the recent history of the *tsumugi* industry, and have done so to highlight that traditions are subject to influences outside of their geographic boundary that lead to innovations that sustain local industry. I have demonstrated how new ideas, technology and materials have been integrated into existing Japanese textile practices since at least the Meiji era, throughout Japan but also with Amami *Oshima tsumugi*. These developments have not diluted how textiles are used and valued by the local community but have instead strengthened their economic potential. This innovation can be seen industry wide, but also at the individual level, through the future thinking practices of community pioneers such as the Kanai family, making their factory the last dyeing stronghold. This thesis, that

"living tradition[s]" are able to "traverse history" (Sahlins 1999, 408–409), is in line with the opinion of anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, who has argued against a preservation of tradition that favors historicity.

Sahlins launched his polemic as a result of a debate that took hold throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when scholars in the social sciences looked to 'debunk' traditions that claimed unchanged heritage. These scholars argued that many traditions are invented, done so with nationalist sentiments or money making ambitions.[18] Sahlins instead considered what traditions meant to those who lived them, believing their "invention" an "inventive" combination of disparate properties rather than bounded inauthentic "cultural things" (Sahlins 1999, 407). The "inventiveness" of tradition he hypothesized, was often constructed from manifestations of older practices, evolving alongside social, economic and environmental change, beyond the control of their makers. If one wanted to 'debunk' *Oshima tsumugi*, a cloth that claims a heritage of 1300 years, it could be done so easily. The way it looks and feels has changed considerably since it was commercialized after the Meiji Restoration. This is the result of technological advances, new trade in materials, and global fashions. However, Sahlins proposes that traditions are the way people 'indigenize modernity' (1999, 410), making them socially valuable. He calls these "visible signs of an invisible constituting presence. And, as sacred, they give a people commitment as well as definition … a sense of shared existence as well as determinate boundaries?" (1999, 413)

This "sense of shared existence" is perhaps what has drawn a new generation of dyer to Kanai Kougei. Although Yukihito-san returned to Amami and gave the business a contemporary partner, it is interesting that he did so against the advice of his family. The main issues that faces the *tsumugi* industry today are the low wages and labor conditions faced by the craftspeople. Since they are considered 'freelance' they lack the security of regular income, the benefits of lifetime employment, or sickness and holiday pay.[19] Moreover, their freelance status means that is has been difficult to organize government support since skill and hours across each process is so diverse.[20] In addition, the work is physically demanding, repetitive, and requires good health, whether this is strength and stamina for dyeing, or good eyesight and dexterous hands for weaving. It also takes a significant investment of time and money to train, and when wages (or government stipends) are low, it is difficult for apprentices to sustain themselves for a minimum of 5 years required to master a foundation. As a result, many quit before training is complete. Nevertheless, weaving still remains the most desirable *tsumugi* technique to learn, as Eriko-san explained:

> That's why Japan and Kagoshima-ken [prefecture] want to create a training school for the residents of the island to be able to acquire the weaving skills. But the keen people who come to learn are typically from the mainland – art school graduates who love textile work.

In certain respects, this reflects the situation as it exists with the dyers at Kanai Kougei. It is difficult to attract young local employees when they can earn better wages for less physically demanding work at somewhere like Family Mart; the ubiquitous convenience chain that has branches throughout the island and across Japan. However, Kanai Kougei is exemplary being that it is both a family business but also one that readily employs members of staff from outside of the local community. This is quite unusual in traditional crafting businesses that have historically been structured around the *iemoto* or household system – evidenced by the ease by which I gained access as an anthropologist, with no formal introduction.

Now almost 30 years old, Dorinne Kondo's ethnography *Crafting Selves* (1990) can still be drawn upon to consider the circumstances in Amami in regards to *iemoto*. A book in which she explored gender relations based in a Tokyo sweet shop, Kondo argued in favor of the continued existence of the *iemoto* in Japan, despite it being dismantled during the postwar constitution. Kondo explains that while the word *ie* can designate both a physical house, or the household line (1990, 122), in the Japanese context "*ie* are best understood as *corporate groups* that hold property (for example, land, a reputation, an art, or 'cultural capital') in perpetuity" (1990). She argued that far from being "defunct", the concept of "company as family" continues to operate either literally or symbolically (1990, 121).

Although I was told that Amami has historically followed a *shima* (island) system, where the islanders worked together to represent a large household – a mentality that still remains today – it could be argued that on a smaller scale the *ie* system has been absorbed from mainland Japan.[21] Kondo says that the "core"

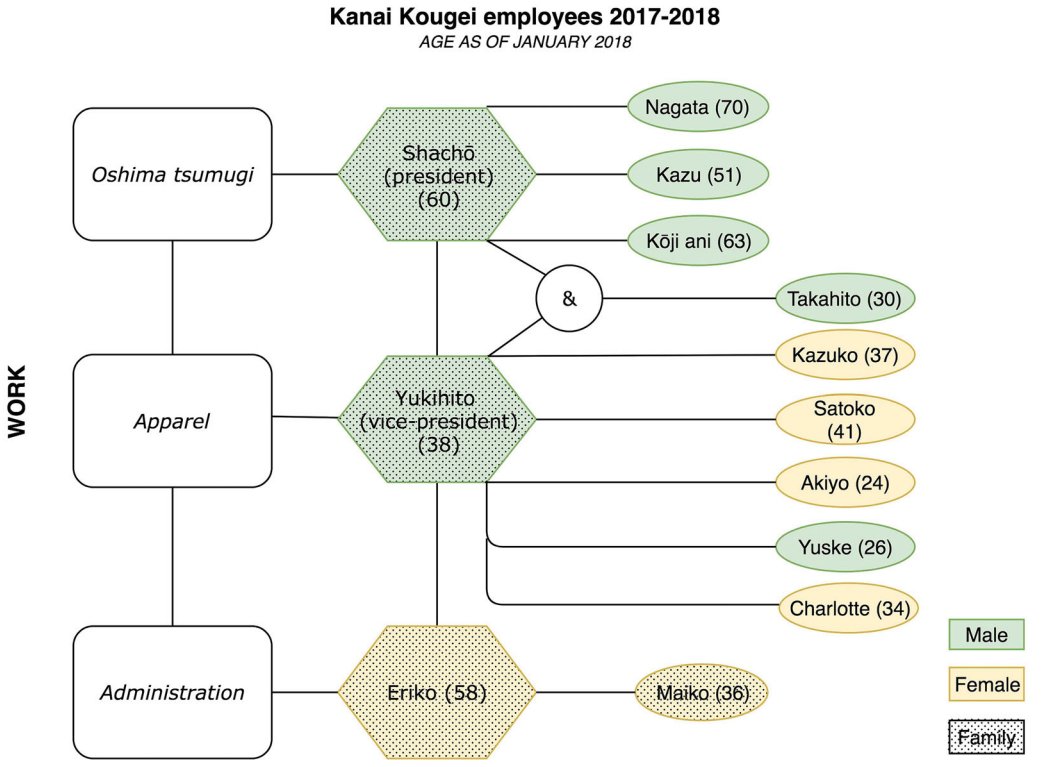

Figure 13
Kanai Kougei's employees during the time of my fieldwork.

of the group may consist of kin. A mother and father who are responsible for the continued success of the business who will pass it on to their successor, which historically has been the eldest son or an adopted 'son' gained through marriage or law (Kondo 1990). Kondo gives several examples from her fieldwork of businesses closing when a successor cannot be found, as Eriko-san demonstrated too when accounting for the number of dyeing businesses shutting shop. Although Yukihito-san did eventually return to the family business, the Shachō's continued acceptance of outsiders across his tenure has seen Kanai Kougei gain access to social and business networks outside of Amami. This stands in contrast to many of the other *tsumugi* businesses. As the Shachō described:

I think, *kuru mono kobamazu* ('accept one who comes to you') … So I accept anyone who comes, and *saru mono owazu* ('don't chase one who leaves'). So I'm connected to many different people – including Kazuko-chan or Akiyo-chan [two Kanai Kougei dyers, from Tokyo and south Amami respectively] – and that sort of thing expands and continues, right?[22]

In effect, the Kanai family have extended their *ie* by picking up craftsmen as other dyeing houses closed, and attracting new employees who are similar to Yukihito-san who were keen to learn the craft. Kondo says that entry into the *ie* "means belonging to an institution that links one to the past and projects one into the future" (1990, 122–123). Kanai Kougei sits very much at this meeting point as the Shachō takes cares of *tsumugi* while Yukihito-san leads apparel. They employ three full-time and one part-time *tsumugi* dyer, all Amamian men over the age of 50. In addition, it has three men and three women aged between 24 and 41 working on apparel (Figure 13), while Eriko-san and Maiko-san oversee public workshops and administration.

What is significant about this is that the new generation apparel dyers

are all U-turn migrants (those who have 'U-turned' back to the countryside like Yukihito-san) or I-turn migrants (meaning *Inaka*-turn, the Japanese word for countryside). These are typically those who have rejected more prosperous urban living hoping for a more fulfilled existence in the countryside. This urban to rural migration is happening globally, but in the Japanese context anthropologist Susanne Klien (2016) suggests it has been prompted by negative economic growth, 20 years of deflation and the triple disaster caused by 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. This was confirmed by Koki-san, who moved to Amami when he had a secure job in Tokyo. He explains a fundamental shift:

One thing that was really huge for me was when the earthquake and the nuclear disaster happened, that kind of changed my way of thinking completely. That really destroyed everything, all those superficial things, they disappeared really easily. And then [I thought] maybe I should focus on something that is more a core part of things, that doesn't just get washed away, perhaps.

Klien suggests that amongst Japan's youth there are those rejecting the "orthodox *Sarariiman* (salaryman) mode of work and life" (2016, 40) prompted by job insecurity, but also a rejection of the previous generations inclination to over-work and resulting material affluence. Instead many young people are embracing more precarious forms of subsistence that value "self-expression" and "quality of life" (Inglehart 1995, 57). These are lifestyles that maintain city relationships assisted by the internet and social media, but also local social networks that ultimately lead to a richer engagement with their community and environment. Koki-san explains:

I've never really lived in places other than big cities, like in Tokyo or London … I am finding a new me here, you know? Life is really different. You don't get dressed up every day … And don't get really stressed about it, once you are in Tokyo you know, shopping is like another form of sports, like people work Monday to Friday and then on the weekends they do sports-slash-shopping … I think it's like our generation started to realize something that we value more, than you know labels, or materialistic purposes. I don't know when that shifted, but I began to be more interested in those kinds of aspects.

Having let go of some of their materialistic desires, people like Koki-san and Kanai Kougei's new generation of dyer find they value work and the skills they are obtaining more than a high income. Yet they only manage to survive on minimal resources because the cost of living is low in Amami. In addition, people tend to foster close relationships with their coworkers and neighbors, leading to the exchange of material supplies such as food, clothes and even child care. Functioning like an *ie*, the Kanai family extend access to their Amamian networks of knowledge to those migrating from the mainland.[23] Whether it is finding an employee an affordable car, recommending the best place to collect seaweed or dressing one's family in kimono for a ceremony, there will be a member of staff willing to assist.

Two of Kanai Kougei's dyers are working mothers from Kyoto and Tokyo who value this support network highly.[24] The third female, is a 24-year-old Tokyo-trained fashion graduate from south Amami. Their employment reveals a further evolution of tradition in that gendered labor is also becoming outdated. As I can testify, *dorozome* is physically demanding and for full-time employees working a 6-day week, it is not for the faint hearted. The new generation dyers are strong women in body and mind; following a *real* Amamian tradition of women with rights equal to men.[25] This reversal of gender roles is working both ways however, as Koki-san has been training at the weaving school along with another man, in an activity that has historically been the preserve of Amamian women. The value of this work is therefore evident; one could not sustain this level of physical exertion at the minimum wage if dyeing was not a labor of love. For many it is the draw of making color that they find enchanting:

So, rather than taking up the job out of pure interest, I was concerned that the work my parents were doing might disappear. I thought I wanted to try it out even if it was a little bit [risky]— but when I realized, I became *entirely* into the color making (Yukihito-san).

Takahito-san, 30, (Figure 14) also finds pleasure in the possibilities of making color but his primary motivation in joining Kanai Kougei was to sustain Amamian tradition. After a string of part-time jobs on the

Figure 14
Takahito-san drying *tsumugi* yarn. He begun in apparel but is now also a *tsumugi* apprentice.

mainland, he returned to his hometown with the aim of starting an NPO (Nonprofit Organization) to support the summer *matsuri* (festival) of Yamato village. He soon realized he couldn't make an income from this nonprofit work, but heard of an opening at Kanai Kougei when he was bartending. For two and half years he was content to work only on apparel, but a growing sense of responsibility spurred on by the aging craftsmen around him has resulted in a *tsumugi* dyeing apprenticeship under the Shachō. Eriko-san told me that his apprenticeship is a draw for the *orimoto-sans*; they are sending more work to Kanai Kougei because they see a future for *tsumugi* at the workshop.

The nail that sticks out

When the Shachō started public *dorozome* workshops in Amami in the late 1980s, in his words: "it actually angered the other dyeing companies". Today, all of Amami's dyeing companies offer public workshops that financially support their business. Similarly, in the 2000s, Yukihito-san faced significant resistance from the *tsumugi* union who were concerned that dyeing "cheap t-shirts" would devalue *dorozome* and subsequently *Oshima tsumugi*. As he describes:

Our generation does not wear kimono so often. I was doing it thinking that it would be nice if there were *tsumugi* for the everyday – it is a thing to wear – the same as kimono.[26] But from the point of view of the (*tsumugi*) industry, the entire opposite opinion bounced back to me. I was quite surprised.

In Yukihito-san's words, apparel became "the nail that sticks out". This refers to the Japanese saying "a nail that sticks out must be banged down" – "a metaphor for Japanese social tendency to favor and preserve collective harmony over individual uniqueness." [27] Nevertheless, he persevered:

The side of apparel works as a job and I thought it would be better for *dorozome* to have the connection with young people.

Figure 15
The sales gallery at Kanai Kougei.

I just had to continue doing it for the time being and gain their trust, yes. Did I gain their trust then? Well, I wonder … I don't quite know if they approved me or not because how it works is different from the side of the (*tsumugi*) industry [being hierarchical] … But now, the *tsumugi* union understands that Kanai Kougei is a place who does that sort of work. So if there was a request, they would say: "Right, please go and speak to them." It wasn't always like that at the beginning.

Yukihito-san highlights that in the case of *Oshima tsumugi*, resistance to change in more recent years has been top-down, while innovation has been bottom-up. Historically, the *tsumugi* industry has been based on a strict hierarchy with the dyers at the bottom. But by creating a more hybridized business that welcomes people, trade and ideas from outside of the community this hierarchy has been severely disrupted. Yet, as I have argued throughout this paper, traditions have always been pushed forward by external forces that should not necessarily be considered threatening. Japanese craft processes continue to combine superior hand skills with innovative technologies. This is evident by the number of historic textile processes that are still being carried out across the country today, even if output has dramatically declined (Figure 15).[28]

Conclusion

On days when Kanai Kougei was overrun with tourists partaking in dyeing workshops, they would inevitably disrupt workflow. While this was often frustrating, being a point of contention between the Shachō and Yukihito-san, I was told that tourists liked being in an environment where 'things to wear', whether it be kimono yarn or t-shirts, were undergoing production. Kanai Kougei is an exemplary case study being that it is "an institution that links one to the past and projects one into the future" (Kondo 1990, 122–123). This is through its intimate connection with *Oshima tsumugi*, a cloth likely to become a *Mukei Bunkazai,* supported by government stipends; but also as a place where workers, visitors and

clients can imagine a future for the craft. It is a place where innovation has been embraced in the face of local resistance, the Kanai family becoming pioneers in the democratization of a luxury craft process. By establishing a symbiotic relationship between *tsumugi*, apparel, and public workshops, the family have created a precarious but functioning business that at present is prospering. Rather than choosing between the maintenance of traditional practices, or innovating to ensure long-term sustainability, Kanai Kougei show that it may be possible to pursue both.

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to highlight why this might be, by outlining the history of *tsumugi* to show that flows of ideas, materials, technologies and people can assist in the maintenance of tradition. I have considered the global environmental, economic and political conditions that have prompted a renewed interest in consuming but also making traditional craft objects, particularly by a new generation of dyer that have been able to migrate to Amami drawn by "a sense of shared existence" (Sahlins 1999, 413).

Yet Kanai Kougei and the situation in Amami as it exists today is far from perfect. While the company-as-extended-family model has its benefits that have allowed the business to evolve, it also has issues. Employment conditions are rigid, as they are across Amami, with workers obliged to accept a long working week, low wages, and be subject to unequal power relationships that exist in the old but also the new garment industry. There are also concerns in regards to the environment that I will give space to elsewhere, where I will consider the local impact of natural dyeing, but also the public's understanding of its sustainability. Nonetheless, today Kanai Kougei is the most popular destination for *tsumugi* dyeing, public workshops, visits by the media, and designer brands looking for partnerships. This case study demonstrates that the economic and cultural importance of *tsumugi* can be detached from the kimono as a cultural object and commodity, providing alternative streams of income through a process such as *dorozome*. As Yukihito-san says: "With the case of *Oshima tsumugi* … What is important is not the fabric – it is the background, Amami's nature and the wisdom of people who made it. That is what actually should be endorsed."

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Notes

1. 'san' is an gender-neutral honorific used to show respect in Japan.
2. This was particularly the case in colonised nations, where regional styles were often copied, industrially manufactured in the UK and sold back to local markets by colonisers. See Scotland's Turkey Red industry as a prime example (Nenadic and Tuckett 2013).
3. i.e., 20-year-olds celebrate *seiji no hi* (Coming of Age day) each January, with girls wearing a kimono called a *furosode*.
4. These infrastructural networks might range from the sourcing and processing of raw materials, the development and skills associated with production technologies, and hierarchies of people power involved in making, promoting and distributing textiles.
5. The internet has facilitated a trend in manufacturing transparency, where the smallest to the largest companies can share stories from their factories through websites or editorial.
6. Population figures gathered and collated from the five Amamian district websites.
7. Previously part of Okinawa's Ryūkyū kingdom, Amami is today bureaucratically attached to Kagoshima Prefecture.
8. Accessed 14 July 2017. http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6160/
9. Martin Fackler. "Old Ways Prove Hard to Shed, Even as Crisis Hits Kimono Trade." *The New York Times*, February 9, 2015. Accessed February 27 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/10/world/old-ways-prove-hard-to-shed-even-as-crisis-hits-kimono-trade.html
10. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan website.
11. Nagata-san sadly passed away in May 2019.
12. By this I infer that the Shachō means patience and

willingness to commit to one thing over many years.

13. As in many countries, Edo era (1603–1868) sumptuary laws dictated the colors and fibres that society could wear to tame displays of wealth exhibited by rich merchants.
14. Approximate currency conversions (2019): USD60 = JPY6000 or GBP46. USD3000-6000 = JPY333,000-666,000 / GBP2300-4600
15. See also Moeran and Skov (1995).
16. As a point of interest, it is said that the quality of *tsumugi* is far superior today than that of the boom period, quality not quantity being the goal.
17. This is a locally used term. In Japanese, it is a combination of two kanji's 織 *(ori)*– meaning to weave and 元 meaning *moto*, which is taken from *iemoto*, meaning a family company (see more below). The honorific 'san' that is used to show respect to individuals is also extended to tradespeople.
18. See Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983); Vlastos (1998).
19. For example, part-time workers earn the Japanese minimum wage of 958 JPY per hour (about 7GBP) while a full-time *tsumugi* dye craftsman will earn approximately 35,000–40,000 JPY (about £250–300) per 6-day week.
20. The local authorities have been working on a financial support scheme for *tsumugi* craftspeople for a number of years. As of October 2019, they are close to implementation.
21. The *Shima* system is a 'co-op' on Amami, although it differs significantly from my understanding of a co-op since the profits are not distributed evenly. Rather it follows the Oxford English Dictionary definition of 'working together or with others to the same end'.
22. Kanai Kougei has a significant media presence, its popularity stemming from the Shachō's attitude. It has built a reputation that has seen NHK, the BBC, and CNN visit amongst others, that helps promote both *tsumugi* and *kusakizome*, bringing in people and business.
23. Access to this knowledge is often cited as a problem by I-turners in other areas of Japan, who find it difficult to connect with the local community.
24. Although it must be mentioned that this community closeness is also quoted as being problematic!
25. As mentioned previously, Amamian women have gained a reputation for their physical and mental strength.
26. The direct English translation of kimono is "thing to wear".
27. Translators note.
28. In comparison to the United Kingdom, where many textile traditions were all but erased during the industrial revolution (circa 1760–1840), it could be said that Japan more generally has excelled in incorporating change into existing manufacturing systems. The UK in contrast, saw British industrialists promote the gradual replacement of historic methods that superseded skilled workers and their highly refined techniques in the pursuit of profit (as protested by the luddites). This was an approach replicated in its colonies.

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