

# Aesthetics, Sanitation, and Nationalism: Japanese Majolica Tiles in Late Colonial India

AKI TOYOYAMA

## INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, tiles have been used to cover building surfaces not only for practical purposes but also in beautification efforts.<sup>1</sup> In contemporary India, as in many places elsewhere, glazed ceramic tiles often with decorative motifs can be seen everywhere, from household spaces and village shrines to urban public buildings. The ubiquity of tiles in India can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when the British eagerly constructed Western-style buildings decorated with British tiles in the process of colonial urbanisation.<sup>2</sup> However, it is not widely known that the spread of tile use among ordinary people in modern India was promoted by Japanese tile manufacturers in the interwar period, rather than by the British colonisers or as an organic development among Indians themselves. Along with a variety of Japanese commodities, including cotton piece-goods, silks, glassware, and matches, tiles were actively exported to India in the 1920s and 1930s. Imported Japanese tiles were particularly popular in Calcutta, which had been the former capital of British India (until 1911) and as a result of the strong influence of British practices had been at the forefront of the acceptance of tiles as a building material.

Among the different communities that cherished Japanese tiles in colonial Calcutta, the Marwari, a successful immigrant mercantile group from northern India, were prominent consumers. Japanese tiles were adopted in construction of Marwari buildings such as *havelis* (residential mansions), *chhatris* (ancestral memorials), temples, wells, reservoirs, and *dharmashalas* (rest houses), both in Calcutta and in remote Marwari home villages. Although the colonial architectural heritage of the Marwaris has been much studied, the focus has been mostly on mural paintings, which have been analysed to understand the changes in colonial Indian society and the builders' identities through the stylistic transitions represented on them (Wacziarg and Nath 1982; Hardgrove 2004: 91-125; S. Jain 2004; A. Patel 2006; Cooper 2009; Lambah 2013). However, it may

be that the strong visibility of these murals and the attention to them as a vernacular tradition have hindered the scholarly appreciation of other visual displays associated with the Marwaris, including the use of Japanese mass-produced tiles, which must also have been deeply significant for the builders' self-representation.

Meanwhile, Japanese scholars have researched the export of Japanese tiles mainly to East and Southeast Asia in the interwar period (Takeda 2000; Fukai 2005a, 2005b, 2011a, 2011b). Their attention has not reached India probably because the tile trade has been discussed mostly in connection with Japanese colonialism, which focused on parts further east. However, economic historians have in recent years been engaged in work revealing the status of Indo-Japanese trade in the early twentieth century, focusing on miscellaneous commodities exported from Japan to India.<sup>3</sup> Due to their durability, tiles constitute rare physical evidence of this trade that has been handed down to the present day, and that can help us understand how Japanese commodities were perceived and consumed by Indian people at that time. The decorative tiles called majolica were particularly popular in the Indian market, reflecting the aesthetic values of Indian consumers. In short, Japanese majolica tiles may give us a crucial perspective on the interaction between consumer culture and representation of identity in modernising India.<sup>4</sup>

This article thus aims to trace changing notions of modernity in late colonial India, focusing on Japanese majolica tiles as visual evidence and the Marwari merchants as a major group of acceptors of majolica tiles. First, the historical trajectory of the Marwaris in the colonial period will be outlined, and their adoption of Japanese tiles for construction in their remote home villages in northern India will be discussed. Second, the transformation of the tile culture in Calcutta, where the Marwaris established their strongest economic base away from home, will be reviewed to understand how the Marwaris developed the motivation to introduce Japanese tiles to their home regions. Third, focusing on the designs of Japanese majolica tiles designed for the Indian market and depicting Hindu mythological subjects, the Japanese vision of the Indian market during the interwar period will be examined. Ultimately, the article aims to shed light on how changes in colonial modernity in India are crystallised in tiles, and how identity representation in early-twentieth-century India was moulded through manifold cultural interactions in the interwar period.

### THE MARWARIS AND THEIR ARCHITECTURE (FIGURE 1)

The term *marwari* literally means 'a person who comes from the Marwar region' (the former princely state of Jodhpur) (Tripathi 1996: 190). This

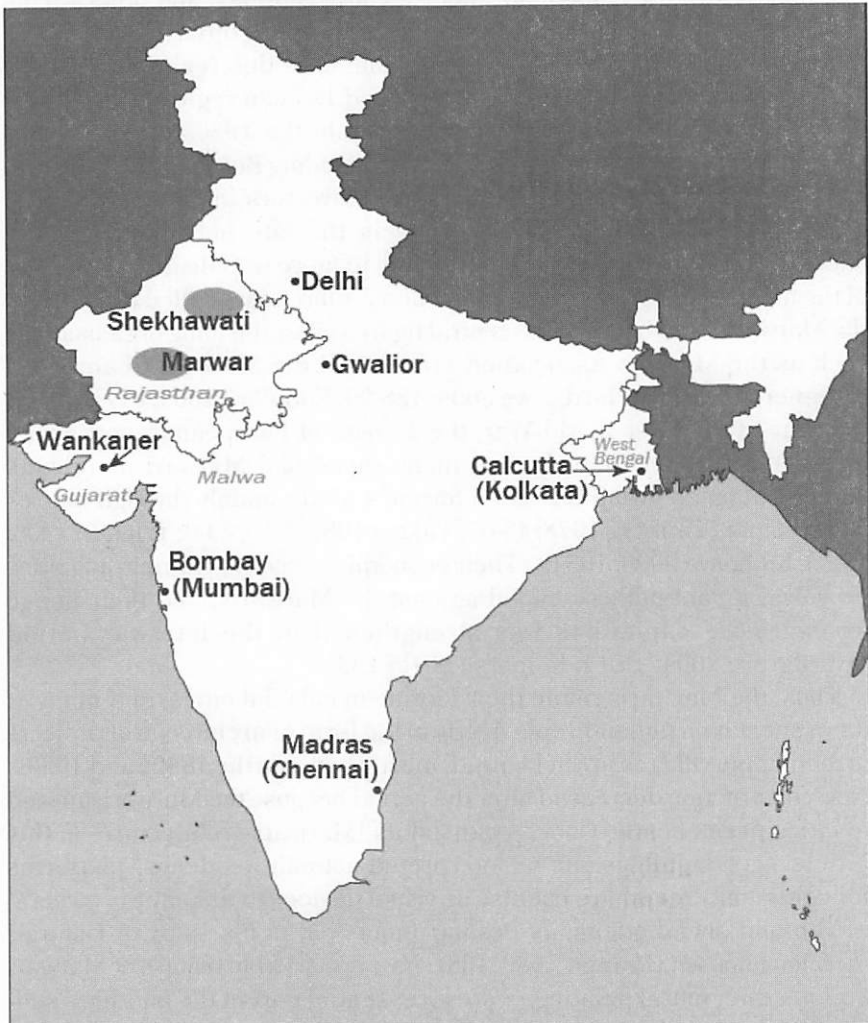
term was initially used in sixteenth-century Bengal, as an autonym by the merchants coming from the region (Taknet 1986: 23). Over time, it became a generic term to refer to merchants from Rajasthan and neighbouring regions (Timberg 1978: 10). This article uses the term to indicate migrant merchants from Rajasthan specifically, including various Hindu and Jain mercantile castes such as the Aggarwals, Maheshwaris, Oswals, and Khandelwals (Tripathi 1996: 192-3). Many of the influential Marwari capitalists in the modern Indian economic world trace their ancestral roots to the Shekhawati region rather than to Marwar. Shekhawati had long been an important market connecting the coastal regions of Gujarat and Sind with inland cities. However, in the late eighteenth century, British colonisation caused the trade networks to shift, connecting agricultural commodity centres for products such as cotton and opium with the coastal ports of Calcutta, Bombay, and others. This change devastated the pre-existing trade route passing through Shekhawati, a development which encouraged merchants in this region to move to agricultural centres such as the Malwa and Deccan regions in the early nineteenth century to work as bankers. From the 1830s onwards, they advanced into colonial economic centres, including Bombay and Calcutta, and succeeded as brokers, bankers, and investors in futures markets. The growth of the Bengali jute trade in the late nineteenth century encouraged more Shekhawati merchants to move to Calcutta; by the end of the nineteenth century, those 'up-country' merchants called themselves the Marwaris, and became the central figures in establishing organisations such as the Marwari Association (1898) and the Marwari Chamber of Commerce (1900) (Hardgrove 2004: 188-99; Kudaisya 2009: 91). Around the time of the First World War, the amount of European import goods in India decreased sharply, and many successful Marwari merchants entered manufacturing based on fortunes made mainly through futures investments (Timberg 1978: 43-65; Taknet 1986: 52-6, 83-9; Tripathi 1996: 192-3; Kudaisya 2009: 103-6). Their economic success in immigrant cities provoked an antipathetic mood against the Marwaris, and their image as excessive capitalists was strengthened in the interwar period (Hardgrove 2004: 10-14; Komatsu 2012: 133).

Thus, the Marwaris made their fortune in colonial cities; and many of them spent it on philanthropic deeds in the form of architectural projects in their home villages in Shekhawati, mostly between the 1830s and 1930s. New construction decreased after the period because the Marwaris moved to cities permanently. Conceptualised as 'Marwari architecture' in this article, such buildings can be interpreted not only as identity platforms for community members but also as visual devices to display the owners' wealth and social status, as Prammar points out in his study of Gujarati merchant houses (Prammar 1989: 108). As a remarkable feature of Marwari architecture, mural paintings were an essential part of the builders' self-

representation for the eyes of other social groups. Interestingly in this light, the stylistic changes in the murals appear to coincide with changes in the social status of the Marwaris themselves.

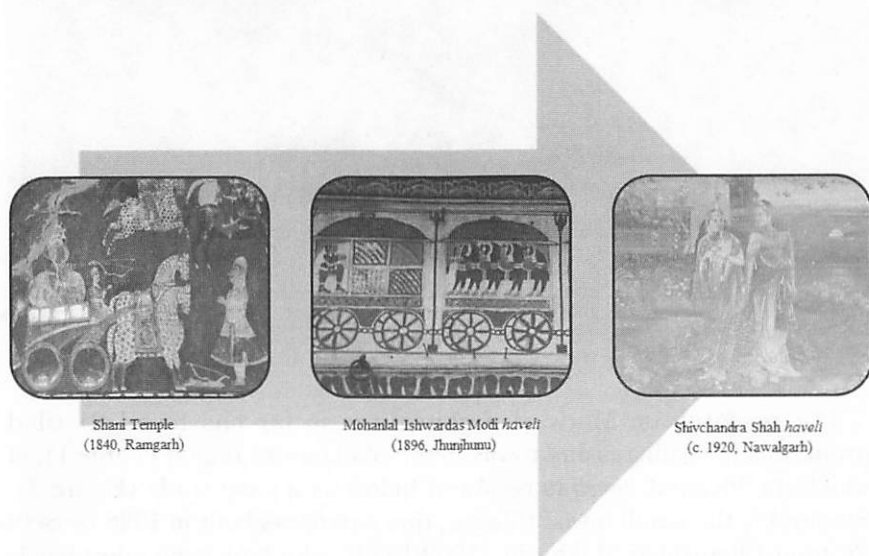
In the initial stage of Marwari architecture, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the murals followed the pre-colonial tradition of Rajput paintings, as exemplified by two-dimensional profile representations in portraiture. From the late nineteenth century, new artistic forms arising in colonial cities, such as photographs and Kalighat paintings,<sup>5</sup> gradually influenced the Shekhawati murals.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the frequent appearance of motifs related to mechanised civilization, including railways, bicycles, motorcars, gramophones, and sewing machines, suggested the extent of

FIG. 1. MAP OF INDIA RELATED TO THE MARWARIS AND TILE CULTURE



Western impact at that time. Later, at the turn of the twentieth century, the development of new printing techniques generated reproduction prints in chromolithography and oleography as new forms of popular art, and those printed images were frequently copied in murals (Toyoyama 2012). The stylistic changes in murals reflected the changes in the social status of the Marwaris, from provincial merchants (in the first half of the nineteenth century) to successful traders in the colonial economy (in the late nineteenth century) and then to leading capitalists of the nation (in the early twentieth century) (Figure 2). Tile decoration in Marwari architecture emerged in the 1920s, when the murals mostly depicted copied images of popular print art. In this light, the tiles may be understood to have functioned as a form of Marwari self-representation as industrialists in the interwar period.

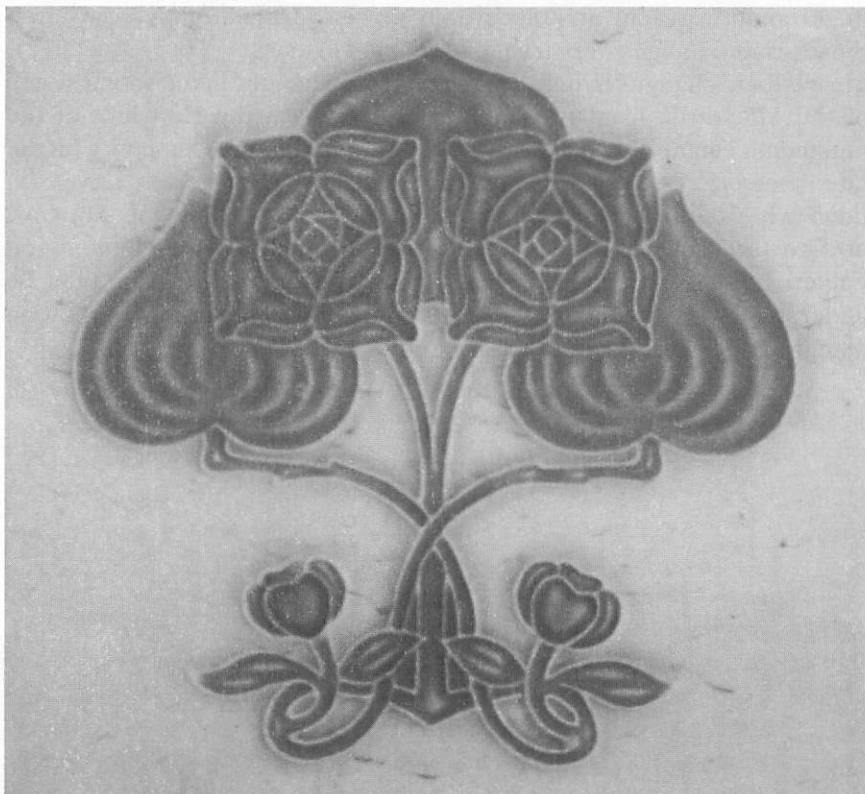
FIG. 2. THE STYLISTIC CHANGES IN THE MURALS OF MARWARI ARCHITECTURE



#### THE TILING OF THE HOMELAND: JAPANESE MAJOLICA TILES IN MARWARI ARCHITECTURE

Most of the tiles used in Marwari architecture are made in Japan and of a type called polychrome relief tiles, which of a decorative character and project the outlines of floral, animal, geometric, and other motifs, and are glazed with multiple colors (STH 2000: 50) (Figure 3). As discussed in more detail later, polychrome relief tiles were developed in nineteenth-century Britain and commonly known as majolica tiles in the world market. The name derived from painted pottery of Renaissance Europe, called *maiolica* (from Italian), that was strongly influenced by Islamic pottery techniques (van Lemmen 2013: 112-19, 172-3).

FIG. 3. A POLYCHROME RELIEF TILE USED IN MARWARI ARCHITECTURE  
(SONTHALIA GATE, 1930s, MANDAWA)



The research on Marwari architecture so far has found 21 tiled properties in 9 villages and towns in the Shekhawati region (Table 1), of which the Piramal *haveli* is reviewed below as a case study (Figure 4). Situated in the small town of Bagar, this *haveli* was built in 1928 by Seth Piramal Chaturbhuj Makharia (1892-1958), who had been enormously successful in the cotton and opium trades in Bombay (Martinelli and Mitchell 2004: 93). The walls of the galleries attached to the façade and reception room are decorated with polychrome relief tiles bearing floral motifs. The tiles have partly come off the walls, and the marks on the back are stamped on ground plaster. Generally, the marks on the back of tiles indicate useful information to identify the manufacturers, such as the place of production and the manufacturer's trademark. A trace on the plaster in this *haveli*, for instance, shows a diamond mark with the capital letters 'DK' at the centre; below this mark is the sign 'MADE IN JAPAN.' DK here stands for Danto Kaisha or 'Danto Corporation' (INTK 1991: 462) (Figure 5). Danto was established in 1885 (in Japan, Meiji era year 18) on Awaji Island in Hyogo prefecture, and is still a leading tile

company in Japan today.<sup>7</sup> Danto's trademarks have changed several times since its establishment, and the one found on the tiles in the Piramal *haveli* was used between the late 1920s and 1930s, that is, the early or prewar Showa era, beginning in 1926 and thus coinciding with the date of construction of the *haveli* (Fukai 2006: 101-2; 2008: 11-12).

The Piramal *haveli* is a rare case in that it directly tells us the manufacturer of the tiles used on the walls. Another possible way to read the trademarks on the back of tiles is to analyse tile remnants from demolished Marwari buildings. Hundreds of such remnants are stored by antique dealers in Shekhawati, and prove that other manufacturers also supplied similar polychrome relief tiles for Marwari architecture. A large number of these tiles bear the trademarks of Japanese manufacturers, including Saji Tairu (Saji Tileworks), Fujimi Yaki (Fujimi Tile), and Sato Kesho Renga Kojo (Sato Decorative Tile Factory).<sup>8</sup> In addition, there are found a limited number of British tiles containing the trademark of H & R Johnson<sup>9</sup> and Indian tiles, identified by their places of manufacture in Wankaner and Gwalior.<sup>10</sup> These collections fuel further interest in the great popularity of Japanese majolica tiles in Marwari architecture.

TABLE 1. LIST OF TILED MARWARI BUILDINGS IN SHEKHAWATI

Location	Name of Building	Year of Construction
Alsisar	Khaitan <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
Bagar	Piramal <i>haveli</i>	1928
Churi Ajitgarh	Nemani <i>chhatri</i>	c.1930
	Nemani <i>kothi</i>	c.1930
Churu	Malji ka <i>kamra</i>	c.1925 (tiles not extant)
	Shantinath Temple	1935
	Dugarmalji Baid <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
	Mannalal Hanutmal Surana <i>nivas</i>	Unknown
	Sugarmalji Hanutamal Bair <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
Fatehpur	Joharlal Bhartia <i>haveli</i>	1920s
	Gopiram Jalan <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
	Goenka <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
	Mahendra Lal Devra <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
	Nand Lal Devra <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
Lakshmangarh	Rama Shrine	1954 (probably the year of renovation)
Mandawa	Sonthalia Gate and <i>haveli</i>	1930s
Ramgarh	Hanuman Temple	1885 (the year of initial construction)
	Johari <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
	Hanya Lal Modi <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
	Moti Lal Sawanlika <i>haveli</i>	Unknown
Sikar	Jubilee Hall	1897 (the year of initial construction)

Source: Based on the Author's Fieldwork in 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015.

FIG. 4. THE PIRAMAL *HAVELI* (1928, MANDAWA)



FIG. 5. A TRACE ON THE PLASTER OF THE WALL,  
THE PIRAMAL *HAVELI* (1928, MANDAWA)





## THE TILING OF A COLONIAL CITY: THE CASE OF CALCUTTA

### TILES AS A STATUS SYMBOL

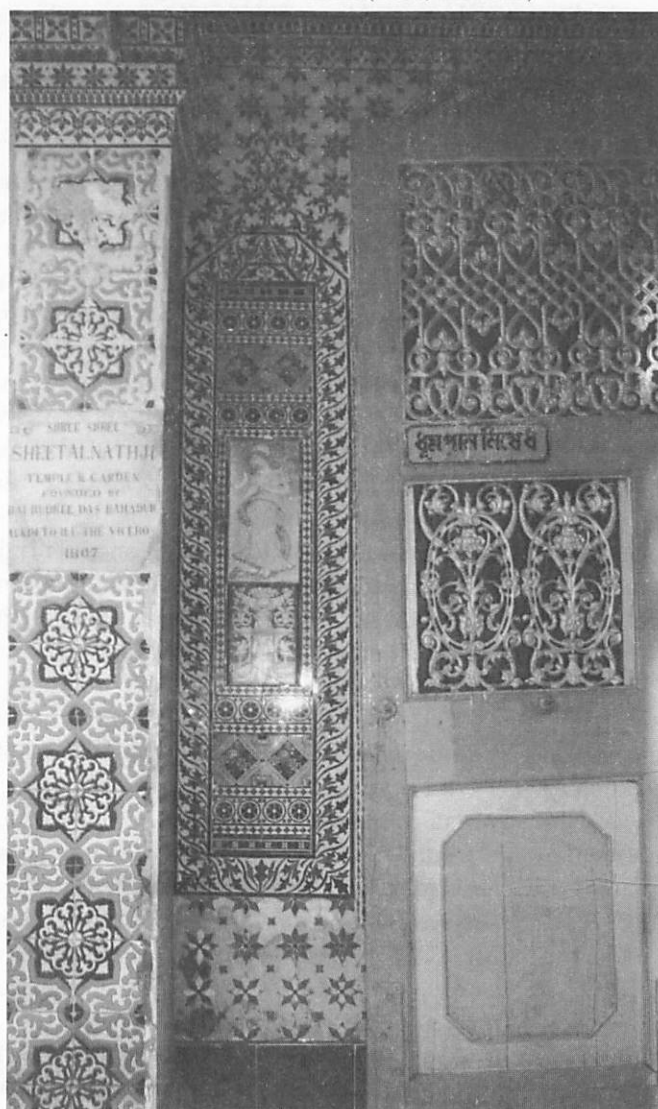
Tiles in Marwari architecture commonly decorate dadoes (the lower part of walls). This decorative style can be traced back to the major colonial cities including Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. It was especially popular in Calcutta, where the largest Marwari community outside Rajasthan had prospered, as outlined above. Since the late eighteenth century, newly-rising Bengali elites in Calcutta had constructed Western-style residential mansions. The Jorasanko neighbourhood was the centre of this elite Bengali society, and the dadoes of the porches and passageways of their mansions along the streets of Jorasanko were commonly decorated with different kinds of decorative tiles, similar to the style in Marwari architecture. However, these Bengali mansions were decorated largely with British tiles rather than Japanese ones, since the latter were not introduced in India until the early twentieth century, and therefore the decorative style of tiles in early colonial Calcutta originated in Victorian Britain.

The British tiles used in Bengali mansions were mass-produced products that developed with the impetus of the Industrial Revolution. With the growth of the urban middle class in nineteenth-century Britain, tiling gained great popularity in middle-class apartments (Austwick and Austwick 1980: 22-8). Minton China Works & Co. (1868-1918), one of the leading tile manufacturers in nineteenth-century Britain, advertised to consumers that 'the tile is made of an extra strength; their cheerful appearance and the ease with which they are kept clean and bright, owing to their richly glazed surface' (Anonymous (a) 1885). Tile was compared with stone in terms of durability and smoothness, advantageous for cleanliness, and was viewed as an ideal alternative to stone, since stone required highly trained masons to cut it and was expensive as a result. The mention of cleanliness in the Minton material also reflects the growing interest in sanitation in modernising British society. Moreover, the use of adjectives such as 'cheerful' and 'bright' to explain the characteristics of tile evoked an idealised image of urban living for dwellers in industrially polluted cities. In upper-middle-class apartments, more decorative and more expensive tiles, including polychrome relief tiles, decorated the walls to differentiate the residents from the lower middle class. Thus, for the Victorian middle class, the tile signified their aesthetic sense, public health consciousness, and middle-class identity (Yoshimura 2000: 42).

Victorian tiles, as a form of middle-class consumption culture in nineteenth-century Britain, also became a symbol of status in the British colonies, and India was not an exception. For example, a Jain merchant, Rai Badridas Bahadur Mookim (1832-1917), who was appointed court

jeweller to the Viceroy of British India, built a magnificent temple known as the Shri Shri Sheetalnath in Calcutta in 1867. The temple complex is planned in an eclectic style, symbolised by the main shrine, which incorporates different architectural elements of Nagara (Hindu temple architecture in northern India), Mughal, and Western styles. The whole of the complex is embellished with state-of-the-art imports, such as Belgian mosaic glass, Chinese blue-and-white ceramics, and Victorian tiles from Britain (Figure 6). In nineteenth-century India, these foreign

FIG. 6. THE MAIN GATE, THE SHRI SHRI SHEETALNATH TEMPLE (1867, KOLKATA)



goods were only accessible to the wealthy, such as aristocratic landlords and successful merchants, who established ties of complicity with the colonisers and became able to commission large-scale architectural projects. Victorian tiles, therefore, functioned as a status symbol for local elites in early colonial Calcutta.

#### TILES FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The symbolism of tiles in India was drastically changed in the late nineteenth century, however, when a series of epidemic diseases attacked the country.<sup>11</sup> A bubonic plague epidemic in 1896 caused particularly catastrophic damage, after which serious concern for public health rapidly increased on a broad social scale. British colonial officers argued that epidemic disease was caused by poor sanitary conditions, and public health improvement in colonial cities became one of the most important issues for British administration in India (Crook 1993: 8-15; Wakimura 2009: 129-31). As one aspect of this, the central authority urged different local governments to establish the improvement trusts.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of Calcutta, the Calcutta Improvement Act was enacted in 1911 and the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) was established the following year to undertake various urban improvement schemes for 'opening up congested areas, laying out or altering streets, providing open spaces for purpose of ventilation or recreation, demolishing or constructing buildings, acquiring land for the said purposes and for the re-housing of persons of the poorer and working classes' (CIT 1913: 1, IOR/V/24/2918). Public health administration appeared to promote the merits of tiles in terms of sanitation, as illustrated by the instruction given to a school in Bombay that 'the walls of the room should be tiled or painted so as to permit of regular washing', made by the health officers of the Bombay Municipality (Turner and Goldsmith 1914: 910). This showed that tile was recognised as an ideal material for keeping spaces hygienic.

Similarly in Calcutta, tiles were valorised and rapidly spread in public spaces. The Bengali middle class were newly-rising consumers, and they zealously adorned the shrines of their residential blocks with colourful tiles (Figure 7). The tiling of shrines for Goddess Kali and other deities in different neighbourhoods in Kolkata today originated from this period. These shrines also follow the decorative style in which tiles are confined to dadoes, similar to residential mansions of upper-class Bengalis in the previous century as described above. This indicates that the popularisation of tiles among middle-class Bengalis was brought about not only by an increasing concern for public health, promoted by British colonial administration, but also by the intention of the middle class to echo the lifestyles of the upper class. In other words, tiles now became a symbol of status as well as of public health for the Indian middle class.

FIG. 7. THE KALI SHRINE (THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY,  
B.B. GANGULY STREET, KOLKATA)



#### TILES IN BURRA BAZAR

Planning a number of improvement schemes, the CIT saw Burra Bazar (a core area of the Marwari community in Calcutta) as one of the most serious concerns between the late 1910s and 1920s. For example, the CIT's annual report for 1917 referred to Burra Bazar as follows:

Barabazar constitutes the Indian business centre of Calcutta and it is recognised that in many ways its improvement is a problem by itself. The area has been largely built over by four and five storeyed buildings; many of these have been constructed in defiance of all building regulations, and form hot beds of disease and plague. (CIT 1917: 18, IOR/V/24/2918)

The CIT consigned the evaluation of its improvement scheme for Burra Bazar to Patrick Geddes (1854-1932), a Scottish biologist and urban planner.<sup>13</sup> In his report, Geddes critically discussed the housing environment in the area:

From the British point of view, naturally so influential in India, the old Courtyard House is something out of date; and of which the disadvantages are conspicuous, and the advantages inconsiderable. Houses of this type like those of every other, may and do fall out of repair, and below sanitary requirements. They are too often overbuilt, divided, congested, and so on. All this has befallen the courtyard houses

of Barra Bazar and only too generally. Worst of all, since from plan and principle, they have the serious defect of lack of through ventilation. (Geddes 1919: 28)

The courtyard house derives from Islamic architecture and is widely seen in northern India. However, Geddes's report appears to connect this architectural form specifically to the residents in Burra Bazar, that is, the Marwaris. In his report, the term 'courtyard house' signified the Marwari's *haveli* as well as what he perceived as their traditional or backward lifestyle, which needed to be improved. Geddes's perceptions of Burra Bazar and the Marwaris were highly impacted by political and social circumstances in Calcutta at that time.

The Marwari community in Calcutta rapidly expanded from the 1910s onwards as women and children began to accompany male members in their migration.<sup>14</sup> Economically, the Marwari merchants advanced in the manufacturing industry and gradually surpassed other mercantile communities in Calcutta. Such circumstances led Bengalis to criticise the Marwaris as rustic *nouveaux riche* who persisted with a backward lifestyle brought with them from their homeland (Komatsu 2012: 142). The sanitary problem in Burra Bazar, caused by the rapid increase in population gave Bengalis what they perceived as a good reason to attack the Marwaris. Namely, the Burra Bazar debate among the colonisers paradoxically enabled nationalist Bengalis to contrast themselves as modern citizens in relation to the backward Marwaris who obstructed the urban development of Calcutta. Borrowing the Western idea of modernity, Bengali nationalism here sought Indian modernity to overcome British imperialism rather than lionise it.

In reaction to criticism against their community, the Marwaris attempted visible reforms in Burra Bazar. As part of these efforts, their community buildings, such as the relief societies and *dharmashalas*, were almost without exception decorated with tiles (Figure 8).<sup>15</sup> Other social reform issues, particularly the status of women, were critical causes of the split in the Marwari community into conservative and reformist factions in the 1910s (Hardgrave 2004: 205-15). The improvement of urban spaces was a timely unity issue in this regard, since it could be worked on by both groups and could make their reform efforts visible to other communities. It should also be noted in this period that newly-constructed Marwari buildings were more linked up with social welfare, to emphasise their philanthropic character in addition to represent their wealth and social status.

In short, tiled Marwari buildings in early-twentieth-century Calcutta were intended to bolster the builders' self-representation as enlightened modern people who were conscious of public health as well as philanthropists who donated their fortunes to social welfare in a wider context. Marwari architecture in Shekhawati also adopted tile decoration soon after, reflecting the influence of the social environment in Calcutta.

FIG. 8. THE BANGUR *DHARMASHALA* (THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY, PATHURIA GHAT STREET, KOLKATA)

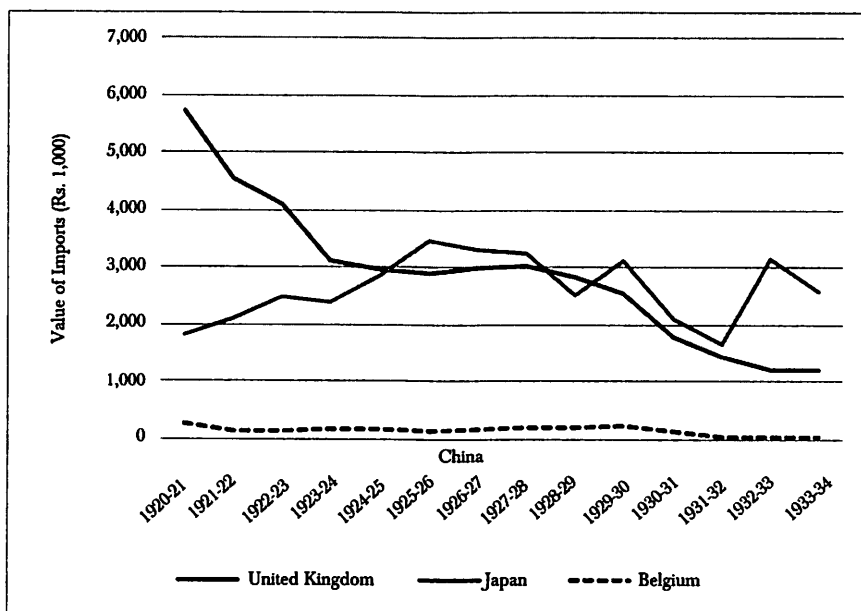


### THE TRANSITION FROM BRITISH TILES TO JAPANESE TILES IN THE INDIAN MARKET

India's foreign trade statistics in the early twentieth century suggest that the First World War was a turning point in the tile import situation. Despite the increasing demand for tiles across different social classes, as discussed in the previous section, the total value of imported British tiles in the Indian market kept decreasing after the First World War as the British tile industry stagnated in the postwar depression and suffered a further blow with the Great Depression in 1929. On the other hand, Japanese tiles increased their market share in India, and surpassed the trade value of British tiles in 1925 (Table 2).

Modern tile production in Japan was first undertaken in the late nineteenth century as part of the construction process of a modern nation state modelled after those of Western countries.<sup>16</sup> With the increasing demand for tiles in Western-style architecture, domestic tile manufacturing in Japan was attempted in existing pottery-making hubs from the pre-modern period.<sup>17</sup> As a result, two potters, Jiroma Murase of Fujimi Yaki and Keizo Nose of Danto, simultaneously determined the means to produce solid ceramic tiles of European quality in 1908 (Meiji 41) (INTK

TABLE 2. VALUE OF IMPORTS OF EARTHENWARE INTO BRITISH INDIA



Source: Statistical Abstract for British India, No. 64-68, London: HSMO, 1932-7, India Office Record ST404.

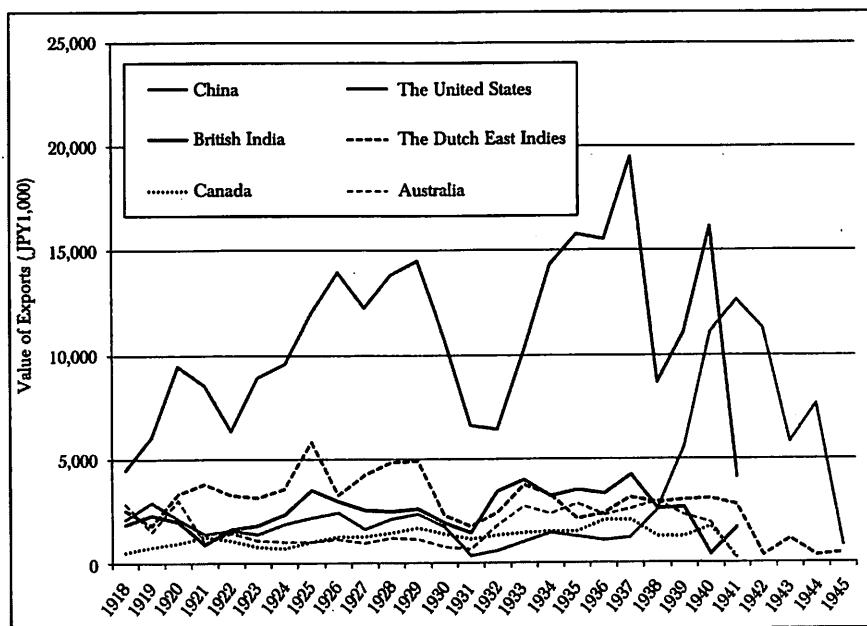
1991: 166-9).<sup>18</sup> The method was modelled after the dust-pressing technique that had developed in mid-nineteenth century Britain, in which clay dust was pressed between two metal moulds to form a tile biscuit.<sup>19</sup> Unlike plastic clay tiles, it does not require a drying process before firing, so that the quality of tiles could be standardised (INTK 1991: 166). Moreover, the moulding technique made decorative representation easy, as the mould came with an embossed surface to represent motifs in relief, on which either transparent or opaque glazes called majolica (after which the tiles were named) were applied for three-dimensional effects.<sup>20</sup> Minton exhibited those embossed tiles with different coloured glazes by the name of 'majolica tiles' in the Great Exhibition in London in 1851. Later in the early twentieth century, this trade name majolica became a general term for glazed or polychrome relief tiles in Japan (Takeda 2000: 39-40).

The export of Japanese majolica tiles to India was encouraged by the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 (Taisho 12). The disaster heavily affected the Tokyo metropolitan area, and both traditional wooden architecture and early (in the Japanese context) Western-style brick architecture were catastrophically damaged. In the reconstruction of Tokyo in a style befitting the capital of the young great power, the demand for quakeproof and fireproof concrete buildings grew. The cold surfaces of the new concrete buildings were beautifully covered with tiles and terracotta,

resulting in the rapid growth of manufacturing for these building materials (STH 2000: 83). The post-quake architectural boom came to an end by the late 1920s, and excessive supply of tile became a serious concern, which encouraged manufacturers to enter the export market (Shibatsuji 1976: 39). The export of Japanese tiles mainly targeted Asian countries, especially the British colonies, as the existing market in tiles from Britain to these colonies, including India, prepared a fairly solid ground for Japan's new entry.

In fact, India and Japan became the most important trading partner to each other in the tile trade by the late 1930s. The foreign trade statistics for Japanese pottery as a whole showed that India was the third-largest market throughout the 1920s, following the United States and the Dutch East Indies. In 1932, India became the second-largest market after the United States (Table 3). Breaking down these statistics by specific pottery items, India became the most important Japanese export market for solid ceramic tiles, including majolica tiles, in 1937 (Table 4). The data show that at that point, India accounted for more than 40 per cent of the total export quantity of solid ceramic tiles, indicating Japan's strong inclination for the tile trade in the Indian market. Besides in the same year, Japan reached the largest share of 48 per cent in India's valuable trade in tiles, overwhelming other countries including Italy (18 per cent), the United Kingdom (17 per cent), and Belgium (7 per cent) (Ainscough 1939: 253-4). In the next section, the Japanese efforts to expand the Indian market

TABLE 3. VALUE OF EXPORT OF POTTERY FROM JAPAN TO MAJOR FOREIGN COUNTRIES



Source: Yokohama Shishi Shiryo Hen 2, Yokohama: Yokohama-shi, 1980.



TABLE 4. QUANTITY OF EXPORT OF POTTERY FROM JAPAN TO MAJOR FOREIGN COUNTRIES IN 1937

(unit: ton)

	Kitchen/ Table Ware	Decorative Item	Toy	Solid Ceramic Tile	Other Types of Tile	Electrical Appliance	Sanitary Ware	Other Items	Total
The United States	129,923	50,810	20,565	448	156	138	15	15	202,090
British India	27,926	699	1,059	5,200	535	602	888	56	36,965
Australia	25,366	1,020	670	179	138	519	193	18	28,103
Canada	24,131	2,404	1,272	93	5	103	3	1	28,012
Manchuria	18,625	1,916	14	641	1,224	585	1,909	203	25,117
Java	22,485	178	61	1,150	67	139	37	198	24,315
The Phillipines	14,535	192	20	851	528	196	307	4	16,633
South Africa	14,423	773	459	226	53	35	24	5	15,998
West Africa	12,930	83	5	20	1	1	2	1,433	14,475
The Straits Settlements	10,961	234	62	419	351	139	53	1,693	13,912
Kwantung	5,548	766	10	1,100	2,099	2,591	1,335	112	13,561
United Kingdom	7,146	1,301	3,564	290	17	92	0	20	12,430
Argentina	10,749	190	84	113	123	1	0	14	11,274
Burma	9,795	45	20	131	12	39	29	4	10,075
Others	96,440	5,124	1,277	2,354	1,014	2,094	1,482	1,559	111,836
Total	430,983	65,735	29,601	13,215	6,323	7,274	6,277	5,375	564,793

Source: Tojiki Gyokai Sokan, Nagoya: Tojikai Kenkyusha.

and political circumstances in India to increase the demand for Japanese majolica tiles will be examined, to understand the context of the figures given in the statistics.

## TILES AND POLITICS IN INTERWAR INDIA

### REPRESENTING INDIA IN JAPANESE MAJOLICA TILES

Japanese tile manufacturers initially succeeded in opening up the Indian market by selling copied tiles of British designs (Shibatsuji 1976: 39). For example, Japanese majolica tiles produced by various manufacturers including Danto, Fujimi Yaki, and Saji, show a close resemblance to tiles made by the British manufacturer H & R Johnson (Figures 9, 10). This makes it likely that Japanese majolica tiles were adopted by the Indian middle class as cheaper alternatives to the original British tiles. To expand their product offerings with an eye on winning the favour of the Indian consumer, Japanese manufacturers energetically developed new designs; in particular, tiles representing Hindu mythological subjects gained huge popularity in the Indian market. One of the Kali shrines in present-day Kolkata is adorned with such tiles, depicting Hindu deities including Vishnu, Krishna, and Sarasvati, as well as floral- and geometric-patterned tiles.<sup>21</sup> A tile from a private collection,<sup>22</sup> showing the same design of the Goddess Sarasvati as at the shrine, enables us to identify its manufacturer on the back, embossed with 'MADE IN JAPAN' and 'SAJI TILEWORKS' with the trademark in the centre (Figure 11).<sup>23</sup> Similar tiles also adorn Marwari architecture in Shekhawati; for example, the Piramal *haveli* in Bagar is decorated with tile panels depicting Krishna myths and scenes from the *Ramayana*, alongside Danto's floral-patterned tiles. The manufacturer of one of the panels has been recently identified as Saji in the sales catalogue of an Indian auctioneer (Bid and Hammer Auctioneers 2010: 25).<sup>24</sup>

Saji, however, did not create any of these iconographic programmes. Sarasvati as represented on Saji tiles is a four-armed seated figure who wears a white *sari* with a red blouse and holds a *vina* (a stringed musical instrument in India), rosary, and *sutra* with her hands, accompanied by a peacock in waterside scenery. This iconographic programme is undoubtedly inspired by a famous oil painting, *Sarasvati* (1896) by Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) (Figure 12).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the *Ramayana* and other mythological subjects on the tile panels decorating the Piramal *haveli* are all closely similar to the artworks of Vasudeo H. Pandya (1896-1970s).<sup>26</sup>

In addition to Saji, other Japanese manufacturers also produced tiles bearing Hindu mythological subjects for the Indian market. The company archives of Fujimi Yaki offer a significant clue to the development of Hindu tile panels in Japan, as follows:

FIG. 9. A TILE MADE BY DANTO

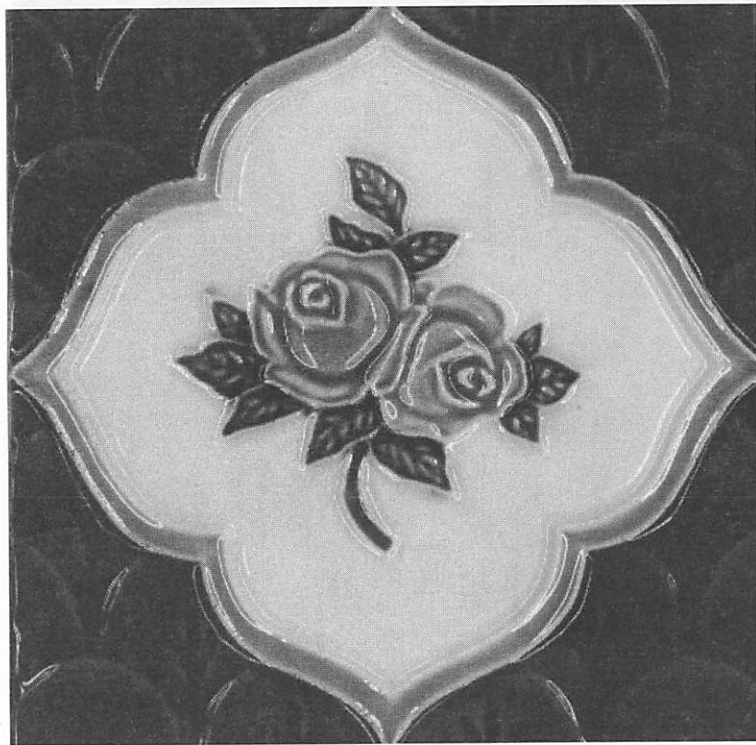


FIG. 10. A TILE MADE BY H & R JOHNSON

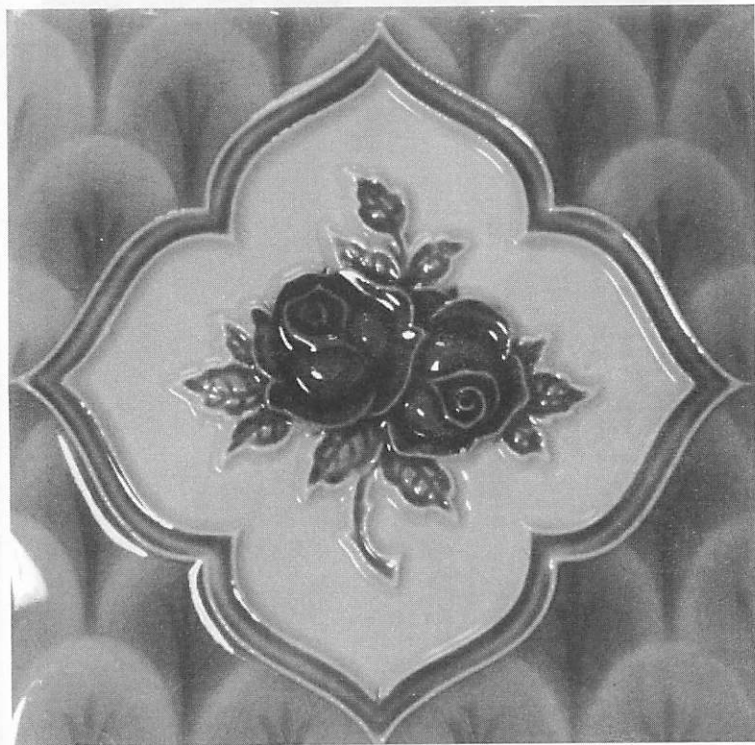


FIG. 11. A MAJOLICA TILE DEPICTING THE  
GODDESS SARASVATI MADE BY SAJI



FIG. 12. RAJA RAVI VARMA, *SARASVATI*, 1896, OIL ON CANVAS,  
54" × 71", MAHARAJA FATEHSINGH MUSEUM, VADODARA



Several mass-prints were brought from India as design samples. As large as six to twelve pieces of tiles, the prints represented religious scenes similar to the Nirvana. Reproduction of those prints into tile panels seemed to be costly; however, Indian customers requested us to produce such panels at any price. (Hyakujunenshi Hensan linkai 1989: 72).

The reference suggests that Fujimi Yaki undertook special orders for Indian customers to create tile products bearing religious subjects of Indian origin, and also that such religious images were modelled after the reproduction prints that were popular among ordinary people in interwar India. Interestingly, Ravi Varma and Pandya were popular artists of reproduction prints in the Indian market, and all their paintings adopted in Saji's majolica tiles were known in the form of reproduction prints.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is quite possible that Saji as well as Fujimi Yaki were provided with reproduction prints from India as the sources of their products.

Hindu myths in oils and their faithful reproduction using new printing technologies such as chromolithography and oleography constituted novel representations of Indian tradition in the colonial period, introduced from the West.<sup>28</sup> The realistic expressions of the Hindu pantheon, supported by scientific knowledge of anatomy and perspective, hugely impacted Indian people's perceptions of the world. Whereas the expensive original oil paintings could be owned only by the wealthy, the technological development of printing enabled the middle class to purchase reproductions as a way of emulating upper-class lifestyles, as well as tiles. In other words, the Indian middle class, who cherished reproduction prints, were also the main consumer class of Japanese majolica tiles. Although Indian middle-class consumers initially welcomed Japanese tiles copying British designs, their taste gradually moved toward Japanese tiles copying Indian reproduction prints, representing a new Indian tradition. In contrast to the British tile industry, which reliably sold Western designs to spread Western cultural values in the colony, Japanese manufacturers were latecomers in India's tile market, and were more eager to go to lengths to win the favour of Indian consumers, resulting in great success.

#### JAPANESE MAJOLICA TILES AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

It is not surprising that the expansion of Japanese majolica tiles threatened the British tile industry in the interwar period. For example, an article in a Japanese newspaper in 1933 argued that the success of the Japanese pottery industry in British territories had become a serious concern for Anglo-Japanese relations (Anonymous (b) 1933). The Empire amended customs tariffs on imported tiles in India in 1933 in order to repulse Japanese tiles in the sterling bloc: a new tariff on 'tiles of earthenware and porcelain' prescribed that British tiles be taxed at 20 per cent, whereas 'other' (in practice, mostly Japanese) tiles were taxed at 30 per cent, or 2 annas per square foot (Anonymous (c) 1934). Despite these

severe counter-measures against Japanese tiles, the Indian market share of Japanese pottery, including majolica tiles, was retained to a great degree until the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, according to the trade statistics discussed in the previous section. This was partly because the Japanese Ministry of Commerce and Industry began to monitor the price and quality of export tiles in order to show a cooperative attitude towards bloc economies of the Western powers before the War.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the demand for Japanese majolica tiles was kept vigorous in India by the rise of public health consciousness and the development of consumption culture, which led a broader swathe of society to decorate their living environments with affordable Japanese tiles depicting their own cultural traditions.

Most importantly, the rise of the nationalist movement in India was a crucial cause of expanding demand for Japanese majolica tiles. The Swadeshi movement encouraged people to boycott British goods and buy domestic goods as part of the anti-British movement, but the Indian tile industry had not yet been well established by the 1930s. Therefore, Japanese majolica tiles were recognised as 'good alternatives in the movement. Having very shrewdly perceived what motivated Indian people to consume Japanese tiles, Japanese tile manufacturers saw this situation as a major business opportunity for a further expansion in the Indian market.<sup>30</sup> In terms of subject matter, tile panels with images from reproduction prints depicting Hindu myths occupied a crucial role in increasing the demand for Japanese majolica tiles on their own among Indian nationalists, who in this sense expressed their nationalism through consumption culture. Calcutta in particular inevitably became the forefront of this kind of consumption of Japanese tiles, since it was already a driving force of both tile consumption and the nationalist movement.

With regard to the Marwaris specifically, their support for the nationalistic Congress movement may have encouraged them to consume Japanese majolica tiles as part of their self-representation. Some of the most prominent Marwari capitalists, such as Jamnalal Bajaj (1889-1942) and G.D. Birla (1894-1983), were known as earnest Gandhians who actively funded Congress activities (Hardgrave 2004: 200-4; Markovitz 2008: 212-13). Their ideology was strongly reflected in the secondary-copied paintings frequently seen on the walls of Marwari buildings during the interwar period. These include portraits of Gandhi, Nehru, and other Congress leaders; of Chhatrapati Shivaji who was recognised as a Hindu fighter in a nationalistic context; and of the mythical figure Bharat Mata which was the national personification of India as a mother goddess. Such a political selection of subject matter indicates that the Marwaris' sympathy for Indian nationalism was closely connected to their motivation to consume Japanese tiles. In other words, the decoration of Marwari architecture with Japanese majolica tiles signified their anti-British attitude as well as their identity as modern Gandhian capitalists.

One benefit of these developments for India was that Japanese tiles, as an alternative to British goods, generated the development of a modern tile industry in India from the late 1930s onwards. Some of the made-in-India tiles obviously imitated Japanese designs of the interwar period; one example, which attempted to reproduce a traditional Japanese flower-and-bird design depicting plums and bush warblers, shows that the Japanese tile industry was a feasible model for the modern tile industry towards postcolonial India. The expansion of tile consumption in India as a result of interactions between the efforts of Japanese tile firms and the nationalist movement in India motivated the domestic production of Indian tiles among the Swadeshi movement, and the Indian tile industry developed further in the 1940s, when the import of Japanese tiles was ceased because of the Pacific War. After Independence, India has become one of the largest countries of tile production in the world (Indian Council of Ceramic Tiles and Sanitaryware 2012). Not only as subcontract factories out to world-famous tile firms but also as a large consumer market on its own, India's significance in modern tile culture was prepared in the colonial period through the agency of Japan.

## CONCLUSION

To further the substantive understanding of identity formation in late colonial India, this article has focused on changes in tile culture in colonial India in relation to Japanese majolica tiles exported to India during the interwar period, in particular their consumption by Marwari merchants for buildings they constructed both in their home villages and in Calcutta as migrants.

As a prerequisite for the Marwaris' use of Japanese tiles in the 1920s-30s, the tile as a modern building material had been spreading among Indian colonial cities under the strong influence of British rule since the early nineteenth century. Calcutta, the capital of British India and the largest community hub of migrant Marwaris, was more active in the development of tile culture than any other city. Although tiles from Victorian Britain were initially and throughout the nineteenth century a display of high social status among the aristocratic class, outbreaks of epidemic diseases at the turn of the century propelled the development of legal structures related to public health, and tiles were recognised as sanitary materials suitable for the improvement of public health conditions in urban spaces. In the case of Calcutta, this led to further spread of tiles among the Bengali middle class in the 1910s, as their increasing wealth motivated themselves to practice cultural mimicry of higher social classes. In addition, interest in public health issues grew in Bengali society as part of social reform associated with the nationalistic movement. This encouraged Bengali people to openly criticise those who lived in an insanitary environment in Calcutta. The criticism was directed especially

towards the Marwari community that threatened Bengali society with their increased economic clout. To protest the criticism of their community, the Marwaris introduced tiles for decorating and sanitising Burra Bazar, and consequently, tile decoration reached the buildings in their home villages of Rajasthan soon after.

The expansion of tile culture in late colonial India thus owed an inestimable amount to the Japanese tile industry. The interwar period was a crucial turning point in this regard; it was a hard time for British tile industry because of the post-World War I depression, on the one hand, and the Japanese tile industry rapidly grew as part of the recovery from a large earthquake in the 1920s, on the other. India's robust demand for tiles made Japan the first country to import tiles into India. At the same time, India became the most important country of exporting tiles for the Japanese tile industry. Initially, the Japanese tile manufacturers successfully entered the Indian market by copying British tile designs and selling them at cheaper prices. Later, they succeeded further, expanding the market by developing 'Indian' designs including Hindu mythological subjects inspired by popular reproduction prints. The consumption of Japanese tiles also signified the boycott of British goods as part of the Swadeshi movement led by Gandhi.

Thus, Japanese tiles were not mere alternatives to domestically produced commodities. The display of traditional values (Hindu iconographical programmes) on modern figure-grounds (tiles) indicates that Indian people sought their own modernity, as an alternative to forced modernisation under colonial rule. This effort was occasioned and made fruitful not by the British tile industry but by the Japanese tile industry. This complex transition resulted in the active consumption of Japanese tiles in interwar India, and furthermore, it prepared the way for the development of a domestic tile industry in independent India, and the way for the making of Indian modernity, represented in the tiling of the everyday landscape of India today.

## NOTES

1. A *tile* in this study is a small flat piece of baked clay or other material, generally square in shape.
2. Tiles existed in pre-colonial South Asia, but their production and use were generally confined to Muslim-dominant regions such as Sind and Punjab (A. Patel 2008; Bordia 2014: 7-21).
3. The preceding studies of Japanese economic history have shed light on the industrial system and trade issues related to major products such as cotton and other textiles (Sugihara 1996; Kagotani 2000; Akita and Kagotani 2001). In addition, recent studies have considered other miscellaneous goods. For example, Oishi discussed the relations between the Japanese match industry and the network of Indian Muslim merchants in the 1910s and 1920s (Oishi 2002), while Yanagisawa



examined the social motivation of the Indian lower middle class to consume Japanese artificial silk clothes in the first half of the twentieth century (Yanagisawa 2010).

4. Toyoyama have recently argued the acceptance of Japanese majolica tiles in interwar India, particularly by the Marwaris (Toyoyama 2015, 2016).
5. Kalighat paintings are watercolour paintings on mill-made papers executed by *patuas* or scroll painters-cum-potters who had migrated in the nineteenth century from the villages of Bengal to Calcutta, and set up their workshops around the Kalighat temple (J. Jain 1999: 9).
6. The Marwaris brought those new popular artistic forms and other European curiosities to Shekhawati, and displayed their collections in *havelis* for public viewing on festive occasions (J. Jain 2004: 73-4).
7. The predecessor to Danto was the Minpei kiln, established by Minpei Kashu (1796-1871) in the Bunsei era (1818-30) of the Edo period. This kiln was a purveyor to the Awa Clan (in present-day Tokushima prefecture) (NTB 1976: 53-4; INTK 1991: 462; Anonymous (d) 2001: 76-81; Fukai 2006: 100).
8. Fujimi Yaki was the oldest manufacturer of the three, established in 1879 (Meiji 12) in Nagoya. Fujimi's products were commercially distributed by a wholesale dealer called Usami Ya. Shunzo Saji, the president of Usami Ya, established Saji in 1917 (Taisho 6) in Nagoya. Sato was established in 1916 (Taisho 5) in Toyooka in Gifu prefecture. Sato is the only one of these manufacturers that survives today, under the name Kaminoyama Seito (Kaminoyama Pottery) (INTK 1991: 166-71, 458-68).
9. Established in Stoke-on-Trent in 1901, H & R Johnson entered the tile industry later than many other companies. It is currently one of the largest tile companies in the world after mergers with some world-famous manufacturers of the Victorian period, such as Maw and Minton Hollins (Johnson Tiles 2013).
10. Wankaner in Gujarat and Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh.
11. The epidemic diseases that occurred in late-nineteenth-century India included smallpox, cholera, plague, malaria, and flu. These diseases frequently co-occurred with famines, so that damage became more serious (Wakimura 2002: 3-4, 26-48).
12. The first Improvement Trust in India was established in 1898 in Bombay, which was the most seriously affected city in the 1896 plague, and made it a model to other municipalities (Mukharji and Ghose 1913: iii).
13. Geddes was invited to India in 1914 by Lord Pentland, then-Governor of Madras, and stayed there until 1919. He toured all over British India and produced city planning reports for eighteen cities, including Madras, Dacca, Baroda, Lucknow, and Lahore as well as Calcutta (Meller 1990: 201-88; Tyrwhitt 1947).
14. According to census data, the Marwari population in Calcutta was 14,000 (1901), 15,000 (1911), and 30,000 (1921) (Timberg 1978: 88-9; Hardgrave 2004: 4-5).
15. For example, the Bharat Relief Society building on Zakaria Street in Burra Bazar was originally constructed in the early twentieth century by the Birlas and decorated with polychrome relief tiles.
16. The history of the tile in Japan can be traced back to the eighth century, when Buddhist temples were decorated with ceramic floor tiles modelled after Chinese architecture. The establishment of the tea ceremony in the sixteenth century brought about the development of ceramic ware and tile for decorating tea rooms (INTK 1991: 43-61).
17. One of the earliest attempts to produce tiles in a European style was made in Seto in Aichi prefecture. European Orientalist designs of floral and geometric patterns were reproduced using Japanese pottery techniques (STH 2000: 78).

18. Murase was a scion of the founding family of Fujimi Yaki, whereas Nose was the son of a potter at Danto. Both Murase and Nose graduated from the department of ceramic engineering at Tokyo Higher Technical School (present-day Tokyo University of Technology) in 1906 (Meiji 39) (INTK 1991: 166).
19. The technique was initially established by a British engineer, Richard Prosser, for making ceramic buttons, in 1840. Soon after, Minton purchased a share in the patent to apply the method to manufacture tiles (Austwick and Austwick 1980: 25).
20. Majolica glaze was introduced by Lön Arnoux, a French art director of Minton around 1850 (van Lemmen 2013: 172-3).
21. The shrine is located on S.N. Banerjee Road in the Taltala neighbourhood.
22. Specifically, from the author's collection; purchased in March 2014 in Melaka, Malaysia.
23. The trademark is a diamond shape, within which the Roman letters S (the capital letter of Saji) and H (the capital letter of Holdings) are written (INTK 1991: 461).
24. The panel consists of twelve tiles and represents a scene from the *Ramayana* in which Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana encounter a deer in the forest.
25. Ravi Varma is recognised as one of the greatest artists of colonial India. His famous work *Sarasvati* is executed in oil on canvas, measuring 54" × 71". It is in the collection of Maharaja Fatehsingh Museum in Vadodara.
26. For example, one of the panels depicting the Holi celebration by Krishna and Gopis shows a close resemblance to Pandya's work titled *Rang Panchami* (1930).
27. Ravi Varma established his own printing company, called Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press, in Bombay in 1894 whereas Pandya was known as a professional artist and contributor to Bombay press Anant Shivaji Desai (Topiwala) (Neumayer and Schelberger 2003: 35-49; Artslant India 2013).
28. Oil painting was initially introduced to India by European professional artists who sought careers in the late Mughal and regional courts. In the nineteenth century, the newly-rising aristocratic class became a new patron of Western-style oil paintings (Archer 1979; Mitter 1994: 17-21, 173-8).
29. Notification No. 61 of the national Ministry of Commerce and Industry (August 1934) (NTB 1976: 108-13).
30. In the business world of prewar Japanese pottery, it was recognised that Gandhi was the central figure boycotting British goods, and that this movement encouraged Indian people to choose Japanese goods instead in some cases (Asai 1933: 206-7).

## ABBREVIATIONS

CIT: the Calcutta Improvement Trust  
 INTK: INAX Nihon no Tairu Kogyoshi Henshu Iinkai  
 NTB: Nihon no Tairu Bunka Henshu Iinkai  
 STH: Sekai no Tairu Hakubutsukan

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