

Revitalization “Old is New” : A Case Study of Traditional Craft Industry

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Abstract: In Japan, a number of traditional craft products have been prevailed since ancient times. However, over the past few decades, factors such as globalization, changing lifestyles and the development of plastic products, have let craft industry bear hardship. In response to this problem, and to ensure a healthy future for the cultural heritage, some of practitioners try to create new ways to communicate with younger generations. For, example, a *furoshiki* is a piece of square-shaped fabric. MINOBE INC., a traditional *furoshiki* maker founded in 1919, once faced severe challenges to sell old-fashioned items. This paper explains how MINOBE INC., has redefined the *furoshiki* by designing a new concept called “ARCHITEXTURE,” an innovation bringing the rebirth of *furoshiki*. The objective of this paper is to analyze its product design strategy in Kansei Engineering perspective through an interview with Junichiro Minobe, Senior Managing Director of MINOBE, to explain his concept on traditional craft revitalization. Also, a review will be examined by conducting a Brand Scan analysis of six quadrants using the 360 degree brand management model developed by Ogilvy and Mather Advertising. The paper illustrate the “ARCHITEXTURE” project of Minobe is an experiment research of integration on Kansei Value and traditional craft skills. While some people argue that it is not possible to brand a small business, Minobe presents a best practice for researchers, policy makers, artisans and local government

Key words: innovation, design, brand management, marketing, culture

1. Introduction

In Japan, a number of traditional craft products have been prevailed since ancient times. Japanese artisans have utilized raw natural materials and made them into unique designs throughout history. The techniques to make hand-crafted objects for daily use have been passed down from one generation to the next, and each of them has its own local characteristics.

In order to promote traditional craft products, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, has enacted a law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries in May, 1974. Also, the Association for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries was founded in 1975 with the support from the government, regional state organizations and local production associations [1].

However, over the past few decades, factors such as globalization, changing lifestyles and the development of plastic products, have led craft industry bear hardship in manufacturing with traditional methods and materials. In response to this problem, and to ensure a healthy future for the cultural heritage, many practitioners of the craft industries today try to create new ways to communicate with younger generations [1].

For example, a *furoshiki* is a piece of square-shaped fabric, which the Japanese have been using to wrap things for more than one thousand years. MINOBE INC., a traditional *furoshiki* maker founded in 1919, once faced

severe challenges to sell old-fashioned items. Junichiro Minobe, Senior Managing Director of MINOBE, has redefined the *furoshiki* by designing a new concept called “ARCHITEXTURE,” an innovation bringing the rebirth of *furoshiki*. In addition, as environmental protection is now of high interest to the world, *furoshiki* could be a substitute for disposable plastic and paper bags.

The objective of this paper is to analyze their product design strategy in Kansei Engineering perspective through an interview with Junichiro Minobe, Senior Managing Director of MINOBE, who explained his concept on traditional craft revitalization. Also, a review will be examined on brand building by conducting an analysis using the 360 degree brand management model developed by Ogilvy and Mather Advertising [7].

2. History of Furoshiki

There has been a custom to wrap things with fabric since a long time ago. *Furoshiki*, one piece of fabric have been used for more than 1000 years. The name has changed from time to time, but the shape remains almost the same. The wisdom and spirit of Japanese predecessors were beyond the usage of *furoshiki*.

The history of *furoshiki* goes back to the Nara Period (710-794AD) [2]. We could see the document from Nara period about fabrics that people used for wrapping valuables. The fabric used for wrapping imperial

treasures since 1200 years ago. The documents show that this kind of fabrics were called “*tsutsuti (wrapping)*” and written in Chinese character “裏 (back)” which still exist at Shosoin in Nara [3].

Also, there were several paintings in Heian Period (794-1185) described the custom of using fabric to wrap clothing [4]. An illustration in a *sutra* (Buddhist scripture) of the Heian Period shows people carrying their cloths in bundles on their heads [5]. In Kamakura period (1185-1333), there was a word written in “平包み (Plain wrapping)” and read “*hirazutsumi*”. This is the origin of *furoshiki*. People used “*hirazutsumi*” just like we use “*furoshiki*”. *Furoshiki* have been used through periods while changing names [3].

The word “*furoshiki*” first appeared in documents dating from Muromachi Period (1336-1573). People started to use the word “*furoshiki*” because *furo* (Japanese bath) became popular while Yoshimitsu Ashikaga (1358-1408) and his Shoguns took bath in a public *furo* [4]. They used “*furoshiki*” to wrap up their cloths while taking bath, so people won’t mix up their cloths to others. When finishing the bath, they used the same fabric for wiping their body, sitting down on it while putting their cloths on. This is the root of the word for “*furoshiki*” [3].

Since “*hirazutsumi*” and “*furoshiki*” are similar in shape and usage, these two words of fabrics were combined to one word which is “*furoshiki*” in Edo Period. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the word “*hirazutsumi*” had been completely replaced by “*furoshiki*”, although the carrying cloth was by then being used for various purposes that had nothing to do with the *furo* (bath). Neighboring public bath-house still flourish everywhere in Japan, but a *furoshiki* has been replaced by a small plastic bowl in which are carried towels [5].

Merchants used *furoshiki* to deliver merchandize; travelers used it to wrap things for carrying personal belongings. *Furoshiki* were used in many different ways. However, *furoshiki* have not been used much recent years. Because of the rapid economic growth after the World War II, people felt *furoshiki* are old fashioned and too much trouble to use. Another fact that caused *furoshiki* became more and more unpopular is that many department stores and super markets use paper and plastic bags for their customers [3].

Nowadays, *furoshiki* started to get its attractiveness back. One reason is that it is encouraged to use reusable

wrapping for environment. Another reason is that some people started to be interested in Japanese culture [3]. As lifestyle and fashion have turned into westernized, there are some new concepts of *furoshiki* have been developed. People are seeking a contemporary way to use *furoshiki* that match their fashion.

3. Background of “ARCHITEXTURE”

New word “ARCHITEXTURE” is a coinage by crossing “ARCHITECTURE” and “TEXTURE” (Fig.1), which is created by 36-year-old successor of MINOBE INC., Junichiro Minobe. According to Mr. Minobe, he developed an innovative concept based on his design experience of being an architect. He was with Naito Architect & Associates for years. After carefully thinking about the future of his family business, MINOBE *furoshiki*, he decided to assist his father on establishing the fresh image of the *furoshiki* to attract potential customers.



Figure 1. ARCHITEXTURE Logo

The main connection between “Architecture” and “*Furoshiki*” is a three-dimensional form. When a user wraps a *furoshiki*, this flat (2D) and square cloth can make hundreds of possible shapes, and an architecture does the same creation. Therefore, when Mr. Minobe proposed his original idea to five distinguished Japanese architects, they were very excited to join this interesting 3D project.

4. Analysis of 360 Degree Brand Management Model

A number of researchers have documented theory of brand management. Specifically, 360 Degree Brand Stewardship® is a mindset from Ogilvy & Mather Advertising. Ogilvy & Mather believe a company's brand is its most precious asset. They take themselves for Brand Stewards.

4.1 360 Degree Brand Stewardship

360 Degree Brand Stewardship is a method for consistently managing the customer's experience of a brand, regardless of when, or where, the experience takes place. It is a set of beliefs, practices, and techniques for getting inside each brand, and finding out what makes it work. The model consists of three primary stages [6, 7]:

4.1.1 Brand Scan—Discovery.

Defining the essence of a brand is always the first step. Through an information-gathering process called the “Brand Scan”, brand marketers can find out what customers really feel about the brand, setting down the intangible cluster of feelings, impressions, hopes, and memories that form the customer's perception of the brand.

This process can help brand managers to clarify key challenges on brand development, and allocate effective marketing resources on the right track.

4.1.2 Brand Audit—Strategy and Planning.

After assessing the brand scan, marketers could identify the demographical and psychological attributes of their target audiences.

Through the procedure of “Brand Audit”, brand managers outline brand strategy of where the customer and the brand interact, and find ways to ensure that the brand shines at these crucial moments.

4.1.3 Brand Building—Execution.

Turning insight and strategy into work is the third step. Besides establishing brand blueprint, it is very important to execute the big brand idea that anchors and drives all communications, including TV commercials, web sites, direct mailings, public relations campaigns, points of contacts, and so on. Brand building is to reinforce the brand each time customers interact with it.

4.2 Analysis of 360 Degree Brand Management Model

In this paper, a recent model, 360 Degree Brand Stewardship®, developed by Ogilvy & Mather Advertising, is reviewed to examine the brand re-positioning of Minobe Inc. This new project has optimized Kansei Value and brought the revitalization to Japanese traditional craft products.

According to 360 Degree Brand Management Model, six quadrants need to be analyzed in the step of “Brand Scan”, which are product, image, customer, visual, channel and goodwill. The Brand Scan of “ARCHITEXTURE” is shown in the following figure (Fig. 2).

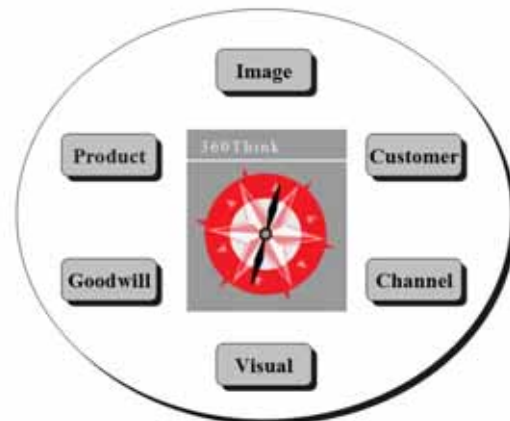


Figure 2. Brand Scan developed by Ogilvy & Mather

4.2.1 Brand Scan—Product

A maker of a long history, Minobe, established in 1919, has been made Japanese small articles with focusing on the wrapper. In the new series of “ARCHITEXTURE”, the five leading international architects designed the square cloth, Japanese wrapper, *furoshiki*, who were dedicated in discovering the possibilities of function and beauty from a three-dimensional aspect.

In the first category of *Product*, the innovative design concepts provide both emotional and functional benefits of Kansei Value for consumers. The cloth is not only for wrapping, it also represents a modern lifestyle.

The pattern, color and texture of “ARCHITEXTURE” create a new concept design of *furoshiki*. Through the five senses of sight and touch, an innovation brings the rebirth of brand value.

4.2.2 Brand Scan—Image

Secondly, in the category of *Image*, Minobe tries to build fashionable image within potential customers. Unlike other traditional craft family business, Minobe launched the product by conducting several creative campaigns (Fig. 3). For example, he participated in the Good Design Award Presentation 2006 to directly appeal the design power to the industry world and general public as well as to promote a new lifestyle. As a result, “ARCHITEXTURE” won the Good Design Award 2006.

Image rebuilding is challenging for a traditional brand such as Minobe. It means to build a brand by using appropriate contact points, not only simply relying on old formulas. The unique communication strategy of “ARCHITEXTURE” successfully changes the brand image from old-fashioned one to stylish one.



Figure 3. Junichiro Minobe

4.2.3 Brand Scan—Customer

A *Furoshiki* used to be carried with middle-aged women who had uneasiness towards the quality of paper strength. However, by adding the Kansei Value into the *furoshiki*, it evokes potential needs of new users and becomes more and more popular. Specifically, many of their customers are young women. Also, a new gift-giving market is being created through various occasions.

This Kansei experience generates a quiet boom among young generation of using the *furoshiki* associated with its original design (Fig.4).

Understanding the users is essential task in brand management. It seeks to increase the product's perceived value to the customer and thereby increase brand equity. The series of “ARCHITEXTURE” demonstrates the revitalization of “Old is new”.



Figure 4. Flower Wrapping

4.2.4 Brand Scan—Channel

In the category of *Channel*, Minobe presents a creative brand strategy. They didn't put “ARCHITEXTURE” in traditional channels, such as a desolate corner of a department store with Kimono together. In contrast, they selected hhstyle.com, an interior design & furniture store

at Minami-Aoyama as the first spot for launch campaign

Besides, an art exhibition of “ARCHITEXTURE” was held at hhstyle.com to illustrate the symphony of the meeting of traditional culture and modern design.

The marketing world is changing. Discover potential encounter points will be more and more important for last-mile competition. From problems to solutions, the channel strategy of “ARCHITEXTURE” delivers a new positioning by its breakthrough ideas.

4.2.5 Brand Scan—Visual

The visual design of “ARCHITEXTURE” is very different from a traditional *furoshiki*. It represents a neat, sophisticated and elegant taste of simplicity (Fig.5). Starting from the logo design and pamphlets designs to typography design, there is a united system for each design concept.

In addition, the name card of Minobe Inc. provides the methods of how to wrap the *furoshikis* which is a new vehicle to communicate the craft regeneration.

Brand identity is the art of visual communication. A good logo can be a valuable asset, while the wrong look can damage the reputation. The visual communication of “ARCHITEXTURE” strengthens the unity and creates a fresh look. It helps to build long-term brand identity.



Figure 5. Visual Design Concept

4.2.6 Brand Scan—Goodwill

In the category of *Goodwill*, Minobe, established in 1919, which is one of the leading manufacturers of making a *furoshiki* in Japan. The “ARCHITEXTURE” project involved several difficult dyeing techniques which were solved by experienced artisans in Minobe. The collaboration between traditional craftsmanship and preminent architects accomplishes the outstanding

creative work which built up a good reputation.

Goodwill will involve optimizing the brand experience of opinion leaders. “ARCHITEXTURE” strategically utilizes the advantages of its techniques which generates a heat dialogue among diverse designers.

5. Product Design Strategy

“ARCHITEXTURE” is a design project aiming to create a stylish brand image on traditional *furoshiki*. The five internationally renowned architects joined the product design of the “ARCHITEXTURE” series. Each of the *furoshiki* has its unique design concept. The five architects dedicated to realize three-dimensional beauty and its function.

While developing this project, experts in the areas of architectures and texture delivered their intelligence and spirit to bring a new kind of lifestyle for contemporary living. They have utilized new materials and dyeing techniques never before used which generate unique Kansei Value of modern appeal for young generation.

Kansei Value is a special type of value that is actualized when a product or service appeals to the Kansei of customers and arouses their emotion and empathy. The availability of a growing numbers of products and services with high “Kansei Value” will contribute to the wealth of the spirit. In a mature economy, manufacturing and service centered on the concept of Kansei Value will stimulate new demand [8].

In the series of “ARCHITEXTURE” design, sensuous features such as texture, sight and touch are developed to represent the delicate Kansei of Japanese culture. This experiment design does initiate new possibilities for traditional craft industry.

5.1 Arabesque Designed by Kazuyo Sejima

This *furoshiki* consists of a large floral pattern, arabesque. Fig. 6 & Fig. 7 show Kazuyo Sejima’s favorite plant. She focused on emerging different styles of wrapping. People can wrap the arabesque *furoshiki* around an object, creating countless forms.

Based on her design concept, there is no right or wrong side. The *furoshiki* could be wrapped on different occasions by users for making it into a desired shape. It is a new thinking for using a *furoshiki*. This design concept would encourage consumers to try a *furoshiki* not only for wrapping objects, but also for representing their taste in fashion.



Figure 6. Suitcase Wrapping Designed by Kazuyo Sejima



Figure 7. Floral pattern Designed by Kazuyo Sejima

5.2 Moiré Designed by Jun Aoki

In the dyeing process, gauze is normally used over the fabric being dyed, but this *furoshiki* is made from the gauze itself. The unique design makes the *furoshiki* a fashionable impression as Fig.8 shows. When tied, it creates a luxurious wrapping with a variegated moiré effect. In addition, Mr. Aoki designed big circles on the fabric, which help to cushion the objects of the *furoshiki* as shows in Fig.9.



Figure 8. Wine Bottle Wrapping Designed by Jun Aoki



Figure 9. Big Circles for Protecting Objects

5.3 Braille Touch Designed by Kengo Kuma

Mr. Kuma gives an example of how an obsolete textile might interpret trendy Kansei Value. He has made deep observation on the usage habit of a *furoshiki* and states that “The pleasure of the *furoshiki* includes the touch feeling of it in your hands.”

What appears to be a plain black surface actually contains sheet music in Braille. The tune is a children’s song, むすんで ひらいて, (Close and open your hands). Mr. Kuma plays on words of “むすんで”、“ひらいて” to “knot” and “unknot” a *furoshiki*. Also, in terms of technique innovation, this is the first time raised text has been presented on a *furoshiki*, achieved by a special blocking technique by MINOBE Inc., an old-standing wrapper maker (Fig.10).



Figure 10. Gift wrapping Designed by Kengo Kuma

5.4 Yoryu Designed by Hiroshi Naito

Hiroshi Naito is the previous supervisor of Junichiro Minobe. When Mr. Minobe proposed this new concept to Mr. Naito, he did not only agree to outline the design, but also suggested Mr. Minobe to develop a series of products by inviting five leading architects to design a *furoshiki* in a contemporary aspect.

In particular, Naito has used distinctive Japanese woven yoryu fabric, the texture which makes it difficult

to dye. Dyeing yoryu in two separate colors requires particularly dyeing skills. As a result, it brings out splendid impact in beauty and functionality (Fig.11).

While used for wrapping, this simple *furoshiki* splits into two colors, consumers can see and touch the completely different shapes.



Figure 11. Book Wrapping Designed by Hiroshi Naito

6. Conclusion

Without doubt, Japanese priceless traditional craft skills that can only be performed by hand are valuable heritage in today’s global competition. Evidently the *furoshiki* have explored the Kansei Value to stimulate consumer’s demands.

According to the “*Kansei Initiates*” released by Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Kansei is a high order of the brain including inspiration, intuition, pleasure, pain, taste, curiosity, aesthetics, emotion, sensitivity, attachment and creativity [8].

The “*ARCHITEXTURE*” project of Minobe could be an experiment research of integration on Kansei Value and traditional craft skills. While some people argue that it is not possible to brand a small business, Minobe would be a best practice for researchers, policy makers, artisans and local government.

The products in local craft industries are an expression of local culture and art [9]. Nevertheless, most traditional craft industries are micro-enterprises and have difficulties surviving in today’s society. Thus, researchers must pay more attention to craft industries and create the Kansei Value for local regeneration.

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