

Sustainability of Traditional Folk Textile Dyeing in Japan and Continuity of the Tradition

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Room 301, building 10,
Sophia University
No registration required
In person only

About **Maria J. Santamaria Hergueta**

Maria is a Spanish physician, who obtained a PhD in medical sciences in Japan and a DrPH in organizational management in the UK. She had a professional career in global infectious disease control and organizational assessment policy. Maria is also an amateur craftswoman and belongs to a Japanese traditional stencil dyeing workshop since 1985.

Combining dyeing practice with research on the continuity of the stencil dyeing tradition in Japan, she has received a PhD in art and cultural heritage from the International Christian University in July 2024.

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This talk is organized by Bettina Gramlich-Oka (Professor, FLA, Sophia University).

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Katazome, or stencil dyeing, is a form of traditional folk textile dyeing in Japan. While its origins date back several centuries, modern *katazome* is associated with the Mingei Movement of the 1920s and Serizawa Keisuke. Like other traditional crafts, *katazome* has experienced three waves of popularity: first with the Mingei movement, then in the aftermath of World War II (1950s), and finally in response to the massive import of crafts into Japan in the 1970s. However, over the past 50 years, there has been a steady decline in the consumption and production of *katazome*, leading to a gradual disappearance of traditional ateliers or *kōbō*.

In a globalized economy focused on economic efficiency, the material consumption of traditional folk textile dyeing in Japan faces significant challenges. Ensuring the economic viability of these crafts as genuine Japanese craft requires tremendous efforts. Some traditional *kōbō* have streamlined their production towards more marketable crafts to survive, reserving master-signed pieces for a niche elite. Others have adopted new production techniques, modernizing the tradition. At the same time, the market is flooded with industrially manufactured crafts marketed as “traditional” dyeing.

The *katazome* tradition is sustained by a network of mediators who support the visual, cultural, and symbolic consumption of the craft through effective strategies. Both profit and non-profit intermediaries operate at prefectural and local levels, often collaborating and competing, leveraging national initiatives aimed at enhancing Japan’s national culture and identity. Some of these initiatives also support the economic recovery of the craft sector at a local level.

The folk textile dyeing tradition is evidently modernizing in response to liberal economic policies. This modernization has brought changes to *katazome* production, impacting both the craftspeople and their *kōbō*. These changes illustrate the evolving nature of the tradition. In this dynamic context, exploring options that contribute to the survival of a diversified and vibrant traditional folk textile dyeing practice in Japan is essential.

