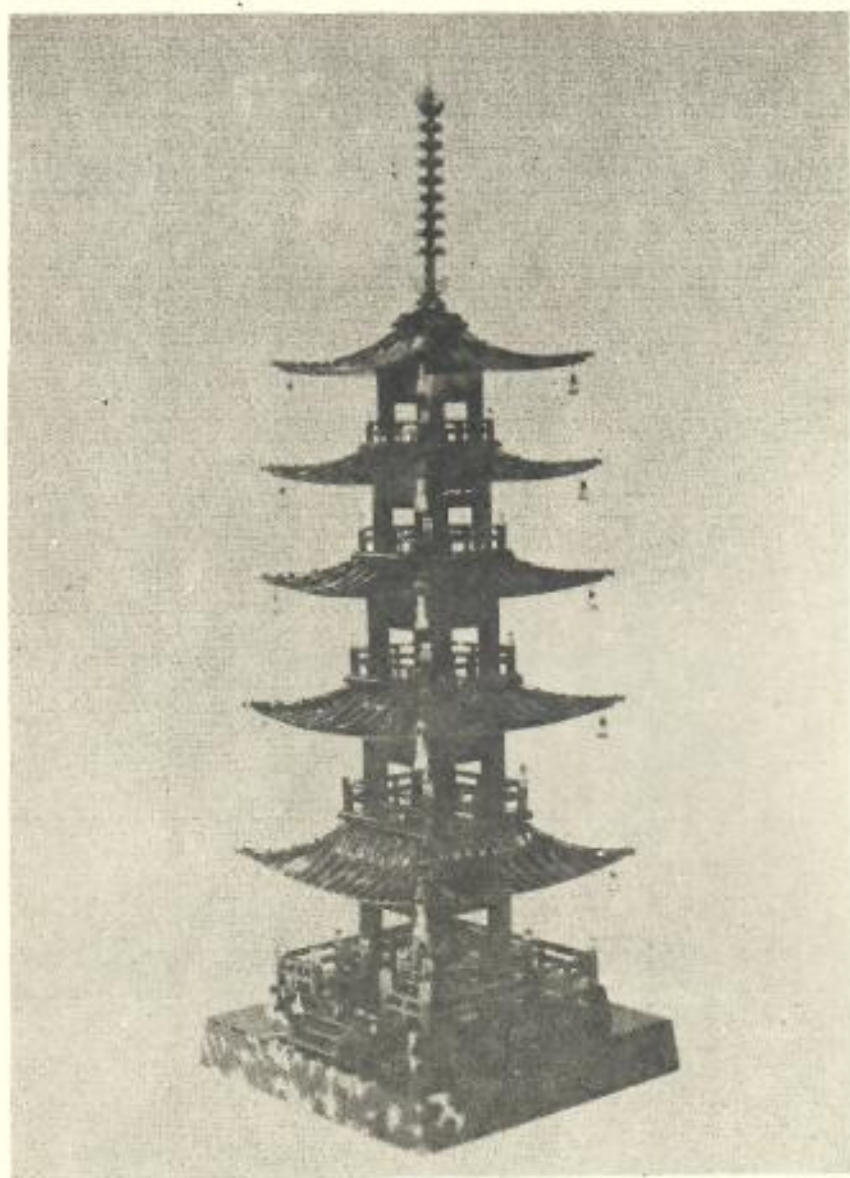


1970s

THE PRESENT STATUS OF
JAPANESE TORTOISE-SHELL PRODUCT INDUSTRY

LIBRARY OF
GEORGE H. BALAZS

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1. BRIEF HISTORY OF TORTOISE-SHELL WARE IN THE ORIENT AND JAPAN

In a book of the Chinese history of one century before Christian era, there is written the fact that the South Sea pearl and tortoise shell had been imported abundantly to Kuangchou, then the center of South Sea trading.

It is known that in China the tortoise-shell wares had been abundantly produced already then. One century before Christian era, in a tomb of a aristocrats near to the metropolis far from the seaside, tortoise-shell combs were discovered, and from a tomb of a Chinese aristocrats in the North Korea at that same period, a splendid tortoise-shell toilet case was found, and it is believed there was a fairly high level workmanship already.

In Japan there are many items of splendid music instrument and furniture decorated with tortoise-shell as the old treasures belonged to the Emperor Shomu(AD 724-749) still preserved in the Shosoin Treasure Palace at Nara. These treasures were gifts to the Emperor of Japan from the Chinese Government, and these Chinese tortoise-shell wares had been produced one century before then with superior workmanship and can be realized them as very precious items.

In the 10th century of Japan, the Japanese Government had allowed only to high Government officers to wear tortoise-shell belting, and Japanese commanders in the 16th century were considered to be the highest honour to have a spear decorated with tortoise-shell hilt.

In Japan the tortoise-shell wares were loved by majority of people since the 17th century when the Japanese women were accustomed to wear tortoise-shell hair accessories and combs, etc.

The tortoise-shell color and lustre was believed to fit with Japanese women's black hair, and noble families and rich merchants' women of those days had considered as "the most valuable things to women" and they bought high priced splendid combs and hair pins with beautiful workmanship. The comb and the ornamental hair pin were typical artistic decor items in those days.

During the period the annual import of tortoise shells came into Japan through only international port of Nagasaki, about 3,000-4,000 Kgs. in average, which were imported by the Dutch ships or the Chinese ships from the Eastern Indian countries.

The Meiji Government of Japan, established in 1868, encouraged people to participate in the industrial exhibitions held in domestic and foreign countries with national products in order to promote national industries. The Japanese tortoise-shell ware makers took initiative in displaying various fine tortoise-shell products to the both exhibitions internal and external. They received various medals, and gained the world fame of the Japanese tortoise-shell wares and is still famous to date.

2. PRESENT STATUS OF ENTERPRISE:

number of manufacturers	211 workshops
number of employees working in the industry	1,200 persons
handicapped workers	50 persons
Amount of products	¥ 4,800,000,000
Amount of proceeds(whole-sales & retails)	¥ 1,890,000,000

3. RECORD OF IMPORT OF RAW TORTOISE SHELLS :

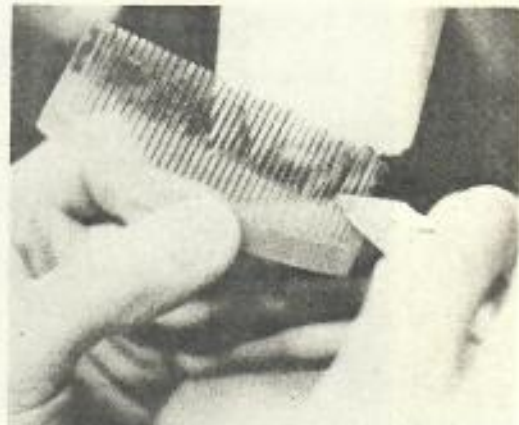
Origin of supplies	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
	Kgs. 1000 ¥	Kgs. 1000 ¥	Kgs. 1000 ¥	Kgs. 1000 ¥	Kgs. 1000 ¥
Pacific & Indian Ocean	12548 ¥118479	15178 ¥150820	20271 ¥228646	23782 ¥257574	16189 ¥160588
Atlantic Ocean	21785 ¥468120	21489 ¥411088	21008 ¥482581	19871 ¥515545	24405 ¥586868
TOTAL:	34288 ¥576599	36667 ¥561408	41274 ¥711177	43653 ¥778119	40544 ¥747449

4. BRIEF EXPLANATION OF MANUFACTURING PROCESS:

The tortoise-shell ware is told as an artistic work that was skillful work using water and heat.

The material sheets of hawksbill tortoise shell is tightly adhered each other by cleaver usage of water and heat and are made into a necessary size and thickness to fit for making a desired item. No adhesive material is used. If the material is pressed with heat, it becomes softer and the material sheets get tightly together. Several sheets of tortoise shells can be adhered together by such work.

The materials have been used without waste by a long traditional method continued since a several hundred years ago.



5. COUNTER-MEASURES BY THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT

The Japanese Government is planning to control the following items in order to conserve the hawksbill species.

1. Import ban of any stuffed hawksbills.
2. Import ban of the small young turtles.
3. Control of import quantity of turtle shell.
4. Encouragement of cultivation of hawksbill farming.

6. TYPICAL ITEMS OF THE MANUFACTURED:

These art items (interior decoratives) and also various ornaments worked by long tradition and skillful workmanships are such decorative items with beautiful taste and touch only seen in the tortoise-shell products.

Tortoise-shell ware has shared a part of the personal ornament culture for more than centuries. This will be one of the Japanese necessary culture.

* Interior Decor Items:

Various art items such as 5-storied pagoda, small mallet, Holland ship, animal, bird, fish, etc.

* Personal Ornaments:

necklace, brooch, ear-ring, bracelet, ring, spectacle frame, hair-pin, comb, compact, cuff-link, tie-holder, tie-tack, etc.

