Katagami - Japanese Paper Stencils and their Role in the Vienna Workshops
A Research on the Siebold Collection in MAK

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Abstract: This paper examines the role of Japanese dyeing stencils, *katagami*, in the Vienna Workshops (Wiener Werkstätte 1903-1932). Main subjects of the study are *katagami* from the Siebold Collection in the Austrian Museum for Applied Arts in Vienna (MAK) and textiles by the Workshops after the 1910s. This research will clarify the course of cultural exchange between Japan and Vienna, and new relationship between European and Japanese design in the 20th century.

Since the *katagami* were used as teaching materials at the attached school of the Museum of Art and Industry, many Workshops' designers stemming from the school later adopted the *katagami* stylistic elements. This tendency was supported by the fact that the Workshops had to diversify their scope of products. Thus the *katagami* were utilized within the enterprise's marketing strategy. Transformed Japanese patterns were later exported to European countries and the U.S.A. via the textiles of the Vienna Workshops.

Keywords: Katagami (Japanese dyeing stencil), the Siebold Collection, the Vienna Workshops, textile design.

1. Introduction
The purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of Japanese *katagami* [1] on Austrian modern design in the first half of the 20th century. The Siebold Collection in the Austrian Museum for Applied Art in Vienna (MAK) was essential for the spread of that influence.

The collection of Heinrich von Siebold (1852-1908) was one of the largest Japanese art collections in Europe in that period. In 1907, the Imperial Museum of Art and Industry (k.k. Museum für Kunst und Industrie, est. 1864, now MAK) inherited this collection, which at that time comprised over 8,000 Japanese *katagami*. *Katagami* were imported to Europe in the late 19th century along with other Japanese artworks and have been a source of inspiration for the Flächenkunst (planar art) of art nouveau.
Katagami are usually mentioned only peripherally as one of the various ornament sources of art déco in the 1920s. Little is known about relations between Vienna designs in fin-de-siècle and traditional Japanese artworks. However, researchers of the MAK have identified the echoes of katagami in Viennese geometric Jugendstil at exhibitions in Vienna and Tokyo in the 1990s [2]. Just as the European ornamental patterns were learned and developed further by the Japanese in the Meiji era (1868-1912), so were Japanese patterns important models for Viennese designers. In this context, katagami played an important role as an inspirational source for the textile design manufacture of the Vienna Workshops (Wiener Werkstätte 1903-1932), a representative design enterprise in Austria, famous for its founders Josef Hoffmann (1870-1956) and Koloman Moser (1868-1918).

Nevertheless, the influence of katagami after the Jugendstil period has yet to be explored. In the area of design, a firm relationship between Vienna and Japan still exists today. Felice Ueno Rix (1893-1967), a designer of the Vienna Workshops who came to Japan with her Japanese husband in 1926, contributed to Japanese design education after 1945 while producing her own artistic creations. Her design methods based on style of the Vienna Workshops are still practiced at Kyoto City University of Arts today. The Japonisme in Vienna at the end of the 19th century has been carried over to Japan through the activity of Felice Rix. In a way, it can be said that herewith the elements of katagami patterns, transformed by Viennese artists, returned home - not directly, but rather in the sense of a formation technique.

Therefore, the study on how the Siebold Collection has influenced design style of the younger generation in Vienna aims to reveal a part of the history of exchange between Austria and Japan in the 20th century. This research can help clarify the new relationship between European and Japanese design after the 1910s. The so-called Japonisme is said to have ebbed away around 1910, but in case of the Vienna Workshops, the Japanese influence can still be seen in the later works.

First, I will analyze the history of the Siebold Collection in the Museum of Art and Industry. Secondly, I will discuss the relationship between the collection, the Wiener Kunstgewerbeschule (Vienna School of Applied Arts, est. 1867) and the Vienna Workshops. Thirdly, I will examine the commercial strategy of the Vienna Workshops.

2. The Siebold Collection in the Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna possessed massive collections of Japanese artworks. The core collection was that of Heinrich von Siebold, which was transferred from the Handelsmuseum (Museum of Trade) in 1907.

Heinrich von Siebold was the son of the naturalist and Japan expert Philipp Franz von Siebold. After 1869 Heinrich was a local member of the Austrian-Hungarian legation in Japan where he worked as an interpreter. He collected numerous art objects and common artefacts for every-day use before he went back to Europe in 1896 [3]. His archaeological and ethnological contribution was significant as well.

The Museum of Art and Industry played an important role in the spreading of Japonisme in Vienna around 1900. In 1897, under its new director Arthur von Scala, the museum began intensively to collect and exhibit Japanese
Early Japan collections of the museum were obtained, for example, from the Austrian-Hungarian expedition to Eastern Asia between 1868 and 1871, and at the world exhibition in Vienna 1873, which has greatly contributed to the subsequent Japan-boom in the monarchy [4]. Nevertheless, before Scala, this collection was nothing exceptional when compared to other museums in Europe.

Arthur von Scala favoured Japanese arts so much that he carried out a series of pioneer projects for Japanese art within the museum. He was the former director of the Handelsmuseum in Vienna, which was initially established as the Oriental Museum [5]. Thanks to his efforts, the Museum of Art and Industry organized a Japanese woodcut exhibition in 1899, the first Hokusai exhibition in Europe in 1901, an extensive exhibition of old Japanese art in 1905, and a Japanese ceramic exhibition in the following year. In addition, a lecture by the artist Emil Orlik, who just came back from his trip to Japan, took place in 1902, and in 1905 another lecture was held by Justus Brinckmann, director of the Museum for Arts and Crafts in Hamburg who promoted Japonisme in Germany.

At the same time, the collections in the museum increased remarkably. The museum purchased plenty of exhibits formerly borrowed from Siebold for the exhibition in 1905. Further, in 1907, as the Handelsmuseum closed, its massive collections obtained from Siebold were moved to the Museum of Art and Industry, which hereby came into possession of one of the largest Japan collections in Europe. There were several Japan collections in Vienna besides Siebold’s. However, the Siebold Collection was the most prominent one because of its wide scope and large quantity of exhibits.

The composition of the Siebold Collection, which was transferred to the Museum of Art and Industry in 1907, was as follows: over 8,000 katagami, 2,600 wash drawings, 117 sword shells, 6 folding screens, 63 hanging scrolls, 3 Buddharupas, 3 Buddhist altars, 58 ceramics, 20 lacquerwares, 30 textiles and remains of a Tokugawa mausoleum. According to Johannes Wieninger, these katagami are not only prominent in quantity but also in quality. Their artistic value is world-class [6]. There was also a significant katagami collection in the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Hamburg. The museum’s collection, formed with cooperation of Samuel Bing (1838-1905), played a leading role in German Japonisme.

On the other hand, the most remarkable characteristic of the katagami collection in Vienna was the way of its utilization alongside its content. The katagami were used as materials at the attached school of the museum. It is highly probable that students could also see them outside the classes. In this way, Japanese dyeing stencils had a long-term influence on Vienna design.

3. Katagami in the Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule
The Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule was a school attached to the Museum of Art and Industry. The close connection between the school and the museum has made it easy for both professors and students to access the museum’s collection. For the same reason, the Siebold’s katagami have found their way into the classes at the school as teaching materials.
The general relation between Japanese stencils and Flächenkunst in Vienna around 1900 is already well researched. Especially Secession artists praised either abstract or stylized naturalistic patterns of stencils. Katagami were often reproduced in their magazine Ver Sacrum. As Wieninger underlines, each katagami pattern makes sense only when combined, dyed one after another, for the complete design. However, since Viennese artists were not certain about its original usage, they referred to every single pattern as individual [7]. From katagami the artists learned the interplay of line and planar space. Further, the artists sometimes quoted katagami quite directly. Koloman Moser’s textiles were often identical reflections of katagami.

After 1899, new Secessionist Principal Felician von Myrbach practiced innovative design education at the Kunstgewerbeschule. Myrbach and other Secessionist professors appointed by him promoted the modern applied art that reflected their ideal “Gesamtkunstwerk” (total art). The Secessionists and founders of the Vienna Workshops Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser were also among the professors at the school.

In the new curriculum, a composition class was emphasized as a basis for formation. Here katagami were used in order to learn space composition with the simplest elements. Already in 1899, the composition lesson with Japanese stencils by Josef Hoffmann was reported in an article in the museum’s journal Kunst und Kunsthåndwerk. Hoffmann’s students “trained to see and combine the form in itself… then they advanced on to rings, discs, frames or planar surfaces, which overlap in Japanese way and are rhythmically distributed across the space”. Finally they made “the symmetrically composed ornament… form the linear element, without imitating the natural subject” [8].

Those katagami were most probably borrowed from the Handelsmuseum. It can be assumed that after the transfer of the Siebold Collection in 1907, Japanese artworks including katagami were used more frequently at the Kunstgewerbeschule.

As a result, ornament patterns of katagami inspired not only Secession artists but also the students, who learned from them at the Kunstgewerbeschule. Several professors were also members of the Vienna Workshops. At the same time, many of the students joined the Workshops after graduation, since Hoffmann and Moser taught at the school. Thanks to the designers from the Kunstgewerbeschule, katagami became a source of textile designs of the Workshops.

4. Katagami’s influence on textile design of the Vienna Workshops

This chapter deals with the comparative analysis of the katagami from the Siebold Collection in Vienna and textile designs of the Vienna Workshops after 1910s. The 70 katagami used in Hoffmann’s class are today held in the “Josef Hoffmann” section in MAK. Floral motives are most prominent in Hoffmann’s katagami. Another prominent characteristic are floral motives combined with butterflies or little birds. The stencils vary in pattern: Some are bold, i.e. featuring two or three flowers or butterflies in a large format, others fine, strewed over with little ornamental flowers or bamboos. Further, there are fantastic patterns of asymmetrical flowers, birds or butterflies flying among geometrical figures, or patterns of thick composition with leaves and creepers. All these motives are freely stylized with various lines and planes. Pure geometrics of lozenges and oblongs are also found.
in the collection. The logical question is how these Japanese ornaments, including those of other katagami of the Siebold Collection, were applied in textiles of the Vienna Workshops.

The textile section of the Vienna Workshops was reportedly opened in 1910 [9]. At this time, the Workshops was getting into a new stage. Some important designers of its early period such as Koloman Moser and C. O. Czeschka (1878-1960) resigned from the Workshops, although they often continued to collaborate. New active designers at the textile section were Hoffmann’s former students at the Kunstgewerbeschule. For example, Wilhelm Jonasch, Martha Alber and Leopold Blonder in the 1910s, followed by Reni Sealschel, Maria Likarz, Mathilde Flögl and Felice Rix, the representative women designers of the 1920s. Director of the fashion section, Eduald J. Wimmer-Wisgrill, also studied under Hoffmann and later become professor at the Kunstgewerbeschule. Also, Dagobert Peche (1887-1923), a representative designer of the Workshops in the interwar period, joined the section in 1911. Peche was not a student at the Kunstgewerbeschule, but he clearly adopted Japanese ornamental elements in his designs.

Textile designers of the Vienna Workshops created diverse works. They did not persist in one style. Here the influence of Japanese katagami can be recognized in the stylizing of nature motives, and their positioning and composition.

Early designs at the textile section can be roughly classified into two groups: vivid figurative patterns and restrained colourless geometric patterns. Already the contemporaries mentioned that the expressive colour and the large-sized botanics of the former derive from diverse folk arts within the vast Habsburg monarchy [10]. However, if seen just black and white, many of the forms of flowers and leaves strongly resemble the motives of katagami [fig.1]. The Workshops’ textile designs comprised obviously wider and more artistic variation of formations of nature motives than folk arts. The designers borrowed the representations from the katagami. Katagami’s patterns were affluent in flower motives, such as chrysanthemums, cherry blossoms, plums, irises or camellias. Matha Alber’s <Kahlenberg> (1910/11) [fig.2] appears as a folk arts style on the whole. Nevertheless, layered planar flower figures as well as clear petals and their inside indents reveal the influence from the katagami patterns [fig.3].

fig. 1 Katagami, MAK  
fig. 2 <Kahlenberg>, MAK  
fig. 3 Katagami, MAK

In <Flora> (1911/14) [fig. 4], Leopold Blonder represented a pile of petals with strong outlines and zigzags. Ornamental silhouettes of butterflies and flowers in Peche’s <Schwalbenschwanz> (1911/13) [fig.5] are clearly cited from katagami.
Moreover, compositions like flowers on a grid or plants in geometric figures demonstrate a close resemblance to *katagami*. Reni Schaschi’s *<Gitterblume>* (1912/17) [fig.6] and Eduald J. Wimmer-Wisgrill’s *<Ameise>* (1910/11) [fig.7] are typical examples. Unlike in folk arts, where organic ornaments expand on a whole planar surface, Wimmer-Wisgrill put relatively large-sized flowers at regular intervals. The ground stripes give a certain order to the whole. Vertical stripes of small flowers and growing tendrils are also common in both Viennese and Japanese patterns [fig.8].

As for restrained geometric patterns, the similarities to *katagami* appear in the combination of diverse rectangles and lozenges, their rhythmic construction and effective contrasts in dark colour. Carl Krenek, who studied under Moser and Czeschka, used ovals with lightning bolts in *<Blitz>* (1910/11) [fig.9] that also resemble Japanese pattern.

The textile production continued rather successfully during World War I. In the second half of the 1910s, women designers increased in number, replacing their conscripted male colleagues. Many of the women designers were Hoffmann’s former students. Their textile designs also reflect ornamental elements of *katagami* from the previous period.

Decorative styles at the Vienna Workshops in the 1920s are often described as representative of the Austrian art déco. The Workshops increasingly produced diverse textiles. The characteristic of the textile patterns at this time...
was predominantly sensitive, light ornaments as opposed to the rather expressive large rapport in the 1910s. Figures of stylized animals and plants became generally smaller and finer than that of the 1910s, but they still suggest the effect of Japanese patterns. Besides, *katagami* seem to have inspired lively patterns of unintentionally strewed simple lines or flowers and floating effects caused by empty blanks such as Felice Rix’s *<Geranie>* (1929) [fig.10].

A combination of squares with inside ornaments - for instance Hilda Blumberger’s *<Qurartett>* (1928) - is also similar to *katagami*. *<Brioni>* (1926) [fig.11] by Clara Posnanski may have been inspired by *katagami* as well. Her link to Japanese art is nevertheless not clear, for details of her career are unknown.

As shown above, it is obvious that textile designers of the Vienna Workshops utilized *katagami* patterns continuously in respects of form and composition. The Workshops’ colourful, decorative textiles after the 1910s are seemingly opposite to Japanese simple designs. However, in reality, the Viennese design was essentially inspired by *katagami* patterns. Japanese traditional patterns were flexibly assimilated into bright Viennese designs. Colourless stencils seem to have inspired the Viennese all the more for their free development of colours.

**5. Relation to a commercial strategy of the Vienna Workshops**

The reason why designers continued to utilize the elements of *katagami* was not only the connection between the Vienna Workshops, the Kunstgewerbeschule and the Museum of Art and Industry. A new commercial strategy of the Workshops in its latter period was another important factor for development of this artistic tendency. To overcome financial difficulties, the Vienna Workshops, which was more an enterprise than a workshop in a literal sense, had to make more profit. Therefore the Workshops began to offer wider scope of products taking into consideration the consumers’ tastes.

Following the arts and crafts movement in England, the aim of the Vienna Workshops at the foundation was to produce the best commodities in quality and style. Early works of the Workshops are distinguished by elegant geometric form. However, their production, too narrow and particular in terms of both material and finish, soon caused problems for the management. This situation forced the designers to change their crafting styles.
The Workshops faced its first serious financial crisis in 1907. Moser left the company because of a disagreement regarding the business policy. As the Workshops felt the urge to readjust its finances, it adopted more luxurious decorative styles to appeal to the consumers. In addition, the Workshops contracted collaborative partnership with “Wiener Keramik”, a ceramic company in Vienna, whose founders were former colleagues of Hoffmann. The management of the Vienna Workshops did not consider the option of business reduction. They decided to overcome the crisis through cooperation with related companies and external artists. Ernst Ploil points out that exhibits for “Kunstschau” 1908 already revealed the conversion of the Workshops. These splendid exhibits lacked unity. Plenty of products resembled something rather to be expected on a company stand at a trade fair than a manifest of the progressive artist group [11].

Due to opening new sections, the Workshops further extended its production. Also, the separation of Hoffmann’s architecture office from the Workshops in 1912 promoted individual articles because of reduced commissions for total interior design that the enterprise received after that event.

Moreover, the Workshops broadened its presence in the foreign markets. Alongside several stores in Vienna, foreign branches were founded in Carlsbad (1909), Berlin (1910), New York (1912) and Zurich (1917). Some German companies sold Workshops’ products on commission. Especially after World War I, the Workshops seemed to have focused on retail and foreign markets due to the downfall of the Viennese middle class, who used to be the patron of the Workshops. The management was also willing to participate in foreign fairs and international exhibitions, such as Werkbund exhibition in Cologne (1914) and Paris exposition des art décoratifs (1925). Through active demonstrations, the Vienna Workshops received wider acknowledgment in Europe and in the U.S.A. as a representative Austrian design company.

It was important for the financially suffering enterprise to have many customers in broad areas. A wide scope and originality of products were therefore essential. In this sense, adopting decorative designs, which reflected customers’ tastes and contemporary elements, was the commercial strategy of the Workshops.

In this context, textiles were the main ware offered at the Workshops. The textile section and the fashion section were the most profitable ones in the company. Textiles were easy to transport and allowed for flexible application in fashion and interior. Accordingly, an attractive selection of textiles was indispensable for the Workshops.

As demonstrated above, the affluent textile patterns at the Vienna Workshops can be described as a part of the enterprise’s commercial strategy. In the textile section, which was the core in the later phase of the Workshops, new designs were always needed to keep it in existence. There, alongside Rococo, Biedermeier, Folk arts, or progressive elements of contemporaries, many designers resorted to Japanese *katagami*, which were familiar to them from the Kunstgewerbeschule.
As a result of all these marketing efforts, the textiles of Vienna Workshops became popular within European countries. Paul Poiret bought abundant textiles of the Workshops when he visited Vienna in 1911. Prints of the Atelier Martine in Paris founded by Poiret often echo the Viennese design [12]. In the 1920s famous companies in Germany and Switzerland released a wallpaper collection of works by Dagobert Peche, Maria Likarz, Felice Rix and Matilde Floegl. Further, several German Museums such as the Landesgewerbemuseum in Stuttgart, the Neue Sammlung in Munich and the Grassi Museum in Leipzig purchased Workshops’ textiles.

6. Conclusions

The most interesting characteristic of the Siebold Collection in the Museum of Arts and Industry is the fact that the exhibits were used as teaching materials in the attached art school. As a result, Japanese ornament patterns were integrated into textile designs of the Vienna Workshops after 1910s, when many graduates of the school joined the enterprise. It is notable that in the background of these developments stands the fact that the Vienna Workshops needed to widen the variety of their popular textiles in order to overcome financial difficulties. The acceptance of katagami was a reflection of the marketing strategy of the company.

The Japanese katagami, which were brought to Vienna at the end of the 19th century, were continually utilized, though indirectly, in the textile field in Vienna until 1920s. This development was possible due to the particular structures of cultural institutions of Vienna, where the museums, the attached school and the Vienna Workshops were closely related.

Textile patterns often determine a room space, when they are utilized to interior decorations. In this sense, the Japanese ornamental pattern was involved in creation of a new taste in Europe and the U.S.A. in the 1910s and 1920s, for it was adopted according to the marketing strategy of the Vienna Workshops and sold internationally. It was a process that led to the long-term acceptance of a different aesthetic system from a foreign culture by assimilation of diverse elements for new expressions.

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Notes and References

[1] Japanese katagami are approximately 30x40cm sized paper stencils used for printing on fabric. The katagami printed textiles, that come in variety of decorative designs and patterns, were used primarily for production of kimono (traditional Japanese clothes).
For example, Heinrich offered to provide about 5,200 articles from his private collection for the opening of the Imperial Museum of Natural History in Vienna in 1888. Additionally, thousands of Japanese art and ethnological materials, in particular more than 120,000 katagami, came up for auctions from Siebold's collection after his death in 1908. At that occasion, many artists also purchased katagami for their private use. For his other contribution, see Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien (ed.) (1996) 200 Jahre Siebold, die Japansammlungen Philipp Franz and Heinrich von Siebold, Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien, Tokyo.


The Orient Museum (est. 1875), after 1886 the Handelsmuseum, was a mediate place for the Japanese arts in Vienna. Although the museum was rather a mercantile agency than an art institute, it often held exhibitions and kept numerous art collections, partly on commission. Many of those may have been obtained from Heinrich von Siebold, even if the fact cannot be confirmed due to loss of archives.


ibid., pp. 62-63.


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