

getemono

Collecting the Folk Crafts of Old Japan



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IRA JACKNIS

with

LETTERS FROM KYOTO *by* BRIAN SHEKELOFF

Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology
University of California, Berkeley

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Cover:

Water Bucket (*oke*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff from
a farmer, Shiga Prefecture
(9-91233).

Dipper (*shaku*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9-9247).

getemono simple ware, folk ware, an odd thing.
Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary, 1974

Q What is meant by *getemono*?

A *Ge* means “ordinary” or “common,” and *te* means “by nature.” I find it an astonishing providence that in these unsigned, cheap, abundant, quite ordinary articles there so often lies hidden a beauty that one could hardly expect to discover. It bespeaks the total harmony between the concepts of economy and aesthetics.

Soetsu Yanagi, “The Way of Craftsmanship,” 1927

下手物



Searching for the Folk Culture of Old Japan 1868–1968

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By the mid-1960s, America had come far in its appreciation of Japan since Commodore Matthew Perry had forcibly “opened” the country in 1853. After centuries of relative isolation enforced by the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868), Japanese culture was little known in the West, but America’s understanding of the country increased greatly during the subsequent decades of the Meiji period (1868–1912). As Americans encountered the culture, they turned repeatedly to what soon became a well-worn phrase, “Old Japan,” meaning a distinctive, quaint civilization that resembled the pre-industrial West and which seemed to be on the verge of extinction in Japan. Aware of the rapid changes the country was undergoing, one prominent collector wrote: “Japan had within a few years emerged from a peculiar state of civilization which had endured for centuries” (Morse 1917:ix). Central to the American fascination with Japan ever since has been the search for authenticity, the sense that Japan has preserved a genuine culture that we have lost.

This catalogue was prepared to accompany an exhibition on Japanese rural life. The display was based on a collection of domestic and agricultural artifacts acquired in Japan between 1965 and 1967 by

Brian Shekeloff, whose letters to the Museum are presented here. The subject of Japanese-American relations over the past century is a huge topic, even if restricted to the arts, and this brief overview can merely outline some of the contexts for Shekeloff’s undertaking—a century of interest in the folk culture of Japan, especially its artifacts, by both Americans as well as Japanese and their mutual interaction. As such, this catalogue is intended to contribute broadly to the literature on museums and collecting, specifically of East Asian ethnography and art history and of folk art in general.¹

Opposite Page:

Serving plate (*ishizara*)

Seto, Aichi Prefecture; late eighteenth-early nineteenth century; collected by George H. Kerr, 1935–47 (9–12268).

So-called stone (*ishi*) plates were used in roadside inns and commoner kitchens to serve fish and vegetables. They were produced in huge quantities; one worker could turn out as many as 300 in a day. Because Soetsu Yanagi had such a fondness for *ishizara* plates, they can be found in almost every exhibition and book on Japanese folk art.



Ivory figurine of a farmer
Nineteenth century (attributed);
collected by Mr. and Mrs. E. J.
Mahoney, Jr., pre-1976 (9-13571).

Farmers in Japanese art are usually identified by either a hoe or a sickle. This figure is outfitted with artifacts that Brian Shekeloff collected: hat, raincoat, hoe, and basket.

Morse, Freer, and Their Circle 1875–1920

In an age before mass electronic media, “most Americans made their first contact with Japanese culture at one of the international expositions” (Harris 1990:30). In a series of government-sponsored pavilions at major world’s fairs (Philadelphia in 1876, Chicago in 1893, St. Louis in 1904), the Japanese presented themselves as the creators of exquisite and beautiful objects. Thus, Americans were seeing and collecting the fancy wares made for export, not the simple, crude crafts made for internal use. At this initial stage there was little interest in the latter; not only did they not fit into the “super-abundant” Victorian aesthetic, but there was virtually no collecting or marketing mechanism to get them out of their “natural habitat.”

This would begin to change with the appearance of Edward S. Morse. One of the pioneers in the appreciation of Japanese folk culture, and a precursor for Brian Shekeloff, Morse (1838–1925) was a biologist by training and a collector by temperament. As a long-time director of the Peabody Museum of Salem, Morse made three extended trips to Japan between 1877 and 1883 (Hickman and Fetchko 1977, Rosenstone 1988). Although he went first for scientific purposes, Morse soon found himself deeply attracted to the daily life

and culture of the Japanese. He applied his natural science approach to collecting human artifacts, acquiring, for instance, over 5,000 pots in an attempt to document every active kiln. Morse bought everyday objects without prejudice, things not recognized as art, such as shop signs, buckets, firemen's coats, carpenters' tools, and so on. Taking the Japanese home as a unifying context for his description of objects of daily life, Morse summarized some of his findings in an influential book of 1886. In 1892, he sold his large pottery collection to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which appointed him keeper of Japanese pottery until his death. Morse's own aesthetic in ceramic collecting was derived from the tea ceremony, which he had studied in Japan. He rejected the finely decorated porcelains, so popular at the time, for simple, rough-glazed stonewares, then a minor, though avant-garde, taste.

The high point of American interest in Japanese art and culture during the Victorian/Meiji period came in New England in the late 1880s and 1890s. This "Japanism," as it was called, coincided generally with the Arts and Crafts movement in art, architecture, and home decoration. Between about 1890 and 1915—which was also the "Golden Age of East Asian Art Collecting in America" (Cohen 1992)—Americans were attracted to "Oriental" philosophies and handcrafting in a counter-cultural movement of anti-modernism (Lears 1981). One of Morse's friends, William S. Bigelow, a Boston Brahmin physician and collector, became a practicing

Buddhist, and Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) made a reputation with his many writings on the spiritual element in Japanese life.

Morse had a great influence in turn-of-the-century Boston. Among his protégés was philosopher and art historian Ernest F. Fenollosa (1853–1908). Following a sojourn of twelve years in Japan, Fenollosa was appointed in 1890 the first curator of the Department of Japanese Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the first department of Asian art in an American museum. During his six years there, he built up the painting and sculpture collections, especially those relating to Buddhism. These fine arts collections balanced Morse's vast accumulation of pottery.

Fenollosa, in turn, guided Charles L. Freer (1854–1919), a wealthy businessman who was the most important collector of Japanese and other Asian arts in this period (Lawton and Merrill 1993). Greatly influenced by American painter James McNeill Whistler, Freer began collecting Asian art in the 1890s. By 1906, his collection had grown to such size and quality that Freer presented it to the Smithsonian, which opened a gallery devoted to it in 1923. Freer's collections focused on the more refined and exquisitely formed objects. With the exception of ceramics and some lacquer, he acquired predominantly paintings and sculpture. While some of his ceramics were the simple kinds of tea ware, popularized by Morse, there was nothing that could even remotely be called folk art.

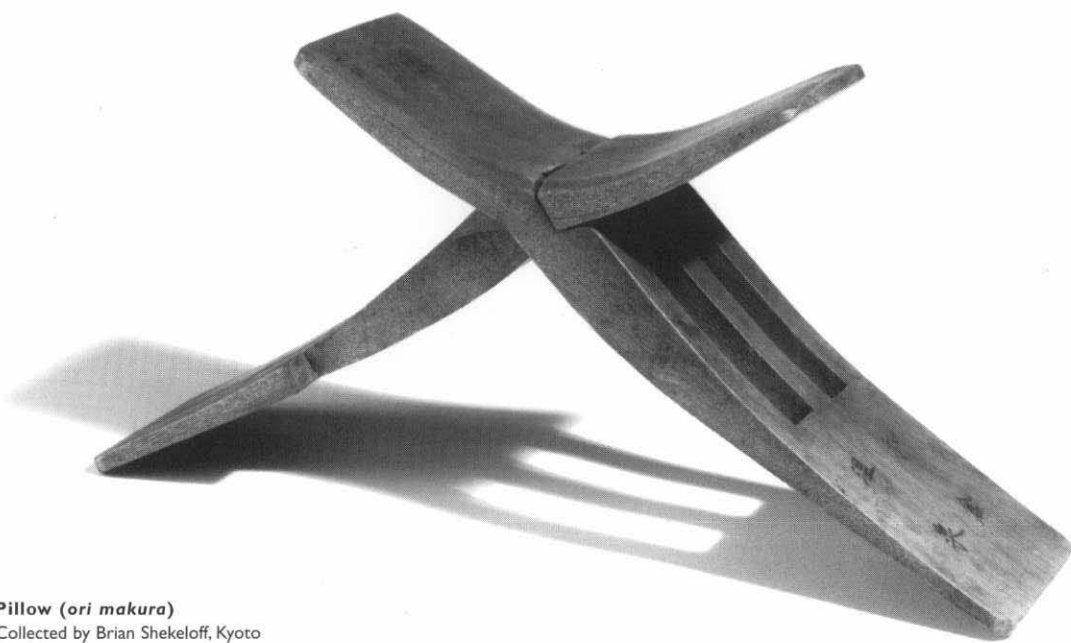
In addition to Morse, two other anthropologists made similar collections of everyday material culture

from East Asia before 1915. Stewart Culin (1858–1929), curator of Ethnology at The Brooklyn Museum, traveled to Japan three times between 1909 and 1914, as well as to China, Korea, and India (Moes 1985). In addition to his special interest in games, Culin collected costumes and textiles, musical instruments, religious items, and decorative arts. Although he did no collecting in Japan, Berthold Laufer (1874–1934) was a pioneer in America for making general material culture collections of Asian civilizations, such as China and Tibet, for the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Field Museum in Chicago. Like Morse, both focused on everyday life and not just the more decorative objects defined as art.²

The interests of Morse, Culin, and Laufer in Japan were a decidedly minority position in turn-of-the-century American anthropology. Until about World War I, the discipline had focused almost exclusively on the American Indian. While there was a gradual shift to the recently acquired colony of the Philippines, there was no fieldwork in Oceania and Africa until the mid-1920s and early 1930s, respectively. There was very little serious collection or study of Asian civilizations in American anthropology, and what little existed was done more for purposes of museum collecting than for ethnographic fieldwork. The study of these cultures was still left to a range of historians and language scholars. In this regard, it is probably relevant that neither Morse, Culin, nor Laufer were trained as anthropologists.

During the Arts and Crafts period, a slippage occurred between the arts and anthropology, with Edward Morse as the critical node. Morse, who shared the roles of ethnology curator at the Peabody Museum of Salem and decorative arts curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, was a resource for most of the leading collectors of Japanese objects in this period. It was in these Victorian/Meiji years that American scholars and museums first began to understand the arts and culture of Japan.

Yanagi, Yanagita, and the Discovery of Japanese Folk Culture 1920–1960



Pillow (*ori makura*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9–9160).

This collapsible and portable pillow—carved from a single piece of wood—has an imprint on its side for a hot spring resort (*onsen*). Pillows were used, particularly by women, to keep elaborate hairstyles intact while asleep.

After the First World War, some Japanese objects came to be defined as “folk art,” first in Japan and then in the West. This movement was actually the result of a complex intercultural dialogue between the two regions. Although there were native, Japanese analogues in Zen and the tea ceremony, for instance, the definition and appreciation of “Japanese folk art” has much to do with the categories of Western culture and its history of modernization. Naturally, one would expect this to be true for the appreciation of Japanese folk art in the West, but, in fact, Western concerns were critical in forming a Japanese conception of folk art.

The man who was most responsible for cultivating an appreciation of the everyday objects of Japan was Soetsu Yanagi (1889–1961). As a young critic and professor in the teens, Yanagi was active in a literary circle that worked to spread to Japan a knowledge of contemporary European aesthetics. His meeting in 1911 with the English potter Bernard Leach, who became a life-long friend, may have exposed Yanagi to the ideas of William Morris and the British Arts and Crafts movement. In a complex mixture of British theories and indigenous Japanese aesthetics, Yanagi praised the simple, rough, and irregular forms, made

by anonymous craftspeople, to be used in daily life by rural peasants.³

At first, Yanagi used the word *getemono* to refer to these things (1972:210–14). It is worth quoting an extended passage from anthropologist Brian Moeran who situates Yanagi so well between the aesthetic and cultural perspectives (1984:14):

Yanagi was particularly fond of looking for this kind of craft work in the street and temple markets of Kyoto, to which city he had moved with his family in 1923 after the Kanto earthquake. The word that the women stall-operators in these markets used for such common or garden items was *getemono* (vulgar thing). Yanagi himself adopted this word for some time, before finding that it was picked up by critics and journalists and sometimes given unfortunate nuances evoked by the concept of vulgarity (*gete*). In order to overcome such misunderstanding, he had no alternative but to think of some other word to describe his “people’s art.” In 1925, after considerable discussion between Yanagi and two potter friends, Hamada Shoji (1894–1978) and Kawai Kanjiro (1890–1966), the term *mingei* was coined to describe the craftsman’s work. This was an abbreviated term, derived from *minshu*, meaning “common people,” and *kogei*, “craft.” Yanagi translated it into English as “folk craft” (not “folk art”), since he did not wish people to conceive of *mingei* as an individually inspired “high” art.

Despite Yanagi’s great debt to Morris and the British Movement, there was also a strong native, Japanese anticipation of his efforts in the tea ceremony. Since at least the sixteenth century, the tea masters had appropriated “found” rustic objects; they removed them from their original functional context so that they could be appreciated aesthetically (Guth 1993); for instance, a basket made as a hatchet sheath could be used to hold a flower arrangement in the tea hut. In a moment of exaggerated praise, Yanagi exclaimed, “No one ever had as sharp eyes as they had to see the aesthetic value of folkcraft. They had nothing but *getemono* for their Tea” (1972:212).

In 1926 Yanagi, Hamada, and Kawai founded the Japanese folk craft society (*Mingei-Kyokai*), followed in 1931 by a magazine, *Kogei* (crafts). With the intention of founding a museum, Yanagi and his colleagues scoured the countryside, purchasing old farm implements. The *Nihon Mingeikan*, or Japanese Museum of Folkcrafts, which opened in 1936 in Tokyo, became the model for many similar institutions throughout the country. In an effort that proved to be influential, he also encouraged artisans to continue to create folk craft items, for sale if necessary. Although Yanagi consistently translated *mingei* as “folk craft,” in his practice and that of his successors even more so, *mingei* has come to be viewed in the Western sense as art, as beautiful objects to be aesthetically contemplated.

Yanagi was not alone, however, in his appreciation for the objects of Japanese daily life. Two men who

advocated a more cultural or ethnological approach to the same material were Kunio Yanagita (1875–1962) and Keizo Shibusawa (1896–1963). Regarded as the father of Japanese folklore and ethnology (*minzoku-gaku*), Yanagita began in 1913 to focus his interests on the culture and custom of the rural population (Koschmann et al. 1985). In 1919, he quit his job as a minor bureaucrat in the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, a post he had held since

1901, in order to devote himself full-time to research and writing. Along with his many students and colleagues, Yanagita spent decades in a massive effort to document the lives of villagers. Shibusawa, a Minister of Finance after World War II, had been a devoted collector of Japanese ethnological material since high school. His large, comprehensive collection was the foundation of the collections at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka (Hauge and Hauge 1978:14–15; Moes 1992:23–24). For those in America interested in Japanese folk art and crafts, these two men have been greatly overshadowed by Yanagi. Yanagita has been ignored because very little of his voluminous writings has been translated into English and because he favored the verbal medium over the material. Shibusawa shunned publicity and put his efforts more into gathering collections than in proselytizing. Finally, both men presented these objects more in an ethnological rather than an aesthetic context.

Yanagi and Yanagita were part of a much broader agrarian movement in early Showa Japan (1920s and 1930s) that valued rural culture during a time when it was being rapidly transformed according to Western models (Havens 1974). Although this pair avoided explicit political action, their valuation of the rural population was taken up by others as part of a conservative, nationalist political movement. Ironically, for Yanagi, at least, this nativism itself was derived, to a great extent, from Western ideas of modernism and anti-modernism.



Smoking basket (*venkei*)
Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9–9143).

These baskets were placed on a storage rack (*hidana*) over the fire pit. Tightly stuffed with rice straw, the basket was used to hold skewered meat or fish that was being either smoked or simply kept warm after cooking.

American Interest in the Interwar Period 1920–1950

During the decades between the two world wars, America's passion for things Japanese declined, partly as interests in East Asian cultures shifted to China. Japan was now seen as an imitator, of China in traditional times, and of the West, in the modern period. This was also a period of world-wide depression and growing conflict, which became full-scale for Japan in 1937. Several individuals kept alive an American interest in Japanese culture and its folk crafts. Yanagi played a small, but direct role in this; in 1928–29 he lectured at Harvard University, and in 1936 he published a brief introduction in English to Japanese folk art. One of Yanagi's American admirers was Langdon Warner (1881–1955), the influential professor and curator of Asian art at Harvard. Warner included twenty-five pieces of Japanese "peasant art," borrowed from Yanagi's museum, in his display of "Pacific Cultures" at the San Francisco World's Fair of 1939 (1939:96), and in 1950 he lectured on Japanese "Folk and Traditional Art" (1952:76–84). Warner and his friend and former pupil, James Marshall Plumer, professor of Oriental Art at the University of Michigan, "both shared their interest and enthusiasm for *mingei* with their many pupils, and saw to it that outstanding examples of

Japanese folk art were displayed in the museums of this country" (Munsterberg 1965:17–18).

Although collections of Japanese folk art were comparatively rare in American art museums, major holdings were amassed by collector-museum director Richard Fuller at the Seattle Art Museum and by art historian-director Sherman Lee at the Cleveland Art Museum. Lee, a specialist in Japan, gathered his own personal collection of Japanese folk art, and Fuller began to purchase folk art on a trip to Japan in 1934. At The Brooklyn Museum, the Japanese collection that Stewart Culin had gathered as ethnology was redefined during the 1930s as Oriental Art. It may be significant that the two principal and oldest collections of Japanese art in the country—the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Freer Gallery—had little that could be called folk art. These younger, "more provincial" museums may have realized a collecting opportunity that was going unfilled by their larger and possibly more conservative sisters.

The art, lectures, and writings of British potter Bernard Leach (1887–1979) also had an impact on American appreciation of *mingei*. Leach, a close friend of Yanagi, incorporated much of his long Japanese experience in his widely popular *A Potter's Book* of 1940.

In 1932, he met Seattle-born painter Mark Tobey (1890–1976), who served as artist in residence in Dartington Hall, Devonshire, between 1931 and 1938. Tobey, who had already been attracted to Asian arts and philosophy, traveled with Leach to Japan in 1934, and for one month lived in a Zen monastery in Kyoto, studying calligraphy, poetry, and meditation (Kingsbury 1978:49).

Despite the real influence that Yanagi was beginning to have in America, an interest in Japanese folk objects was somewhat of a specialist, almost cult, taste during these decades. Morse, on the other hand, with his more ethnological approach, had been largely forgotten, even in anthropology.

Pots, Zen, and Americans in Kyoto 1950–1965



During the 1950s, America experienced an intense new interest in things Japanese. This “craze” was due, to a great extent, to the firsthand experience many Americans had with Japan during the War and subsequent Occupation (1945–1952). This enthusiasm worked itself out in two principal cultural domains: the visual and literary arts. Perhaps because its objects were concrete, the visual influence was mediated and took place more in America, whereas the literary seems to have impelled the growth of an American expatriate colony in Kyoto, the old imperial capital.

American art museums suddenly discovered Japan after decades of neglect. As several historians have noted, “the vast majority of Japanese art treasures entered Western collections *after* World War II” (Guth 1993:172; cf. Cohen 1992:135). Though still not in the forefront, *mingei* was part of this appreciation. For instance, the new Museum of International Folk Art, founded in 1953 as part of the Museum of New Mexico, devoted six exhibits to Japanese themes in its first two decades (Polese 1979).⁴ Hugo Munsterberg, who had studied with Warner at Harvard, was in the vanguard. He spent the years from 1952 to 1956 living in Japan, which led to the first book in English on Japanese folk art (1958)

and one of the first exhibits on the subject (1965).

In addition to the appreciation of “old *mingei*,” Soetsu Yanagi’s efforts began to affect the creation of new art, both in America as well as Japan. Yanagi along with his potter colleagues Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada had their greatest influence during the 1950s. In 1952 the trio toured America (on their way back to Japan from a conference in England), lecturing and giving four extensive demonstration workshops (at Black Mountain College in North Carolina; St. Paul, Minnesota; the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana; and the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles). Continuing to influence the American studio pottery movement throughout the 1960s, Hamada returned to this country in 1963, 1966, and 1967 (Austin et al. 1990).

During the 1950s, Japan had its principal influence on American visual arts more in the media of crafts and architecture than in painting or sculpture. The clean, spacious grids of Japanese architecture appealed to Bauhaus modernists as much as the rough, asymmetrical glazes called to the potters. A telling exception to the craft focus came in Seattle, among painters Mark Tobey and Morris Graves, and Japanese-American painter/sculptor George Tsutakawa. Seattle was a particular center for interest in Japan and East Asia, for several reasons: its distance from European influences and closeness to the Pacific, and its own substantial Japanese-American population (Kingsbury 1978:58, 60). Among the Abstract Expressionist painters of New York, there

was a strong appreciation of the spontaneity, rough brush-strokes, and calligraphic line of Japanese and Chinese art.

Perhaps even stronger than the influence in the visual arts was the Japanese strain in literature (haiku poetry) and religion (Zen). These two were conjoined in the general enthusiasm of the San Francisco community of “Beat” poets, many of whom settled in or visited Kyoto. An early center for this group was Ruth Fuller Sasaki, an American woman who had established in the city an institute in which Westerners could study Zen (Ross 1960). Paradoxically, Daisetsu T. Suzuki (1871–1966), who was probably the greatest “missionary” for Zen, spent the decade of the 1950s in America, teaching, lecturing, writing, before returning to Japan in 1960 (he was also a teacher and friend of Yanagi). Another important proselytizer for Zen during this time was the British-born philosopher Alan Watts (1915–73). Without doubt, the leader of this literary/religious community of Americans in Kyoto was Gary Snyder (*b.* 1930). Deciding that he wanted to practice Zen in Japan, Snyder studied Oriental languages and literature at the University of California at Berkeley (1952–56) before heading off to Japan in 1956. With a number of breaks, he stayed there through 1968 (Halper 1991:53–109, 231–42). One of his colleagues, the literary scholar and translator Burton Watson, remembers “Kyoto in the Fifties” with its relative lack of industrial development and nearby farms (Halper 1991:53–59). The countryside was a great attraction to Snyder, who

Opposite Page:

Saké bottles (*tokkuri*)

left:
Tamba, Hyogo Prefecture;
mid-nineteenth century (attributed);
private collection.
right:
Unknown provenience, collected by
Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto (9–9255).

Saké, a kind of rice wine, has been a Japanese staple for centuries. Although widely consumed for secular purposes, it has important ritual functions as the principal offering for the gods and for consecrating a marriage. In the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, wine shops custom-ordered bottles with the shop’s name written on the surface with a light slip (liquid clay). Customers would return the empty bottle for a refill.

liked hiking and visiting remote mountain temples. Snyder's fluent Japanese helped many of the visiting literati find their way.

According to one of those poets, "Kyoto in the early 1960s looked as if it might become a Far Eastern alternative to Paris—it didn't, but probably through Snyder more than anyone else, it became an accessible and amazingly reasonable cultural outpost for some half-dozen American writers during this period (one could rent half of a nineteenth-century Japanese house with a garden for \$25 a month). Alan Watts, Allen Ginsberg, Philip Whalen, and Frank Samperi all visited while Cid [Corman], Gary, and I were there" (Clayton Eshleman in Halper 1991:235–36).⁵ Kyoto was a part of what historian George Stocking has called the "geography of genuine culture" (1989:217–20). America in the 1920s, the period examined by Stocking, was searching for a place and a culture that offered the hope of a fulfilling, integrated, and personally meaningful culture. Bohemian Greenwich Village found it in the Native American Southwest in the same way that bohemian San Francisco found it in Zen Buddhist Kyoto.

The 1950s infatuation with Zen was a reaction against modernism, industrial technology, affluence, and conformity. In this, it was reminiscent of the last American infatuation with Buddhism in the 1890s, a similar period of anti-modernism. Even aesthetically, there was a startling congruence between the two periods, with the Arts and Crafts movement's appreciation of roughness, handcrafting, and natural

materials. And both were somewhat of a minority, counter-cultural movement against the dominant styles of modernism.⁶

The Study of Rural Japan in American Anthropology 1950–1965



Grinder (*usu*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9–9105).

Although rice was shipped to merchants with the hull removed, farm families stored it with the husk on. This pair of serrated wooden wheels was used for hulling rice and wheat. In olden days, each family ground its own grains at home, but with the introduction of electric or gas-powered mills, this is now done collectively.

At the same time that American poets were discovering the charms of Kyoto, a generation of anthropologists was investigating the culture and society of the countryside. Part of a general trend of 1950s American anthropology, these village studies allowed anthropologists to employ the participant-observation method of fieldwork in a complex society. Rural communities, not the cities, were seen as the most fundamental embodiment of Japanese culture. These approaches were encouraged by Robert Redfield at the University of Chicago and Julian Steward at Columbia, who influenced the study of civilizations, peasants, and the development of area studies (Murphy 1976:6–8).

There was one pioneer in Japanese village studies who preceded the 1950s group—John F. Embree, who studied under Radcliffe-Brown at the University of Chicago. *Suye Mura* (1939), his engagingly written ethnography of a Kyushu village, is filled with telling details about objects of daily life. (Because he turned to Southeast Asian studies and died prematurely in 1950 at the age of 42, Embree's influence was muted.) By contrast, the most famous book on Japan by an American anthropologist, Ruth Benedict's classic *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), was written

without direct access to Japan, and consequently, focused on values and reported behavior. It proved to mark the end of the school of “culture and personality” in American anthropology. When anthropological interest in Japan began again after the War, it followed along the lines of Redfield and Steward.

Many of the next generation of Japan specialists in anthropology derived, or at least deepened, their interest in the country through their experiences in the War; many learned Japanese, often in intelligence or language programs, and several married Japanese women. Among the earliest investigations of the nature of rural Japan was the report of Arthur Raper (1950). In 1947–49, as part of Allied governance, Raper, from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the Department of Agriculture, directed a group survey of the land reform effort and other agrarian programs. Thirteen villages were intensively studied in order to determine issues of social change. Another student of the rural land reform was English sociologist Ronald Dore, who lived in three villages during 1955–56 (1959, 1978). As might be expected, Dore's research was addressed more to social and economic issues than observations of daily life.

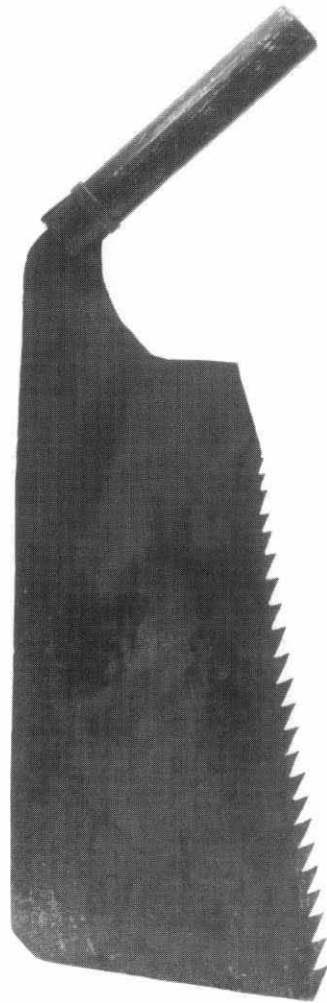
Over the decade, a cluster of American

anthropologists conducted village studies in Japan: Edward Norbeck (1954), John B. Cornell and Robert J. Smith (1956), Richard K. Beardsley (Beardsley, Hall, and Ward, 1959). All were associated with the University of Michigan's Center for Japanese Studies at the time of their fieldwork, which came mostly between 1950 and 1955. Most worked in the general region of the field station that the Center established in Okayama City, on the Inland Sea in southwestern Japan. The research, which was supervised by geographer Robert B. Hall, the Center's first director, was cooperative, comparative, and interdisciplinary. These monographs were the doctoral studies of young scholars, who went on to become the leading scholars in their area during the 1960s and 1970s.

Although none of these anthropologists acquired artifacts, their reports are important to our knowledge of Japanese folk craft collections. Following an earlier tradition of American anthropology, they attempted to write comprehensive ethnographies of their communities, and they paid much attention to material culture and everyday life. Their monographs are full of minute descriptions of farming methods and tools, houses, clothing, food and eating, religion, and most are profusely illustrated with photographs. In many ways, they pick up directly from Embree's study, which seems more American than what we normally think of as a Radcliffe-Brownian study of kinship and social structure.

These anthropologists were also responding to the feeling of many Japanese that their rural culture was

swiftly changing. Since the end of the Tokugawa period and the opening of Japan to the West, there have been two periods of intense modernization—of rapid social, cultural, and economic change. The first came at the beginning, when, for example, *netsuke* toggles flooded the market because most Japanese men suddenly stopped wearing kimonos. The second came after the Second World War, in the 1950s and 1960s, with the shift to a heavily mechanized regime in the countryside. In both cases traditional, handmade and hand-powered objects found their way into secondhand sale. The difference between the two periods was the intervention of Yanagi and the Arts and Crafts movement. In the nineteenth century, there was little self-conscious appreciation in Japan of what was being lost, whereas in the 1950s, this perception was acute. This time, however, aesthetics had won out over a more cultural approach to folk objects.



**Lumbering and rip saw
(*maebiki*)**

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9-9296).

This front-pulling saw was used to cut planks from logs. Although it was primarily used for lumbering, it was also freely employed by carpenters.

Brian Shekeloff and the Lowie Museum 1963–1967

Both currents of art and anthropology converge in Brian Shekeloff, the collector of 252 Japanese domestic objects for the Museum (then known as the Lowie Museum). An artist by training, Shekeloff worked as a scientific illustrator in the Department of Anthropology at UC Berkeley, and, during 1962–63, as an assistant exhibit designer at the Museum. He knew Gary Snyder, Cid Corman, Allen Ginsberg, and other Beat poets in San Francisco during the 1950s. With his wife Mertis, Shekeloff arrived in Japan in 1963 and stayed for four years. He supported himself by teaching English to employees of Japanese companies; his living expenses were low, and he considered himself to be well-paid. Shekeloff learned Japanese well enough to get along, but he claims that he never mastered all the nuances of the elaborate Japanese language. Shekeloff spent most of his time in Kyoto; he loved this ancient city, full of temples and other old buildings that had been spared the bombing of the war, but he did make occasional trips to the countryside of the Kyoto area and longer trips to the mountain village of Takayama, especially for his collecting.

Between 1965 and 1967, Brian Shekeloff formed his collection. His commission came from Michael Harner, a Berkeley anthropologist then serving as

Research Anthropologist and Assistant Director at the Museum. Although Shekeloff had little formal training in anthropology, he obviously picked up the basic principles while working in the Museum and the anthropology department. As he says in an early letter, he wanted to get the everyday objects rather than the rare or decorative items. He wanted his collection to be systematic, with samples of the variations within functional domains, such as all the tools used in pottery or farming, instead of picking up isolated items. Where he had a choice, he obtained old and used objects, although he did buy new things when he needed them to complete a set and when the form was barely different than an old, used example.

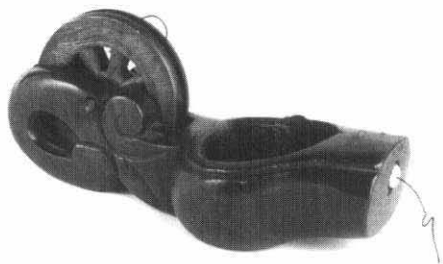
Brian Shekeloff obtained most of his collection from the flea markets at temple fairs and in secondhand shops. For instance, he bought the smaller, decorative items, like the *kotatsu* leg warmers there. The farm implements, especially the larger pieces, came from several sources. Shekeloff knew an American who was living on a farm outside Kyoto, and he was able to pick up things when he visited his friend. While most of his rural artifacts came from his own visits to nearby farms, he purchased a number of items from farmers when they came into the Kyoto markets.

The temple fairs of Kyoto are famous to this day as a source for the enterprising collector—at Toji temple in the southwest part of the city, on the 21st of the month, and the Kitano Tenjin Shrine in the northwest, on the 25th. The former marks the anniversary of Kobo Daishi, Toji's first abbot, and the latter, that of Sugawara no Michizane, the ninth-century prime minister deified as Kitano Tenjin (Kanda 1984:18). It was at these same temple fairs that Soetsu Yanagi first encountered *getemono*.

Although it may at first seem odd that Shekeloff was able to acquire an important collection of crafts and daily objects from a secondary source in Kyoto rather than directly from farmers, it was not at all unusual in the history of the appreciation of Japanese folk craft. Edward Morse, who obtained many valuable finds in these establishments, reported, "The collector of bric-a-brac finds Japan a veritable paradise, for wherever he goes he finds secondhand shops, known as *furui doguya*, displaying old objects of every description; pottery, metal and lacquer work, basketry, swords and sword furniture, pictures, etc. In the smallest villages through which one rides one finds some shop of this description with a modest assortment of old things" (Morse 1917, 2:105, cf. Hickman and Fetchko 1977:91). Although the Japanese have long venerated the past for cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic reasons, much of their constant recycling—as expressed in secondhand stores (Saga 1987:113–17) and *saki-ori* textiles, made from rags—was done out of necessity and poverty, not for aesthetic appreciation.

Brian Shekeloff received information on the pieces from a number of sources, especially contacts at the museums and university of Kyoto. Although he asked Gary Snyder for assistance in forming some of the collection, the poet was not able to collect anything. He did, however, alert Shekeloff to valuable objects in the countryside and, of course, among Buddhist circles. The young collector was also aided by the fluent language skills of a Japanese friend who had studied in America but was then living in Kyoto. Apparently, it was Harner who devised the 8 ½ by 5 ½ inch paper slips that Shekeloff filled out upon his return, based on his notes. The listings included the following categories: collector's name, collector's field catalogue number, date, tribe, place, kind of specimen, native name and meaning, used for what purpose, how used, when used, by whom used, made of what materials, made by, tribe of origin and location if obtained by trade, remarks. Although not always present, this detail makes the collection especially well documented. Shekeloff also took photographs of artifacts, but these have been lost in the intervening years.

After all these years of Yanagi's efforts, the common, everyday objects that Brian Shekeloff was finding were thought of more as *mingei* or folk art. Although they were studied by the first generation of post-War American anthropologists, this group did not collect them; one has to go back to Morse to find a similar collection in America.



Ink pot and snap line
(*sumitsubo*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto, (9-9206).

The ink line, in use since the Nara period, is the traditional symbol of the carpenter. Used to mark lines to guide the sawing of wood, it is similar to the Western chalk line. The string is run through a well containing ink-soaked cotton, drawn taut, raised up near the middle, and allowed to snap back, producing an inked line.



**Woman's work jacket
(*hanten*)**

Kasuri dyed, ca. 1900–40; from the collection of Susan York, Kyoto area, 1979.

Short jackets allowed the wearer to move freely during heavy work. As the *hanten* reached only slightly below the waist, it was worn with pants.

Since Shekeloff post-1965

With the exception of earlier acquisitions from the Philippines, the Shekeloff Japan collection was the Museum's first documented field collection from an Asian civilization. The mostly tribal Philippine collections, which came during the colonial period, were a special interest of early director Alfred Kroeber around 1920. The Japan collection was soon followed by Nancy Tanner's Indonesian assemblage in 1965–66 and several Indian collections: Richard Lerner in 1970, Ron Maduro in 1970, and Niloufer (Ichaporia) Hirschmann in 1972. Although the lack of Chinese material is not surprising, given its political status, one might have expected field collections from Korea or Thailand.

At UC Berkeley, as in other American universities, the anthropology department was gradually moving away from a concentration on the American Indian. David Mandelbaum had been teaching the culture of India since 1946, and in 1963 he was joined by Gerald Berreman (India, Nepal), Herbert Phillips (Thailand), and Jack Potter (China and Thailand). Over the years several Japan specialists, such as Edward Norbeck and David Plath, taught here, until the 1965 appointment of George DeVos, who specialized in the psychological anthropology of Japan.

Upon his return to America in the fall of 1967, Brian Shekeloff worked as a teacher in anti-poverty programs in the Bay Area, and for over twenty-five years has been a professor of communications, human relations, and life-styles. Although he has not been back to Japan since, he still has a vivid memory of his collecting experiences there. In 1988, Barbara Busch, then senior curatorial anthropologist, curated a small display of the collection in the “Held in Value” series of exhibitions.

After the 1960s, there was a decided shift in the anthropology of Japan away from village studies to issues of personality and social organization.⁷ This was due partly to the radical changes in the subject—Japanese rural society—but it also coincided with general trends in the discipline. Along with this went an increasing neglect of artifacts in ethnographic accounts. Anthropology was also affected by a growing amount of native Japanese scholarship by, for example, social anthropologist Chie Nakane (1967) and many Japanese rural sociologists such as Tadashi Fukutake (1967).⁸

Most of the recent village studies are, in fact, longitudinal restudies, focusing on change since the initial monographs of the 1950s (Shimpo 1976, Dore 1978, Smith 1978, Norbeck 1978). Since the 1960s, the culture of “traditional” rural Japan has become almost entirely a self-conscious phenomenon of folk art and ethnology museums, preserved villages and tourism—the subject of “rural nostalgia” (Kelly 1990) for a culture that never really existed, at least not in the form imagined (Graburn 1983, Moon 1989).

In the American art world, *mingei* has finally come into its own. Despite some interest in the late 1950s and early 1960s, most of the major exhibitions and catalogues of *mingei* in American museums have come recently, in the late 1970s and 1980s.⁹ And now there are more specialized studies on pottery (Weidner 1977) and textiles (Rathbun 1993, Yoshida and Williams 1994). The study of Japanese folk objects in America has come almost entirely from an art perspective. A notable exception is the work of British-born anthropologist Brian Moeran, who has closely examined the practice of *mingei* potters in Onta, Kyushu (1984).

In reviewing this history of the interest in Japanese folk culture, it has been necessary to sketch both the artistic and anthropological traditions because Brian Shekeloff was part of both. Though trained as an artist and involved with the literary community in Kyoto, he made a collection of everyday objects that resembled Morse’s natural science collections much more than the aestheticized *mingei* collections of Yanagi and his followers. In the interests of his functional approach, we have decided to employ the word *getemono* in the title. More so than the terms *mingei* or “folk art,” *getemono* describes what Shekeloff was finding in the temple markets and secondhand stores of Kyoto in the mid-1960s.

In the West, the appreciation of Japanese folk culture has to be seen within a series of alternating strands—between art and culture, fine and applied art, beauty and use. Although at first glance there is an

apparent opposition between Japan and the West, both were working within a logic of industrialization. In the end, the aesthetic theories of Yanagi and his American followers were intercultural, combining the Arts and Crafts movement with Zen and the tea ceremony. As in the cultural movement of primitivism, this rustic life and craft filled a perceived void in the lives of those who took them up.¹⁰

In their valuation of the Japanese peasant, both Japanese and Westerners were appropriating a culture from the outside. As far as we know, a hundred years ago, Japanese folk objects were not considered self-consciously as something separate or special by their makers and users. The initial interest in them seems to have been foreign, by people like Morse, who defined them primarily as ethnological documentation of a culture and not as high art. Although it was a Japanese, Soetsu Yanagi, who initially created a category for them and praised their beauty, he was ambivalent, deriving much of his theory from the West and conjoining use and beauty as essential features. He was so successful that by now, especially in the West, these simple utilitarian objects are considered as art of the finest sort by many, taking them far away from their original uses and from how they were first perceived.

After more than a hundred years, the common nineteenth century image of “Old Japan” has changed little. Indeed, it has probably been intensified. Although better known today, less of the culture seems to remain. “Old Japan” was, more likely, a

mirage born out of our needs—in both America and Japan—for an integrated, spiritual, beauty-conscious culture in a modern world that seems to have lost these values long ago.



Notes

A Note on the Text

All of Brian Shekeloff's letters to the Museum are included here. We have tried to stay as close as possible to the author's original; minor deletions (mostly of a personal nature) have been made for purposes of space, and the one or two obvious misspellings or slips of the pen have been corrected. But we have tried to maintain the informal tone. The final version of the text is the full responsibility of the editor. We wish to thank Brian Shekeloff for his wonderful reports from Kyoto and for so graciously allowing the Museum to edit and publish his letters. He recalled that he was practicing his calligraphy when he wrote the letters, so we have decided to use a typeface that captures the feeling of the author's original. Japanese names in the introduction have been given in the Western fashion, with family name last.

Acknowledgments

Many have contributed to the related exhibition; for help specifically on the catalogue, the editor would like to thank Brian Shekeloff, Gary Snyder, Michael Harner, Nelson Graburn, Sheila Keppel, and Yoshiko Wada, for their insightful comments. I must single out my principal research assistant on the Japan project, Roderic Kenji Tierney, in addition to Alexis Roworth and Caroline Posynick. Also at the Hearst Museum, in addition to Barbara Takiguchi and Eugene Prince, I thank Burton Benedict, Louise Braunschweiger, Madeleine Fang, Willie Herman, Martha Muhs, Frank Norick, and Renée Ross. The manuscript was improved by the copy-editing of Tanya Smith. We would like to acknowledge the kind loans of objects from Mary Olive, Susan York, and an anonymous lender.

Opposite Page:

Carrying baskets (*naekago*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff from a farmer, Kyoto (9-9120a/b).

Rice is grown from seed to seedling in a nursery bed before being transplanted to the paddies where it will grow to maturity. Although hard work, transplanting is a time of gaiety, music, and ritual. These baskets, a home product, were used for transplanting and for other carrying purposes.

1 See Cohen 1992 and Guth 1993 on Asian art collecting. For comparative references on collecting, see Cole 1985 on Northwest Coast Indians, Boone 1993 on Pre-Columbian artifacts, Alsop 1982 on art, Rubin 1984 and Price 1989 on primitivism in modern art and anthropology, and Quimby and Swank 1980 and Vlach and Bronner 1986 for American folk art theory.

2 Among anthropological institutions with Japanese collections, the Peabody Museum of Salem is far and away the most important (numbering over 10,000 items). Other major collections are found at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (5,400) and the Field Museum (2,800). There are smaller collections at the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale (where Cornelius Osgood carried forth the Morse and Laufer approach in Chinese and Korean fieldwork), the Burke Museum at the University of Washington, as well as the Hearst. The Carnegie Museum of Natural History and Cranbrook Institute of Science also hold Japanese collections. Although the American Museum of Natural History, the Newark Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the University of Pennsylvania Museum, all have major Asian collections, they either have little from Japan or focus more on decorative or religious arts.

3 For reviews of Yanagi and *mingei*, see Hauge and Hauge 1978, Moes 1985 and 1992, Moeran 1984, Japan Folk Crafts Museum 1991.

4 The Japanese exhibits at the Museum of International Folk Art were: "The Folk Art of Japan" (1955), one of the first exhibitions devoted to the subject, "Children's Paintings from Japan and Sweden" (1956), "The Word is Shibui" (1956), "Photos of Contemporary Japanese Artists at Work" (1963), "Gyotaku [Japanese Fish-Prints]" (1965), and "Japanese Paper Dolls" (1974).

5 As an example of the interconnections of the Kyoto community, one might look at the title of the accompanying exhibition, *Back Roads to Far Towns*. This is a rather free rendering of *Oku no hosomichi*, the famous 1693 travel diary of Matsuo Basho, which may be translated more literally as "The Narrow Road to the Far North." I took this title for its poetic resonance from the translation that Cid Corman did with Kamaike Susumu. Brian Shekeloff knew Corman in San Francisco during the 1950s, and Gary Snyder used the opening passage from the Basho diary as an epigraph to his book of poems, *The Back Country* (1967).

6 This recurrence of cultural critique also harks back in many ways to one of its earliest American incarnations in the Transcendentalist Movement of 1840s New England. Thoreau's protest against incipient industrialization and urbanization was quite influenced by Hinduism.

7 For recent reviews of the anthropology of Japan, see Ben-Ari, Moeran, and Valentine 1990 and Kelly 1991.

8 Nakane (1967:176–83) summarizes a massive accumulation of scholarship by Japanese rural sociologists, legal sociologists, agricultural economists and economic historians, folklorists, and ethnologists. For example, the sociologist Kizaemon Ariga did fieldwork in Ishigami village over a period of thirty years (late 1930s to 1960s).

9 The major recent American catalogues on *mingei* are: Hickman and Fetchko 1977, Hauge and Hauge 1978, Rathbun and Knight 1983, Moes 1985 and 1992, Japan Folk Crafts Museum 1991. See also the books by Muraoka and Okamura 1973 and Saint-Gilles 1989.

10 For reviews of primitivism, see Rubin 1984 and Price 1989. Boon 1990 has outlined for Bali a similar movement in which cultures mutually define themselves. See Clifford 1988 for a treatment of analogous interrelationships between the arts and anthropology.

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Kyoto, 1965–1967: The Letters of Brian Shekeloff

MAY 26, 1965

Dear Mike,

The other day I came across those ethnographic data sheets you gave me and I recalled, with something of a slight shock, that we had made an agreement to the effect that contingent on your budget, I would send you an assortment of domestic implements to balance the excessively decorative items from Japan which the museum assembled in the past. If you are still interested in my doing such, I'd be more than willing to see what I can do. I think I should warn you however that it's not quite like picking up a few spears from the natives. Japan is westernizing so rapidly that "ethnographic" items seem to be power-saws, diesel tractors, and cement-mixers. On closer inspection, though, one can still detect the use of peculiarly Japanese tools in the trades of today and in those strictly Japanese areas such as geta making, the old tools are still in use. The problem is that if I pick them up at the local hardware store, they hardly seem like museum items—perhaps this only indicates my own prejudice as I chop my garden weeds with the traditional sickle and Mertis grinds sesame seeds in the mortar. In Kyoto there are two traditional temple-fairs each month which attract mostly rural folk from outlying areas. Between the hot-dog stands and the plastic jelly-molds there are secondhand tool-stalls displaying a wealth of old, heavy forged unidentifiable devices. If I can find out their function, I might be able to locate an example of the craft to send with the tools—or at least send photographs. They still engage in many startling crafts but only for special occasions like the 20 year rebuilding of Ise Shrine or putting a new bark roof on an old temple. One wonders where such craftsmen come from, as everyone seems to be working for the electronics industry—but a few survive yet.

Japan is archaeologically a bad climate area. I don't mean the weather so much, although it is atrocious, but rather the social climate. The Japanese just don't discard. Everything can be, and is, used in either primary, secondary, tertiary, or what have you function. Those stone grinding cylinders you have in the basement are now widely in use as foundation stones, garden stepping stones, or (in our former place) to keep the rats from coming through a hole in the floor. Things are so thoroughly used out that, as a friend commented, if a Japanese can't do something with it, it's absolutely worthless. Hence the chance of "finding" something in such a utilitarian culture is slight. Another possibility occurs to me—that of having

Opposite Page:

**Pair of grinding stones
(ishiusu)**Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9-9285a/b).**Mill stand (usutate)**Collected by Brian Shekeloff from
a secondhand shop, Takayama, Gifu
Prefecture (9-9108).

Millstones, moved by hand with a wooden handle, are used to grind beans and grains. They often serve a secondary use as weights to compress the lids of pickle jars. This homemade stand did double-duty as a support for the mill and as a catch basin for milled grain. Although the stand fits the stones exactly, Shekeloff purchased them separately.

the Japanese work for me. They are, in some specific and highly formalized ways, a very generous people and more than willing to help a foreigner—particularly if his credentials are evident. I have some contact at Kyoto University and if you were to send me a letter “authorizing and requesting me to gather Japanese domestic implements” I feel fairly sure I could get lots of assistance from the anthro staff if not some gratis material culture. It would at least provide accurate data for the items I do assemble.

Please let me know if you’d still like me to do this and if it’s safe for me to sink my sparse capital in adzes and sickles, and to what extent. Naturally, I will duly receipt all purchases and on the whole it shouldn’t amount to much. My sickle cost 50¢ brand new.

Either way, I look forward to hearing from you.

*Yours truly,
Brian Shekeloff*

Returning from vacation, Michael Harner replied to Shekeloff on July 15th. An initial check for \$50 was prepared. Harner’s charge was quite open: “Follow your own judgment in collecting specimens; all the possibilities you mentioned sound fine.” He also sent along the “To Whom It May Concern” letter that the collector had requested, announcing that the bearer was “engaged in making a collection of Japanese ethnological specimens” for the museum and that “any assistance and courtesies which may be extended to him” would be “profoundly appreciated.”



Ancient carpentry tools

left to right:

Planing knife (*yari-ganna*)
(9-9340)

Adze (*chona*)
(9-9335)

Both collected by Brian Shekeloff,
Kyoto.

This style of adze, along with the planing knife and large wide-bladed rip saw, is among the oldest of Japanese woodworking tools. The adze was used for rough finishing the surfaces of pillars and beams and for making hewn planks even. The planing knife was formerly used for the final smoothing. It was replaced by the large family of specialized planes, but has been revived for its ability to produce extraordinarily smooth and water-resistant surfaces.



Straw raincoat (*mino*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9-9142).

Straw raincoats are particularly evocative of rural Japan, where they held out the longest; they are now virtually extinct as daily wear. Generally, they cover the back and sides only, with the front left open so that one can work or carry loads. There are many variations throughout the country, this example uses two tied together.



Rain clogs (*geta*)

Collected by Mrs. Jeremiah Schoenfield, pre-1920 (9-285 a/b).

Shoes were worn only outdoors; this heavily worn pair was used for walking in rain or snow.

Snow boots (*kanjiki* or *yuki-gutsu*)

Yamagata Prefecture (?); collected by Teruko Yone, Tokyo, 1968 (9-5400 a/b).

Like raincoats, snow boots are made of different materials in different techniques and degrees of elaboration throughout Japan, but they are found especially in the northern, wintry regions. They are made of rice straw or split cattail rushes with a kasuri-dyed cotton border, blue or white traditionally associated with males and red with females.



AUGUST 22, 1965

Dear Mike,

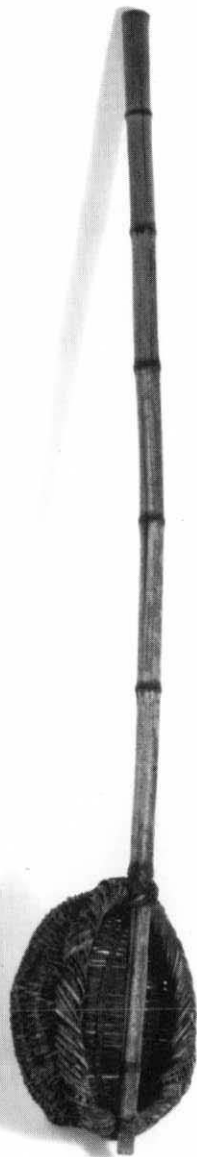
I received your check last week and am now caught up in a flood of conflicts about how best to dispose of it. I've decided to proceed on a case by case basis (museum display case, that is) and, because of friends in the area, have begun on pottery. So far I've rounded up the two main wheel types: the kick and the lever, saggars, shelves, and a kind of container used in the kiln to contain a pot during firing. The various small hand tools used for finishing and decoration are generally fashioned by the potter himself as needed, but I'll pick up some characteristic types. To complete the case I'll get some glazing materials and a selection of major pottery types which differ broadly from area to area. As the money is so limited these latter will necessarily be the smallest, cheapest pot or cup I can find which exemplifies the category.

Other cases I have envisioned include one on traditional clothing. I know the horror of dressing mannequins in native costumes, so I'm not contemplating complete outfits but had in mind rather footwear, which ranges from the straw farmers' sandal to geta to high wooden blocks to woven straw snow-boots in the northern areas. There's also a wide range of head-gear from the conical "coolie-hat" to a hemispherical basket to a tall cylindrical basket worn by monks when begging. This latter rests on the shoulders and completely covers the head. In a nearby town the farmers still wear a costume from the 12th century which could be easily obtained.

In the domestic section a mock-up could easily be made of a rural room using the standard straw matting (available at Cost-Plus), cutting out a square to indicate the ash-filled fire-pit. Above this would be suspended the long wooden or bamboo hook from which the black iron pots are hung. The back panels of the case could readily be made to resemble the sliding paper doors with the addition of a little black paint and the attachment of the inset handles which I could also send. All this would necessarily be symbolic rather than literal, but could rather fairly provide an authentic setting for rural housewares.

In the farming and industry area I'd like not merely to get random tools but, as far as possible, complete sets along with examples of their function. In some cases actual specimens of such work can be obtained, for example, adze-cut fence staves or planed door grooves, along with the tool. Because of the multiplicity of crafts in Japan, I had thought to limit myself to, say farming (perhaps rice and tea) and building. Other industries such as tatami, fishing, weaving, lacquer-ware, and geta would be nice to exhibit but perhaps would be venturing too far from the essential.

I know, of course, that you are not requesting a major exhibition on Japan, but the more thought I give it, the less inclined I am to send you a hundred dollar's worth of unrelated odds and ends which, in all likelihood, would never be exposed to the floodlight of an exhibit-case, and might only provide a minor headache in cataloging and filing.



One other matter occurs to me. I am not very familiar with your Japanese collection. Except for that case I did on cloisonné, all I remember seeing was some armor, a pair of soy-bean grinding stones, and a grass raincoat. If you could give me a better idea of what you already have, I could perhaps fill in a few glaring holes, on the one hand, and avoid duplication on the other.

*I have to also thank you for your letter of introduction. It made me feel rather like a prize-bull but it might be of some use. I've already made contact, through a third-party, with a professor of anthropology at Kyoto University, but in Japan these matters take lots of time and manipulation. So far we've not met, but the machinery grinds slowly on. I also know a young man connected with a temple who would prove most helpful in getting together a ritual case (perhaps birth-marriage-death); the equipment involved is quite decorative, however, and tends to be a bit expensive. The variety is, however, intriguing. At least a dozen different bells with different sounds and meanings. Another possible case would be music. The instruments are very limited—perhaps only ten in all; an assortment of flutes, drums, and plucked strings. Some are indigenous but the *koto* and *shamisen* are from China, and the *biva*, through China from India and Persia, is a brother of the western lute from the same source and remarkably similar considering the space-time factor. I could also send tapes along with the instruments. Such a case, however, would run \$100 by itself and probably approach \$200.*

Yes, I am going to come back! My future plans are far from concrete, but after I finish this collecting, I'll probably pack up and return. Life here has proved more than interesting, and although vastly different from what I anticipated, the rewards have amply justified my coming. However, the infinity of possibility narrows down to a fairly limited actuality, and seeing more or less what's in store, I'm less and less reluctant to leave. I've learned enough of the language to make my way freely through the society (insofar as a foreigner ever can) and enough of the structure of the society to avoid collisions and to see what's happening. The future, however, is grim for artists and anthropologists alike. Inevitably, westernization is burgeoning, and although the transitional phase produces a social dynamism that may intrigue the researcher in such patterns, the destruction and bad taste which results is hardly a source of joy. In the "American age" American values prevail, but away from home they are not tempered by an enlightened minority opposition. Material greed is disguised as technological development and gallops amok through the country (faster in Japan than anywhere in the world). And the culture's turning into a museum, and an ill-kept one at that. The crafts are going, the tools are going, the arts are going, the language is going. For the time being, old reactionary curators cling to a corner of the perishing fabric, but they, if not yet dead, are paralyzed and will thoroughly rigidify and crumble away. Another generation will no doubt produce its "Williamsburgs" and its "houses where Hideyoshi slept" and the beaded-belt mentality will suck money in every tourist trap. Of course, it can't be helped, but I don't have to like it.

I look forward to your comments on my collecting plans, and, rank amateur that I am, would gladly accept any advice you can offer on how best to proceed and what to look for or record in terms of anthropological data. I know that the saddest words in a museum are "provenance unknown."

*Yours truly (with minor flaws),
Brian Shekeloff*

note: Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-98) was one of the shogun generals who unified Japan in the last years of the sixteenth century.

Opposite Page:

**Basket for donations
(zeniatsume)**

Collected by Brian Shekeloff from a secondhand shop, Takayama, Gifu Prefecture (9-9152).

Although this basket appears to be some kind of household item, it was, in fact, used at meetings by village elders to collect donations. Most affairs in village life were settled collectively.

Bowl grinder (suribachi)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto (9-9276).

A common household implement, these typically brown glazed ceramics were used for crushing and grinding items like sesame seeds or beans. They might also be used to crush bean curd cakes.



SEPTEMBER 20, 1965

Dear Mike,

After a hectic month of literally ransacking Kyoto, I'm now the temporary possessor of almost a hundred various rusty implements and a composite vocabulary which is possibly unique in the world. The Japanese are an incredibly and exasperatingly provincial people. Because of the post-war brainwashing, the younger generation is all but ignorant of its traditions and the older people know only such information as is pertinent to their admittedly restricted lives. Consequently the research problem is damned difficult. So far I have at least the generic name of everything and have established the function of at least 90% of the specimens. Where I've had a choice, I've chosen an old specimen simply on the aesthetics alone. Often, however, there were no recent examples, as Japan is rapidly converting piecemeal to polyethylene and aluminum. On the other hand, as in the straw sandals and hats of farmers, used items are simply not available, so I've picked up new ones.

Strangely enough, the competition is sometimes intense. First there are the tourist curio buyers who drive prices beyond all reason, then there are the Japanese themselves who have long nurtured a curator's temperament. The tea-ceremony aficionados prize old kitchen pots and will pay literally thousands of dollars for an old rice cooker. Thus the most expensive item I've bought so far, an old water pot, cost over \$4, which may not seem much to you but is way out of line comparatively speaking. The flower-arrangement folk also like old pots, and the movie people buy everything in sight for samurai movie props.

Fortunately, the competition tends to patronize the more well-known junk-shops, so that by slumming I've managed to avoid most of the unreasonable prices. Alas, some items simply must be paid for. In the rural house there was a central fire-pit over which hung a pot hook. These hooks were beautiful affairs and come in two distinct styles. One of them is a long bamboo tube in which a sliding rod is inserted and locked in place with a carved wooden fish (see A). The other is a huge wooden hook from which is hung a rope with a heavy bar lock (see B). The design of this bar is fairly constant and no doubt is a relevant shape. If I am to assemble even a skeleton group of rural household implements, I feel one each of these pothooks is essential, but since they are highly desired as decorative accessories in hip Tokyo apartments, the price is \$20 on up for a decent specimen. I have asked my favorite old yokel to hunt one up for me and if he finds one it should be cheaper, but even so it's expensive enough to question if you approve.

So far I have collected the following:

Pottery:

Two wheels (foot type & hand type), kiln-shelves, posts, saggars, various small hand tools.



Nose-ring for an ox (*hanagi*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto (9-9283).

Oxen, one of the few draft animals used in traditional Japanese agriculture, were kept for pulling plows, not for their milk and meat. Spending most of their time in the barn, they were principally used twice a year—at the planting of rice and wheat, in the spring and fall.



Adjustable pot-hanger
(*jizai-kagi*)
Collected by Julia Roth, 1965
(9-6311).

This metal and bamboo cooking hook was used to hang pots over the sunken hearth (*irori*). A fish was a traditional motif for the wooden adjuster, its water associations acting as a magical protection against fire. This example may be a sea bream, associated with happiness and good fortune. The carp, another popular design, was a sign of courage, perseverance, and success.

Household:

Main rice, water & veg. cauldrons, well-wheel and buckets, strainer, pillows (ceramic & wood), scales, mat-beater, two irons, strainer.

Carpentry:

Five saws, seven chisels (all old style), 2 adzes, two drills, an awl, a chopper.

Farming:

Three hats, three prs. sandals, three saws, two hoes, a nose-ring, a manure ladle, a spade, an ax, a sickle, a lock, 2 prs. snow cleats, a grain hamper, a reel.

Lumbering:

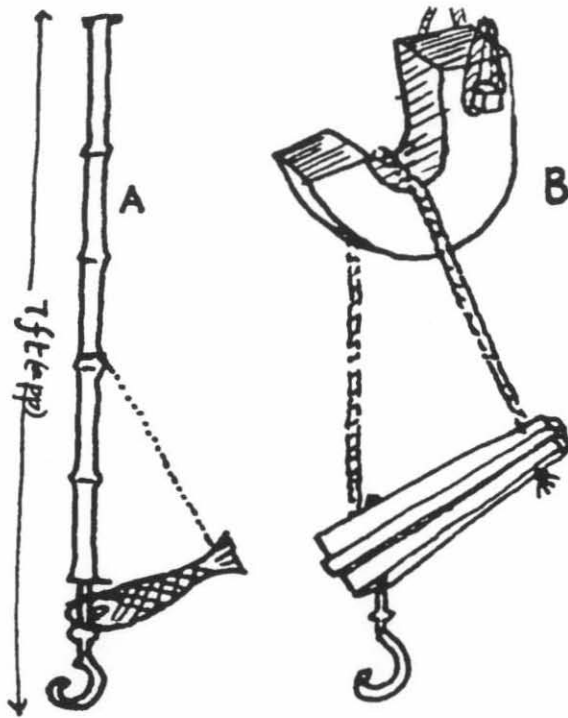
Ax, saw, bark strippers.

Trade:

2 scales, two hand-hooks, vise, bellows, an herbalist's mill.

Miscellaneous:

Water pump, saké bucket, monk's staff, iron pot for grave offerings, flower-making tools, fishing net and gaff hook.

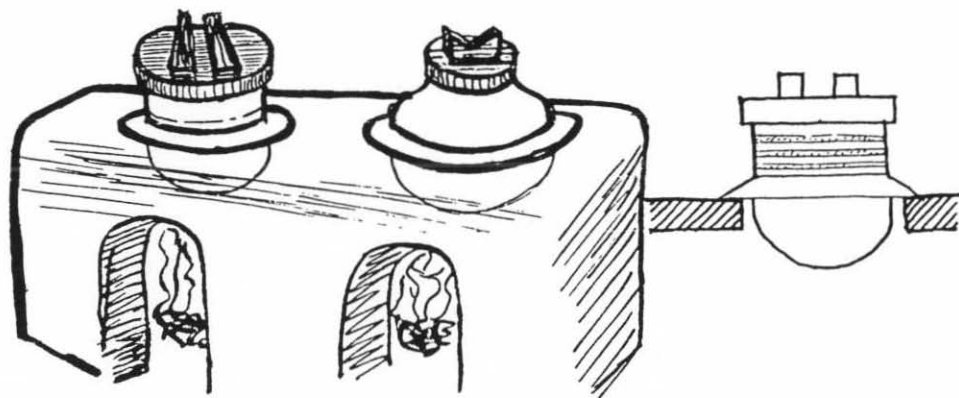




**Cauldron or cooking pot
(kama)**

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9-9273 a/b).

Cast-iron pots with wooden lids were perhaps the most essential cooking utensil, used for heating water or cooking rice and other foods. The distinctive flange allows the kettle to sit in the top of a clay or brick oven (*kamado*). This was probably the "old water pot," the most expensive item purchased by Shekeloff (for \$4).



In the immediate future, I have in mind a set of planes and mallets to complete the carpentry section, a few rakes and hoes and threshing baskets for farming, a set of traditional measuring boxes for rice and saké trade, plus the sacks and barrels in which these latter are kept. For the household there are the hooks I mentioned, plus the Shinto kitchen shrine and the Buddhist living room shrine with its various ancestor-memorial accouterments; ladles, tubs, buckets, and pots which transfer the rice, soup, tea, and vegetables from the kitchen to the "table," and perhaps a basic set of "table" utensils. I would very much like to assemble a basic ritual case—at least marriage, which is colorfully Shinto, and death, which is somberly Buddhist. Conspicuous by its absence is tea cultivation. This is carried on in Uji, not far from here, and next week I'm going to look into it. Fishing, also a major traditional industry, would require travel to a coastal town.

My total expenditure so far is about \$55, so you see, the market is not so bad if one is not foolish. Frankly, when I survey the mass of stuff I've assembled I feel quite heroic. I have hesitated about a couple of items which I've located in a small village near here. One is a hand-loom and the other's a plow. As machines rapidly encroach, such items are destroyed daily, usually for fire-wood. I think I can get them quite cheaply, but I wonder if you'd object to their size. They could probably be disassembled for shipping and would look great in the exhibition hall. The loom standing would be around 5' x 4' x 3', the plow, about 5' long and 3' at its widest point. I can see about getting the loom strung up and a fabric started, as I know a weaver who'd probably oblige. What do you think?

The more involved I get in this business, the more convinced I become that a major exhibit on domestic Japanese life would be not only exciting and timely, but quite easy and cheap. Most people see Japan in terms of paper, straw, and bamboo, but it is far from a tropical area. Its winters are severe, and its crafts are strong and vital. The ironware and tools are particularly impressive in their honesty and simple forcefulness, and strike the uninitiated as quite "un-Japanese." The nineteenth century discovery of Japan was really a

discovery of the samurai class with its armor, swords, lacquerware, cloisonné, brocades, and similar finery. The merchant and peasant culture was generally ignored, and the whole popular concept of Japan in the west became distorted as a result. Thus, when I saw a pair of grind-stones in the Lowie basement, I asked Frank Norick what they were. He guessed they were Northern European—perhaps medieval—and it seemed to me a reasonable guess. When I saw them here, I was very surprised at first at their “foreignness” but not any longer. As a non-anthropologist, I feel sure that the general public—including the student-body—has little idea of basic Japanese culture. Fortunately for the museum, the society was officially rigidified for 300 years so that the items available today differ very slightly from those of centuries past. Since the war, however, and particularly since the industrial boom of the past ten years, these implements are disappearing with a rapidity which must be seen to be appreciated. Only last year I saw ox-drawn plows in my neighborhood. This year, it’s all diesel tractors. Wooden pails, in general use five years ago, are no longer to be found. Blue plastic buckets shine from the yoke of the farmer, while the old ones are reduced to ash under his bath tub. Soon anything flammable will have gone, so if you want anything I’ve not indicated please let me know.

I had also thought of taking photographs of such items as I can find in use. Depending on their quality, they could be used either as reference material for display or in the cases themselves. For example, the classical rice and water pots have rings around them which are flanges to hold them on a stove with cut-out circles. The pots themselves look a bit strange out of context as they don’t stand up but roll around on their round bottoms. Photographs would help both for display and explanation in such cases.

Well, that about brings me up to date. Regards to all,

*Yours truly,
Brian Shekeloff*

On November 5th, Harner responded to Shekeloff’s reports, apologizing that he “had been hoping to write you a letter worthy of the fantastic job you are doing of collecting and documenting,” and explaining that he had been prevented by the common “pile of work on my desk.” He enclosed a check for all that could be spared from the field collections fund: \$67.86. Realizing the value of Shekeloff’s documentation, he wrote: “Your letters are outstanding in detail, so they will be included in the accession envelopes when the collection eventually arrives.” Although he expressed the hope that “the exhibit you envision for the materials will become a reality within a year after the collection arrives,” this would not occur until two decades later.

DECEMBER 27, 1965

Dear Mike,

The collection is slowly drawing to a close; not in terms of adequacy but rather that there's little money left. I'm down to the last few dollars which I'm jealously guarding to fill a hole or purchase a sudden treasure. The Japanese academic world has proved no help at all. To them, the word anthropology means apes and skull measuring, and although they have a term for cultural anthropology, it refers pretty much to Africa or the south seas. Naturally, there are those who study and those who are studied, and the latter carries by far the lesser status. Bernard Leach, the British potter, was somewhat successful in preserving the folk-craft tradition, but it's been perverted into temporal souvenir production—everything gets miniaturized for use as an ashtray or letter-holder. Anyway, this folk-art enjoys some vogue among the educated or fashion-conscious set, but it has little to do with the things I've tried to find and often destroys communication, as people immediately assume it's that that I'm interested in.

All of this leads to the next matter of research. I'm afraid it's going to end up rather spotty as some things can be fairly well documented, whereas others will perhaps bear little more than a name. I suppose this is always a problem of museum work, but I had never realized it quite so intensely. I keep feeling guilty that I can't assemble the same size paragraph for each entry. Obviously, I can keep the things here indefinitely, hoping to glean a trifle more information about this pot or that shovel. I wonder then when I should send it to you. Are you expecting a fairly quiet period when receipt would be most convenient, or is any time in the foreseeable future equally hectic? If you can place a deadline on my musings it will at least make my task finite.

You mentioned in your letter that there would be more funds available in the summer. Since I'm necessarily faced with the problem of when to return, I wonder how much this would be. Last week I visited a shrine near here just in time to view the smoking cinders of a fine collection. Since then I've been overwhelmed with the possibility of assembling an exhibition on Shinto, about which so little is known in the U.S. Despite the hue and cry about Zen and other Buddhist sects, Shinto plays a far greater role in the lives of the Japanese people, and its accouterments and regalia are extensive enough to make a stunning exhibition. Unlike the Buddhists, who tend to preserve and glorify antiquities and relics, Shinto continually discards and renews. In the home, the Buddhist altar is of hardwood, heavily gilded, and outfitted with elegant and expensive lacquer and engraved brass implements, while the central figure may be a priceless iconographic sculpture. In severe contrast, the Shinto counterpart is made of unfinished soft white pine. The equipment is often unglazed pottery, straw, and paper—the cheapest materials available, although the design and craftsmanship is exquisite beyond the rococo of Buddhism. The effect is light and pure, and the colors tend to

**Miniature paper kimono**

From the collection of Susan York,
Miyama-cho, Kyoto Prefecture, 1989.

This talisman had to be installed in the Shinto shrine of an indigo dyer before the first vat of the new year could be used. It remained there until it was replaced the following year.

Miniature shrine (*zushi*)

Takayama, Gifu Prefecture;
late nineteenth century.

**Figurine of god of food
(*Ebisu*) and god of wealth
(*Daikoku*)**

Late nineteenth century; all from the
collection of Mary Olive.

The Shinto home altar (*kami-dana* or "spirit shelf") is often placed above the doorway in the entry or an outer room. Generally much simpler than a Buddhist altar, it holds a flower, incense, and rice bowl for offerings. Although Shinto spirits are immaterial, a small figurine of a Buddhist guardian or god may also be placed there. The Seven Lucky Gods or Seven Gods of Good Fortune—derived from all the religions of Japan, but mostly from Buddhism—became popular as a set in the seventeenth century. Each is characterized by some easily recognized physical feature and an associated object or animal. Two of them, *Ebisu* and *Daikoku*, became a popular pair of household gods in the late fifteenth century and were often displayed in the kitchen. *Ebisu*, the only native, Shinto god, is known for his sea bream fish, while *Daikoku*, of Buddhist origin, stands on rice bales and carries a sack of treasures over his shoulder.



brilliance rather than the somber hues of Buddhism. It's hardly surprising that Shinto handles birth and marriage and leaves the business of death and interment to the Buddhists. The main shrine of Shinto is at Ise and has been universally praised as perhaps Japan's finest architectural work. It is indeed impressive and quite foreign-looking, as it is not influenced by the Chinese styles which Buddhism brought to Japan. Typical of Shinto, it is completely destroyed and rebuilt on a neighboring site every twenty years, so that the oldest building in Japan is also one of the newest. Similarly, the home shrines are also periodically destroyed (albeit ritually), hence the ashes I witnessed last week. It would appear, however, that this ritual burning is not inviolable; when I explained to the priest my purpose, he advised me to rush on down to the burning site, as there might be time to salvage something—alas, it was too late.

Shinto has also preserved the court-music and dances of a thousand years ago with its costumes and instruments. These dances are forbears of Noh and Kabuki. Its gods are legion, ranging from Amaterasu, the great sky-shining deity [Sun Goddess], to a local tree or funny shaped rock. Its imagery is quite varied; some shrines are flanked by lions, some by reclining bulls, some by foxes, messengers of the underworld. Further, from the viewpoint of a museum, this iconography is relatively cheap compared to the priceless treasures of Buddhism. Another aspect well worthy of exhibition are the paintings which are presented to the shrines for the deities' favor. Originally shrines were also the keepers of horses and live horses were presented, later *emma* (lit. picture horse) were substituted and developed into a fresh and beautiful native art which has only recently begun to attract some interest among scholars. All in all, Shinto could result in an exhibition as vivid and exciting in its own way as the New Guinea show, and since it is one institution, could be much more thoroughly documented, thus satisfying those who place knowledge above vision. Ideally, perhaps, a Religions of Japan show, contrasting Buddhism and Shinto, would be an immortal event, but I fear you'll never have the funds—and those who have won't do it. If you approve of assembling a Shinto exhibition please let me know the extent of funds available in July so that I can begin, in a small way, with my own money now. If it comes to only \$100 or so I'm afraid we'll have to scrap the idea as such limited funds make systematic collection impossible. The things one must obtain to complete a section have to be paid for at a higher price than the bargains one begins the section with. Necessity changes the buyer's market into a seller's, and the more you need something, the higher it is.

If you can't come up with say \$500, it'd be better to merely expand the present general collection. I'll send you the photographs I've taken ahead of the specimens (perhaps in a month or so) so you'll have an idea of what you are and aren't getting. I visited and photographed a local exhibition of tools and such last month but it was paltry compared to the stuff I'm sending and hope to send. It did help, however, in naming some of the more obscure items I've picked up. Even a two syllable name is enough to overjoy me these days.

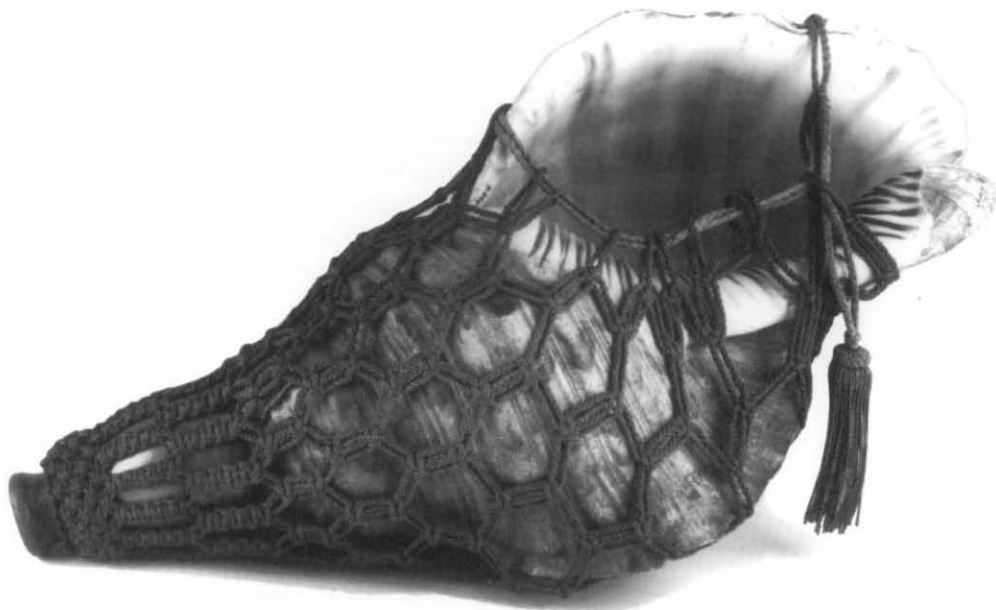
Whether we continue the present collection or do one on Shinto, I'm thinking seriously of returning this

fall. Since I'm dependent on the academic year for illustration work, if I don't return in September or October, it'll mean staying another year which, short of a specific, paying project, I'm not inclined to do. Do you know whether anyone in the department would welcome the return of the prodigal illustrator? I'd appreciate it very much if you could let me know of any possible work as I'll be landing penniless and in dire need of immediate income.

Please convey my best regards to the staff at this auspicious time of the winter solstice and saturnalia.

*Yours truly,
Brian Shekeloff*

On January 5th, Harner responded to Shekeloff's query concerning employment; despite several possibilities, nothing was imminent. Harner and director William Bascom were quite impressed with "the quality of your work and the obvious opportunity" of making the Shinto collection. Superseding the usual \$200 limit on field funds, they drew up a check for \$500, quite a large amount for the Museum in those days. In a postscript, Harner asked if Gary Snyder was "still interested in making the Buddhist monastery collection?" Harner might have encountered Snyder during the 1964-65 academic year, when the poet was teaching English at the University.



Shell trumpet (*horagai*)

Collected for the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893 (9-8966).

Large triton shells have been used in Japan for centuries as war trumpets, signal sounders, assembly callers in mountain villages, and for exorcising evil spirits by Buddhist mountain priests (*yamabushi*). Before the modern era, itinerant *yamabushi* were often the only Buddhist priests who visited remote villages.

MARCH 2, 1966

Dear Mike,

Perhaps my last letter to you was somewhat hasty, but on the other hand you usually take so long to reply and you did say that there'd be no money available until July so my prematurity is in part defensible. Surprised and pleased with the amount you speedily forwarded, I threw myself into an intense investigation of Shinto only to emerge completely daunted. In short, it's a complete mess. From its folk origins, Shinto has been periodically inflated into a political football throughout Japanese history. Originally it was merely a scattering of localized customs. Then, with the introduction of Buddhism from China, the anti-Buddhist elements tried to make it a worthy competitor by imitating structural and ritual forms from the invader. Of course, Buddhism prevailed and gradually absorbed Shinto into its theology. Since its strongest hold was imperial divinity, the Tokugawa shogunate put it down and it almost was lost in syncretic absorption.

Its appearance today is due largely to the restoration of imperial rule in 1868. The Meiji court raised it from near oblivion to a status above all other religions. The priesthood became a government ministry and all priests were salaried civil servants. Although the Shrine-Temple dichotomy is usually clear today, it was not so a century ago and the Meiji government had a hard time deciding which was which, such was the state of overlap. On the other hand, there has been a tendency, historically, to call all non-Buddhist intrusions "Shinto." Thus on top of the complexity of a religion amalgamated from many variant local customs, there's also the addition of Chinese, Korean, and even Indian non-Buddhist deities, customs, and beliefs.

The artificial, albeit political, unity imposed by Meiji was scrapped by the U.S. occupation government and subsequent attempts to reorganize have met with little success. Thus, as it stands today, every little shrine is a separate institution with its own deity and customs. Of course some things are held in common, such as the priests' costumes (patterned after court officials of the Heian period) and the emphasis on purification, but the diversity of images and practices is overwhelming.

As you see, Shinto would make a fascinating religio-political study but as an exhibition, it defies intelligent collection. After much trouble I was finally introduced to a dealer in Shinto implements. For several hours he showed me what I thought were merely conversational curios. It took me a long time to realize that a copy of a Chinese belt with small squares of slate attached was actually a religious item. The rationale is that it was worn by imperial messengers as a sign of rank; and as the dispatching of a courier by the emperor was equivalent to a divine act, the emperor being the deity, the belt (or rather copies of it) assumed awesome qualities. Similarly, any item even remotely connected with the court becomes hallowed, and many of the festivals are no more than historical pageants or costume parades.

One last thing needs to be said. The prices of such items are astronomical. Awe comes high. It would be



**Miniature saké cask
(saka-daru)**

Private collection.

Saké, rice wine, is perhaps the most important Shinto ritual offering. Rows of large casks are set up at shrines; smaller versions, such as this, are used as gifts and as offerings on family altars, especially around the New Year. The straw-covered container is ceramic, not wood, and the "X" marking is a stylization of the character for rice.

difficult to justify the purchase of contemporary copies of questionable items at such rates, and the range is so limitless that a representative sampling seems impossible. Further, such an exhibition would necessarily involve comment on the imperial role in Shinto, a subject that this young democracy finds extremely controversial. Imperial Shinto is far from dead, and the rightists are continually agitating for its expansion. This seems to exceed somewhat the confines of anthropology.

I had thought of turning to home Shinto and home Buddhism which would nicely contrast the aesthetics of the implement which I mentioned in my last letter. This is still a possibility but wouldn't amount to much again because of the expense of such items. The home shrine of Buddhism is handed down through the main branch of each family, so they are rarely purchased and are not readily available secondhand. A medium range one would cost all, if not more, than you sent me. Consequently I'd have to assemble items somewhat smaller and shoddier than those usually used.

Which brings me to the last possibility. You asked if Gary [Snyder] was still interested in doing a collection of Zendo implements. When I relayed the query he protested that he was too busy for such time-consuming work, but that he'd be glad to help me with documentation, and would ask some of his associates in the Zen clergy to assist me in such work. Zen, unlike other sects, tends to keep its equipment down to a minimum, which makes a complete collection quite feasible. For me this is a much more satisfying prospect than the morass of Shinto paraphernalia, and since many of the items are held in common by all sects, there are enough specimens available to allow for some discriminate selection in terms of quality. Gary and I took a preliminary jaunt through the junk shops last week, but as I am not yet familiar with the market I resisted any purchases. Also I didn't want to begin until I had told you of the change in plan. If I don't hear from you to the contrary, I'll begin in a few weeks.

*Yours sincerely,
Brian Shekeloff*

Acknowledging the problems in making a Shinto collection in a letter of March 23rd, Michael Harner authorized Shekeloff and Snyder to make a Zen collection with \$100 of the funds.

MAY 5, 1966

Dear Mike,

I again must apologize for my constant vacillation, but I'm afraid the Zendo collection must also be abandoned. The reason is ultimately the same as in the Shinto case: insufficient funds. Even a fundamental set of equipment would cost most, if not all, of your \$500. I spent a day last week in the company of a professor from a noted Buddhist university visiting various religious implement suppliers. Even with his laudatory introduction, the prices offered were not cheap: \$120 for the large bell; \$100 for the wooden fish-drum; \$60 for the hanging bell; \$15, \$15, and \$20 for the small bells, respectively; \$75 for the incense burner; etc. As you see, there'd be little sense in sending you \$400 and keeping the rest. I'd be writing for more immediately.

One other consideration looms important. Religion persists, and although the quality of its implements will decline and the prices incline even further, they'll always be available. On the contrary, the folk tools I've assembled will very quickly be unobtainable at any price. More than half of the items have completely fallen out of use and many of the rest are only used in remote areas where industrial technology has been slow to penetrate. I think you'll agree that since funds are so limited it's best that they be used for such items.

Several months ago I met two men from Kyoto Prefectural Museum who were delighted to see my collection and since have been of great help to me both in documentation and in suggesting sources whence I might obtain further specimens. As they may well prove of further help, I would like to keep \$100 so that I can take advantage of such leads. The remainder I will return immediately and if any of the \$100 is unused I will, of course, return it when I close the collection and ship it this autumn or thereabouts. Let me know if this is O.K. with you.

The main collection expands slowly. Yesterday, a trip to Gifu yielded a ladle and a back-pack. The Japanese hold farm-tools in contempt (unless they're the latest diesel tractors) and laugh openly at the sight of a blond foreigner lugging around such filth. Like them, I have learned to pretend I don't notice my social environment. Incidentally, in some cases I have had to pay for transportation of large items to my house. Should I consider such part of the cost of the items or do you to prefer to pay from other funds? Although, it amounts to no more than \$10.

Very sincerely,
Brian Shekeloff



**Back-pack carrier
(*shoibashigo*)**

Collected by Brian Shekeloff from a farmer, Gifu Prefecture (9-9305).

Most loads were carried by human labor. This homemade back support was used by men and women for carrying loads such as firewood.

In his May 24th letter, Harner expressed disappointment with the problems of making the Zendo collection and told Shekeloff to “continue folk tool collecting,” adding that “we are really looking forward to seeing the specimens this fall.” On October 26th, a new party entered the correspondence—Albert B. Elsasser, Assistant Research Anthropologist at the Museum. He reported that Harner had left Berkeley for a year of teaching at Columbia University. Before he left, he gave Elsasser “a summary of your collection career in Japan, during which he mentioned some possible loose ends.” Accordingly, Elsasser was writing for “an up-to-date idea of your plans,” primarily so that the Museum could estimate potential shipping costs.

NOVEMBER 23, 1966

Dear Al,

I'm not sure which "loose ends" you're referring to regarding my collecting. It seems to be the nature of the matter that the more one collects, the more loose ends one creates, as new areas and styles open up and new information becomes available. Of course, it's an endless task. One can't gather, pack, and ship a whole culture intact, and so the loose ends that extend in all directions must be radically cut whether doing so at any particular place or time is scholastically defensible or not.

I had intended to return this fall, but as I was unable to persuade either the museum or the department that I might once again prove useful to them, it was economically impossible for me to come back. Summer in Japan is just too deadly to attempt anything other than sweating and gasping one's way through it, so until this autumn, most work on the collection ceased. Last month I began again and am, at present, awaiting a shipment of a hearth from the mountain village of Takayama. It's an area well-known for ethnographic material and unfortunately rather too well exploited and price-conscious. Still I managed to round up some rather nice pieces. I have one more lead to another village in Hyogo prefecture which may prove a gold-mine or a desert. I intend to check it out in the next couple of weeks and that will be the end. (The end, not in any logical or professional sense, merely a cessation.)

By the end of this year I should manage to get everything crated and on the pier. I'm afraid I can give you no indication of how much this will cost, and I don't know whether your voucher will prove acceptable to Japanese transportation companies or if I'll have to lay out the cash for you. I'll let you know these things as soon as I find out. I'm sorry I can't satisfy your queries more substantially, but until I have all the material assembled, I can't do anything concerning shipping and packing estimates. I should imagine that it'll take about 3 months from my house to the museum, so you can roughly anticipate delivery some time in the spring.

I am now speculating on returning next year, when and if I can locate some kind of work. Naturally I feel an intimacy with this collection and would like to assist in the research, documentation, and exhibiting of it if I'm in Berkeley when such work begins.

My plans for the future are less than settled, but it has occurred to me that having worked as an illustrator, museum artist, researcher, and collector of ethnographic specimens that I might well consider taking a masters' in museum business (or whatever they call it), perhaps using this collection as a thesis. I don't know if this is possible or not. Other present fantasies include graduate work in anthro proper, Far Eastern studies, or linguistics, all of which appeal after my three years over here. Until I investigate these possibilities more thoroughly, however, I can tell you little more of my plans.

Again, I'm sorry I can't answer your questions more precisely. When I get everything sorted and ready for shipment, I'll send you a detailed assessment of what to expect and give you as definite information as I can regarding costs and schedules.

*Yours sincerely,
Brian Shekeloff*

Elsasser's reply of December 7th dealt mainly with possibilities for Shekeloff's future education or employment.



Short sickle (takegama)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff in a secondhand store, Kyoto (9-9306).

Spade/hoe (kuwa)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto (9-9294).

The sickle is perhaps the most emblematic tool of the farmer in Japanese art. Although this example was used to cut bamboo, farmers employed similar short-handled sickles, in a bent-over position, to harvest rice stalks. This tool was hand forged by a professional blacksmith. Another classic farmer's tool is the hoe, associated mainly with wheat and other dry-field crops; the farmer broke up earth or cleared out irrigation ditches with it. This factory-made example served for raking and piling straw. Popular in the Meiji period (1868-1912), it is no longer used.



Foot warmer (*kotatsu*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9-9286).

Frames, either wooden or ceramic, were placed over a small heater. People would cover the frame with a cloth or quilt and place their legs under the quilt, thereby trapping the heat. This is a portable version.

MAY 2, 1967

Dear Al,

No doubt you have received the collection of tools and household goods which I shipped to you a couple of months ago. I trust it arrived in no worse condition than age and the Japanese climate had already imposed on it. I had expected to hear from you acknowledging its arrival, but I assume you've been busy with your forthcoming African exhibition.

Once again, as is our annual practice, we are making plans to return. This time, however, it seems more definite than ever, and we have reserved passage for the end of July. By mid-summer I should know whether or not I'll be financially able to even transport myself and family to the threshold of poverty.

Either way, I should be in Berkeley around the middle of August and will certainly drop in the museum to see you if you're still there. Is Mike back from Columbia yet? Please drop me a line on the present developments. Also, I have a random collection of data on the tools which I assume you might want to see.

*Yours,
Brian*

On May 10th, Frank Norick, Museum Anthropologist, informed Shekeloff that the shipment had never arrived at the Museum, and a few days later (May 23), Elsasser reiterated their growing concern. [He added the news that Harner would be remaining in New York.]



Planes

left to right:

Corner groove plane
(*kakumizo kanna*) (9-9183)

Plane (*hira soridai kanna*)
(9-9188)

Molding plane
(*marumentori-ganna*) (9-9192)

All collected by Brian Shekeloff,
Kyoto.

Smoothing planes, the largest family of Japanese carpentry tools, are used to produce the final finish for wood that will typically be neither sanded nor painted.



Wooden tub (*oke*)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9-9127).

With open slats, a hole in the bottom, and a block of wood inside, this bucket was probably used to make pickles, which are usually pressed down by a weight. With some pickles, such as those made with salt, there is an initial stage of letting the liquid drain out. It may also have been used to make bean curd (*tofu*) or fermented soybean paste (*miso*).

JUNE 13, 1967

Dear Al,

I was quite surprised to read Frank's note and called the shipper immediately. I asked him what had happened to the stuff he'd taken three months ago, and he replied, "sumimasen." No doubt you'd appreciate a translation of this cryptic response, and I wish I could supply it. Unfortunately it's one of those all-purpose words for which there is no real counterpart in English and probably in no other language either. It may mean "Please," "Thank-you," "Hello," "Good-bye," "yes," "no," or any one of the innumerable exchanges which take place between people. It tends to indicate that all is not right in the relationship, that obligation may be assumed to exist on behalf of one or both parties. I repeated this word with hysterical, rising intonation which only caused him to chant it incessantly, splicing an "honorable sage!" at various intervals.

It turned out that everything was right here in Kyoto. There was a problem about what category the shipment would fall under. Since I didn't have an exporter's license I would have to send everything as personal property. There was, of course, a way around such difficulties, as there always is here. It was necessary to dig up some old receipts from the bank showing that I had purchased such material with money which had originally been U.S. dollars and therefore was not depleting the national wealth of Japan. Anyway, it's all taken care of now and will sail on the 19th of June aboard the President Taylor, thus you should receive it some time in the first week of July. I trust that this time my information is correct.

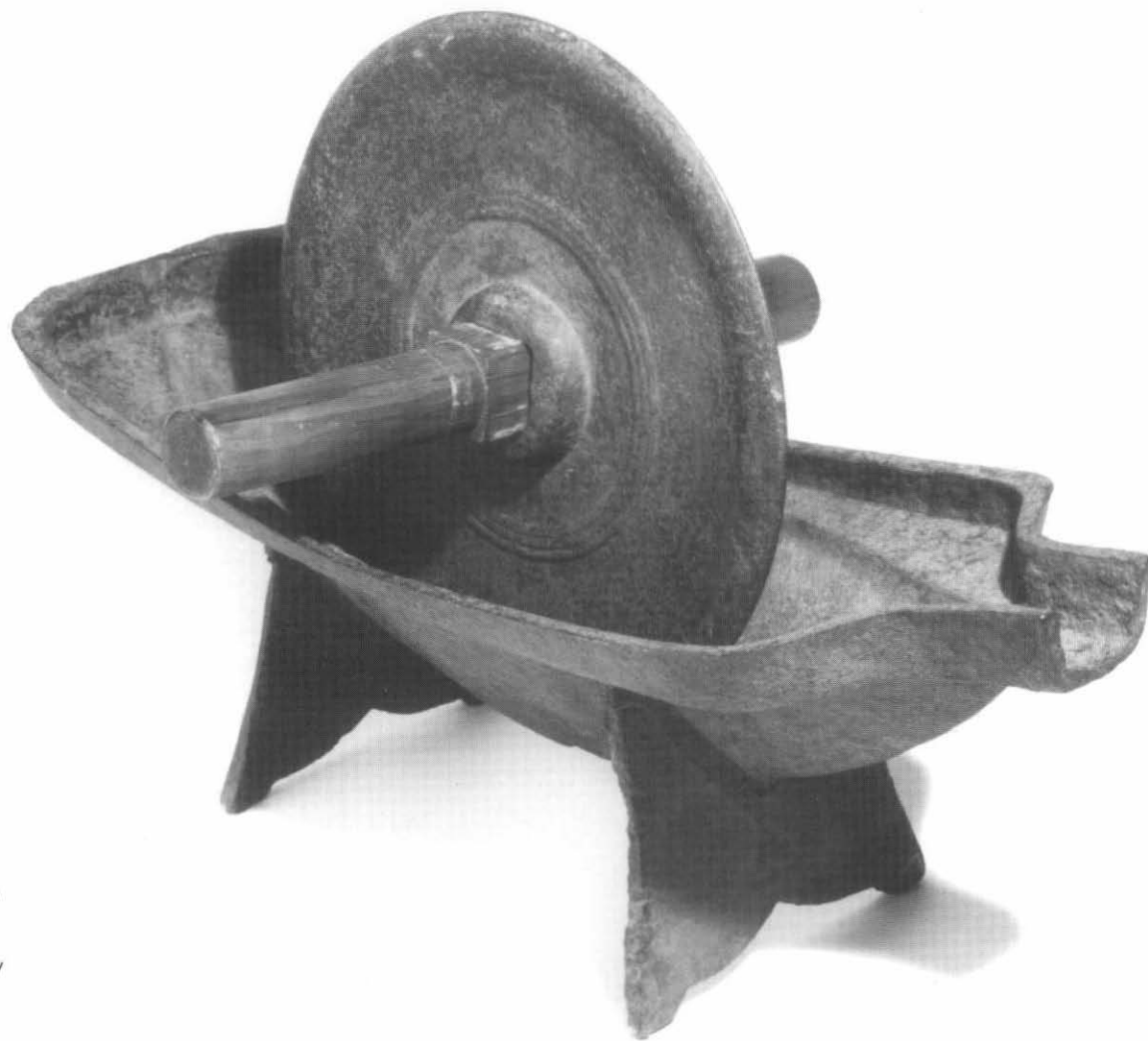
I should arrive in California at the beginning of August and will come to see you shortly thereafter.

I've undertaken to pay for the packing and shipping expenses at this end rather than sending the collection C.O.D. I don't suppose it makes any real difference to the university, and I had to pay for the packing and transportation to the dock, anyway; so I elected to settle the whole thing as it proves an indirect way of converting yen to dollars and saves me the troubles of trying to round up U.S. cash now that I'm about to leave. I don't know the exact amount yet (Japan requires infinite trust and patience), but I was able to squeeze from the packer a reluctant confession that the total cost would be closer to ¥200,000 than ¥100,000 (that is, closer to \$560 than \$280). I realize that such a margin hardly constitutes what we might call an estimate, but, you know He said the bill of lading should be released about the 24th or 25th of June, at which time we'd be able to determine the exact cost.

When I discover something further, I'll let you know.

Sumimasen, Brian

Determining that "the shipment was not aboard the President Taylor," the Museum sent a cable (July 21) and a follow up letter (July 27th) to the collector.



Medicine grinder (yagen)

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9-9278a/b).

This mortar and pestle was used by
the pharmacist to grind Chinese-
style herbal medicines to a fine
powder.



**Cultivator or rotary weeder
(tagakiguruma)**

Collected by Brian Shekeloff from a
tool shop, Kyoto (9-9304).

Farmers used this device for catching
and removing weeds from rice fields.
The rotary wheel style was invented
in the 1880s when the government
encouraged farmers to plant rice in
parallel rows. It has now been
replaced by a mechanized version.

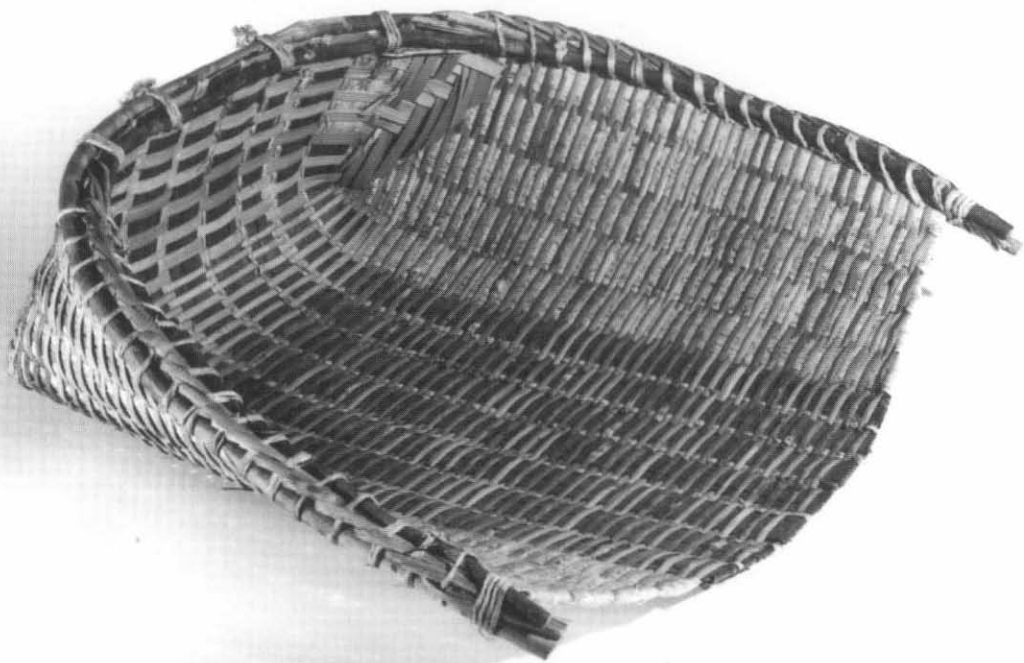
JULY 22, 1967

Dear Frank,

Sorry to cause you so much work. I believe the shipper and packer is some kind of psychopath, but that's what happens in a culture where human feelings are valued above objective fact. Well, after a long series of polite treacheries I do think I have finally obtained a verifiable story: The tools were sent aboard the Asoharu Maru on July 12th. Volume: 305 cu./ft. Wt: 2318 lbs. Case Nos. 1-2, bearing mark LMA. Probable date of arrival: July 27±. There, doesn't that sound credible? If he's lying again I'll demand to see the color of his bowels!

I'll arrive in the bay-area in early August, and will drop by to see you shortly thereafter.

Sumimasen,
Brian Shekeloff



Bamboo winnower (mi)
Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Kyoto
(9-9140).

Winnowers separate the lighter chaff (hulls) from the heavier rice or barley grains. A home product, they were a very common farm implement, employed for general tasks, such as carrying seeds, scooping grains, or processing mulberry leaves.

Weaving implements

left to right:

Fulling mallet (*kinuta*)

(9-9261)

Yarn winder (*itoguruma*)

(9-9107)

Nettle fiber yarn (*irakusa*)

(9-9325)

Shuttle (*hi*) (9-9175)

Spindle whorl (*tsumu*)

(9-9338)

All collected by Brian Shekeloff,
Kyoto.

This is a selection from a fairly complete range of weaving implements, including a large loom, collected by Shekeloff. The heavy mallet was used by country women to pound newly woven cloth, which served to thicken and soften it. The domestic yarn winder, also called a swift, holds the yarn so that it can be wound off into a skein. Nettle was one of the bast fibers widely used before cotton became common. This smaller shuttle was used to pass the weft thread through the shed of the jibata framed backstrap loom. The drop spindle was used to twist thread until the introduction of the spinning wheel in the fifteenth century.





**Lidded basket, for keeping
rice warm (*tsugura*)**

Collected by Brian Shekeloff, Shiga
Prefecture (9-9117).

Large Japanese families needed a big
container to keep the rice tub
(*meshibitsu*) warm. Made of rice-
straw coils, this basket was
commercially manufactured.

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This catalogue, containing 35 black and white photographs, accompanies the Hearst Museum's exhibition:

BACK ROADS TO FAR TOWNS: FOLK ART OF RURAL JAPAN

(September 1, 1994 through June 12, 1995)

Included is a comprehensive introductory essay reviewing a century of interest—in both Japan and America—in the folk culture of Japan, followed by a series of revealing and entertaining letters written by the Museum's collector who gathered traditional Japanese crafts in Kyoto during the mid-1960s.

IRA JACKNIS, Associate Research Anthropologist at the Hearst Museum, is curator of the exhibition BACK ROADS TO FAR TOWNS. With a long-time passion for Japanese folk culture, he has a particular interest in the history of anthropology, especially the relationship of anthropology to the arts.

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