



## **NEW TRADITIONAL Project**

NEW TRADITIONAL Project started in 2019 by Tanpopo-no-ye Foundation, a Nara-based nonprofit organization in Japan. Focusing on the new possibilities that arise when people in the welfare field, including people with disabilities, meet traditional craftsmanship, we have carried out various activities that link communities, welfare and arts and crafts, such as collaborative production and exhibitions between welfare institutions and designers, research trips to materials and production areas, and technical exchanges between craftspeople and people with disabilities.

In 2002, we launched the “NEW TRADITIONAL School,” a series of public lectures where participants can learn from each other about the values, processes and methods of craftsmanship/manufacturing and related issues.

## **About this Booklet**

This booklet tells you the stories of the fun experiments and practices that took place during the NEW TRADITIONAL project. Paying attention to the physical sensations of touching materials and the movements when making things, we bring together our thoughts and the inspiration we have encountered while working with our hands.

# 15 Memorandum on New Traditional Project

Throughout the New Traditional Project, we have gained a lot of insight and inspiration from the handiworks and learned from the people we have met in different local communities of Japan. The following is a memorandum of 15 things that are important in creative handicraft making.

## 1. Handicraft Making with Love and Prayer

'Traditional craftsmanship is filled with people's love and prayer.'  
Yasuo Harima, the founder of the Tanpopo-no-ye Foundation said. Instead of the selfishness of mass-production, he wishes to review what is already there and revalue the life and culture behind each product. We often remembered the words throughout the project.

One day, when we tackled to make products out of dead forest trees on the grounds of the Kasuga Taisha Shrine in Nara, the owner of a pottery gallery, "Soramitsu", Asuka Goi, suggested we could make candleholders. Even on busy days, having time to light a candle can lead to a peaceful, relaxing moment. We were struck by this simple fact, and at the same time realized that we could also present the importance of such quality time through products.

## 2. Love the Presence Itself

Kokeshi, wooden dolls, are folk toys traditionally made in the Tohoku, the northern part of Japan. It is said that kokeshi dolls were first made as souvenirs for children by woodworkers who produced bowls and other items out of wood in the mountains. In recent years, many people display these local toys at home and enjoy the presence. Any object has not only the function of fulfilling a specific purpose, but also the unique presence that attracts certain people. Kokeshi dolls also may be one of the objects that give people a sense of such 'internal value'.

Whenever we saw some people picking up local toys made by people with disabilities working in local welfare facilities and heard them say that they were "fun", "lovely" or "somehow attractive", we realized that people are drawn to the products that have an appeal that goes beyond their use.

Sometimes people pray for the health of children, or wish for someone else's happiness. What are called folk toys imbued with familiarity, attractiveness, and meanings that cannot be logically explained.

## 3. Be a Maker From a User

On one occasion, we were preparing a green tea ceremony and asked Satoe Moriya who organizes a bakery shop and salon, ippo plus, in Nara, to be the tea master. However, she suggested other way, stating, "Wouldn't it be so fun if someone with disabilities took over the tea master role?"

Then, Ryusuke Hanatani who worked at the Good Job! Center, a welfare facility for people with disabilities took the role instead. Mr. Hanatani practiced with Ms. Morita on each of the tea utensils, prepared seasonal sweets and shared the tea time with the guests that day. Not only did we enjoy a place that had already been prepared for us, but we also prepared the hospitality and created the place for the guests with our own hands, which gave us the certainty that we were able to interact more deeply with the visitors.

Whenever we try to make something new, we have to go out to prepare the materials or ask someone what we don't know. The process brings joy and encounters. By making something of ourselves, we can see the potential for building new local communities, socially including people with disabilities.



## 4. Anyone Can Build, Anyone Can Fix

In Nara, there is an ancient road (Yamanobe no Michi) that connects the north and south of the Nara Basin, which is mentioned in Japan's oldest history book, the Kojiki, which was published around 1300 years ago. Maki Takahashi and Tsukasa Isomura who work at the INAX Live Museum, a museum specializing in clay and ceramics were involved in the publication of a book on the existing buildings made of mud in the area. When we visited the area together, we were surprised to find that many huts made of rustic mud walls still remain after a long time. The mud walls, which are made up of layers of various stones and soils in sizes told us that the people who lived there had continued to repair the walls with great care whenever they collapsed.

On another occasion, an architect, Kazuya Morita, showed us a clay wall on the grounds of the Daitokuji Temple in Kyoto. The clay walls were made from the soil of the ground there. Craftsmen and residents at different times seem to have been repaired the weathered parts.

When an object has a simple structure and is made from readily available materials, it can be easily used and reconstructed by anyone. Making and repairing products by yourself helps you understand the basic structure and system, and deepens your relationship with them.

## 5. Product-Making That Embraces Naturally Occurring Variability and Playfulness

In product development, expected standards are often set for “no variation from one product to another”, judging as right or wrong, within or outside the standard. This is no exception even for handmade products made in local welfare facilities.

When a graphic designer, Katsunobu Yoshida, a traditional hand-woven rug workshop Yonezawa Dantsu, Takizawa Kobo, and three Yamagata-based welfare institutions where people with disabilities worked together to create new types of traditional rugs, they set only minimal rules such as using small geometric figures (e.g. dots and crosses etc.) to draw the patterns and the traditional weaving technique to insert the wool pile. While these minimum rules were set up, each maker was able free to decide how to draw the patterns by themselves.

By keeping the rules to a minimum, individual uniqueness and playfulness occurred with a sense of humor and some digressions. As a result, many other people with disabilities were able to participate in the project. Such a non-judgmental atmosphere helps each person's creativity, expression and uniqueness. Perhaps, by first creating such a system that can cultivate individual creativity, new creative things can emerge.

## 6. Products Made by Anonymous People / Products Made by an Identifiable Person

When creating products, the actions and involvement of a maker will appear as an attractive result, and division of the work among several people will also induce such an attractive outcome.

There is a work titled “miamoo”, created by Sachiko Fukuoka, an artist who works in hand weaving at the open studio of Tanpopo-no-ye. The bold tangles and fraying of the threads show traces of her weaving with only her left hand.

Meanwhile, there is one initiative we had developed to create more jobs for more people with disabilities to work. At the Tanpopo-no-ye, clay objects named "Yakuyoke Oni," which had been made entirely by hand for 20 years, was changed to a casting method using plaster molds. This new method has created a clear division of each task: pouring clay into plaster molds, baking the dough, firing, and painting, allowing each person to work in their own area of expertise.



There are products made by hand, where the traces of the person who made them remain, and those made through the division of labor, where many people are involved. Both have their own unique charm, and both are great.

## 7. Appreciate the Joy of the Creation Process

A product designer, Fumi Kawasaki, is willing to stick to a traditional method of using a seaweed-based glue in papier-mâché making. One of the reasons for this is the pleasant touch of the glue when it is applied to the paper.

In a Washi-paper-making project, Kawasaki co-worked with people with disabilities who had attended a community workshop in Tottori, Art Space Colorful, and came up with a number of new ways to make Washi rice paper in order to let them know how good it feels and how much fun it is. She made molds that could be used to make paper in the shape of character (that was drawn by a person with disabilities) by scooping pulp material into the hollows of the molds. They also made paper with a galaxy-like pattern using many small balls rolled up by hand. The cooperative works made in a novel way far removed from the conventional washi paper making method, also conveyed the "joy of making" to the viewer too.

It takes time to make things by hand. But the process also brings us joys, such as the comfort of touching the natural materials and the increasing attachment to the homemade product. Sharing these feelings and sensations, which are difficult to verbalize or quantify, while actually working with our hands may be one of the ways to feel closer to traditional craftsmanship.

## 8. Use What Is in Front of You and at Your Feet as Material

"There are opportunities to create things close at hand."

These words comes from Koji Takahashi, a product designer in Tokoname, one of Japan's famous pottery towns. One day, he was digging in the ground to build a fence at a welfare facility, Work Center Kajima, where he also did some contract design work. As he dug deeper into the ground, he found a clay layer that seemed to be in common with the soil used in the Tokoname ceramic industry, that he realized. Then, he started a mud dyeing project based on the soil.

Without procuring special materials from somewhere far away, what is at hand sometimes in front of you or at your feet can be used as materials for making things. The materials can provide clues to make you think about local industry and history, and bring you more attachment and pride in what you have made with your own hands. Of course, one convenient way is using materials that can be easily purchased at stores. However, there must be aspects of making products that can only be passed on by using local materials and that can be born out of the culture and climate of the area.

## 9. Discover a New Way of Making with Familiar Material as a New Tool

Generally, making wood products requires bulky power tools and hand tools such as knives. So a woodworker, Yoshio Sakai, and we wondered if there was another easier way for people with disabilities to work on wood. Then, we came up with a simple method of hammering the wood surfaces – just like hammering a metal pot- to create an uneven pattern, and finishing by polishing. This method can be used anyone who likes to repeat the same process or who are not good at engaging in detailed tasks can also work on it. We hope that this will invite those who normally find it difficult to participate in the work, to create some attractive things.

As Nara is a wood-production area, including Yoshino Cedar, there are wood workshops and



shops dealing in rare natural woods. From there, we were able to purchase surplus lumber, leftover products after making building and tableware. In the beginning, we used a round hammer for wood surfaces, but one day, on the way to purchase wood, we noticed some stones on the river bank. What kind of patterns we would make if we used stones like ancient stone tools? Out of curiosity, we decided to give it a try.

When we actually tried it, we found that the stones were easy to handle, and anyone could easily participate in creating the surface with a different texture. Each “maker” chose a stone that had a shape they liked or that fitted well in their hand, and created their own unique pattern by hammering.

Whatever we make, there may be various alternative ways of doing that are different from what we think we should do based on the past knowledge and experience. We may also discover new ways of making by going back to ancient or traditional ways rooted in our local culture.

Stones can also be picked up and returned to the riverbank when we have finished using them. If we can use tools for a long time but give them away when they are no longer needed. Not only materials but also tools can be circulated again- such usage is refreshing and pleasant.

## 10. Handicraft with Nature

We have raised silkworms every spring at the Good Job! Center since a textile artist, Mayumi Terakawa, suggested us. After the silkworm, a living creature, came to our welfare facility, we have changed the way we use space and perceive time. While silkworm farmers raise silkworms four to five times until autumn, we take care of them from egg to become cocoon in a month by continuing to pick mulberry leaves, their staple food, from farms, feeding them and watching them grow.



Traditional craftsmanship is born from nature such as soil, stones, wood, and plants with the blessings of nature. From a tiny egg, silkworms grow up and make cocoons. Then, we extract the silk thread from them and make products. Raising silkworms has made us to realize the origin of craftsmanship and the fact that we all live in nature.



## 11. Inheriting the Five Senses through the Body

Making something in a particular local place seems to mean inheriting the culture, human relationships, and physical senses that have been cultivated there over a long period of time in the community. Today, we can do so many things just by pressing a button, and our physical senses are different from those of the past. The evolution of tools has had a great impact on our physicality.

Ryuichiro Ando, a dying artist who has been working to recover the physicality that human originally had by reviewing how we use our bodies in relation to the objects and tools around us. For example, he traces the body movements when using the traditional folk tools that people have used in their lives in order to explore a completely different way of using our bodies than usual.

Tracing the movement with the body without thinking with the mind. This does not necessarily mean that the movements are inherited exactly as they are since they are constantly changing reflecting the personality and movements of the person who is tracing the behavior, as well as the circumstances of the time.

Culture and art are inherited from the past and passed on to the next generation, while maintaining a connection to the local community and a real sense of life of the people of the time. We would like to value the importance of passing on not only techniques, but also sensibilities of the body.

## 12. Be Flexible in Incorporating Technology

There are many instances where production stops because some essential materials or tools are no longer available. However, it may be possible to continue making the products by redesigning the process with alternative ideas and materials. If digital fabrication tools had been available in Edo period (1603-1867), when real Samurai lived, some craftsmen would have used the tools. We believe that focusing on what needs to be made and incorporating the most appropriate technology will lead to sustainable manufacturing.

There is a series of papier-mâché products created at the Good Job! Center. At first glance, it appears to be an ordinary folk toy made in a traditional method. However, the process involves a 3D printer, from which, resin was first outputted as a mold, then pieces of rice paper and newspaper were layered alternately. After that, Gofun paint (white paint made from the shells for the undercoat which are usually used in Japanese painting) and colored paint are applied.

Originally, it started in response to the shortage of craftsmen who could make wooden molds. The use of 3D printers has made it possible to create papier-mâché toys with greater freedom and complexity now.

## 13. Thinking Beyond "Make" and "Use"

We have been using a large amount of PLA resin (thermoplastic resin derived from vegetable matter) to make papier-mâché products at the Good Job! Center since its opening in 2016. In the process, we have sometimes produced failed products and scrap materials that have become waste.

When we started to think about whether we could utilize the waste material and learn about an initiative to reuse plastic, we learned about an online open source community for plastic waste to be recycled, Precious Plastic. They share the process of transforming plastic waste into new products by breaking it into small pieces and applying heat. The information has been shared with many people on YouTube and other social media.

According to Kazutoshi Tsuda, who has been involved in bio-research and FabLab network, "Products, like people, have a lifespan, and how people can be involved in that lifespan is crucial". Instead of throwing away materials, we can use materials for a long time, recycle them, and consider the energy consumption for recycling, the production scale, and the distribution system. For the future of manufacturing, it is also necessary for welfare institutions to have a greater awareness of the resource circulation beyond just "making" and "using",

## 14. Have a Sense of Delivery

A product buyer, Yu Yamada, said that there are three important things to do before selling products: first communicate the value of the product, get people interested in it, and leave a lasting impression.

In a historic metalworking production area for stainless steel products in Tsubame-Sanjo, northern Japan, he directs an annual event to communicate the product value by inviting buyers and users to the factories and the sites of manufacturing so that the visitors can see the manufacturing process and the art of craftsmanship.

By directly visiting the local production site, visitors will buy and use products that are made in that community. It will lead them to respect the products, the manufacturing process, and the community. Therefore, the purchase of the products is just as important as their production. This means increasing the number of supporters who share the value of the products. Today individual values are diversifying, the awareness of increasing the number of supporters and friends by delivering what we make will, in turn, help us to be in a situation where we can continue to make products.

## 15. The Beauty of Uneven and Feel-a-bit-uneasy Things

“When we think about the circulation of products, the use of garbage and waste, we should not only be concerned with creating products with the same quality. I believe that something that feels a bit uncomfortable, uneven, imperfect is more likely to be beloved.”

During a meeting, we were struck by the words from Daijiro Mizuno, a design researcher, especially his affection for the unevenness and irregularities of handmade products. It also made us think about our future issues and goals, including manufacturing that considers the future circulation of materials, treating the waste as a valuable resource to be recycled/upcycled.

By reusing what have been discarded in the process of manufacturing, any irregularity became the product's attraction. Unique things can be born if we allow ourselves to enjoy and embrace the irregularity.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake, a design unit, HUMORABO and the Nozomi Welfare Workshop in Minamisanriku, the affected area, began collaborating to make Washi paper from milk cartons, newspapers, and paper decorations which had used in a town festival. Typically, when making paper, the uneven edges had been cut into straight lines, but they left them in their "NOZOMI PAPER" series.

They also sell some papers that are warped or not suitable for printing which are normally considered to be defects as they are, and named them as "Wild".

Interestingly, some people became fans of the imperfect characteristics of these papers and bought them. We don't have to strive for beautifully aligned products, but must have a sense of appreciation for the beauty of uneven, imperfect nature.



Throughout the practices of this New Traditional project, we discovered the fun and the breadth of making. At the same time, we have come to realize that "making" makes us to think about our own lives and the future.

The system of circulating the right amount of products, which is not possible in mass production/consumption/disposal, the value that cannot only be measured by efficiency, and the attitude of re-examining the culture and materials around us- these are what traditional craftsmanship has always valued.

Welfare institutions will become great potential places for such a craftsmanship. The more such places can be created in many local areas where people can think about and practice working and living with quality of life, local tradition and circulation, the more each place can be comfortable place to live for many more people in our community.

## Tanpopo-no-ye Foundation

Tanpopo-no-ye Foundation is a Nara-based nonprofit organization to run the community art center and welfare facilities. It has conducted various programs related to “arts” and “care”, creating a network of other organizations both within and outside Japan in order to contribute to the society where anyone can engage in highly expressive, creative self-expression regardless of disabilities.

<https://tanpoponoye.org/>

## Good job! Project

Good job! Project was initiated by Tanpopo-no-ye Foundation in 2012. Based in the Good Job! Center Kashiba in Kashiba City, Nara, new working styles and jobs when collaborating with people with lived experience of disabilities have been proposed. “New Traditional” Project was started in 2019 as a part of the Good job! Project.

<https://www.goodjobproject.com/>



Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan