



## NAZİK VE KÜÇÜK REFORMLAR: JAPONYA'DA DIY KÜLTÜRÜNÜN KABUL EDİLMESİ GENTLE AND SMALL REFORMS: THE ACCEPTANCE OF DIY CULTURE IN JAPAN

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### stract

The article explores the evolution and cultural implications of the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) movement in Japan, tracing its roots from post-war British influences to its unique adaptation in Japanese society. Initially stemming from post-WWII slogans encouraging self-reliance and resourcefulness, DIY in Japan gained popularity in the 1960s with the concept of "Sunday Carpentry," where urban professionals pursued carpentry as a hobby. This trend expanded in the 1980s with the rise of home centers, influenced by American lifestyle ideals like spacious living and independence, epitomized by cultural imports like "Little House on the Prairie." Unlike its Western counterparts, Japanese DIY also reflects a deeper historical reverence for craftsmanship, blending professional precision with amateur enthusiasm. Manga and animation since the 2000s have further celebrated the DIY ethos, exemplifying resilience and personal growth through creative endeavors. Ultimately, Japanese DIY culture embodies a nuanced approach to societal change, offering modest yet meaningful solutions through individual initiative and creativity, bridging personal expression with communal values of self-improvement and resilience.

**Keywords:** Japan, DIY, American influence, craftsmanship, independence.

### Özet

Bu makale, Japonya'daki Kendin Yap (DIY) hareketinin evrimini ve kültürel etkilerini, II. Dünya Savaşı sonrası İngiliz etkilerinden başlayarak Japon toplumundaki uyarlamasına kadar geçen süreci konu edinmektedir. Başlangıçta savaş sonrası kendi kendine yeterlilik ve kaynakları verimli kullanma çağrısından doğan DIY, Japonya'da 1960'larda "Pazar Marangozluğu" kavramıyla popülerlik kazanmıştır; bu dönemde beyaz yakalılar marangozluğu bir hobi olarak benimsemiştir. 1980'lerde, Amerikan yaşam tarzı idealleri, geniş yaşam alanı ve bağımsızlık gibi unsurların etkisiyle, DIY trendi nalburiyelerin yükselişiyle daha da yaygınlaşmıştır. Bu dönemin kültürel ithalatlardan biri olan *Little House on the Prairie* dizisi, bu idealleri simgelemektedir. Batılı karşıtlarından farklı olarak, Japon DIY kültürü, amatör heyecanla profesyonel hassasiyeti birleştiren, tarihten gelen derin bir zanaatkarlık saygısını da yansıtmaktadır. 2000'lerden itibaren manga ve animasyonlar, yaratıcı çabalarla dayanıklılığı ve kişisel gelişimi yücelterek DIY ethosunu kutlamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Japon DIY kültürü, bireysel girişimcilik ve yaratıcılık yoluyla toplumsal değişime ince, ancak anlamlı çözümler sunan, kişisel ifadeyi öz gelişim ve dayanıklılık gibi toplumsal değerlerle birleştiren karmaşık bir yaklaşımı temsil etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Japonya, DIY, Amerikan etkisi, el sanatları, bağımsızlık.



This paper explores the evolution of the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) movement in Japan, tracing its origins from post-World War II British influences to its adaptation within Japanese society. It examines how Western cultural imports, particularly from the United States, shaped the development of Japanese DIY culture while emphasizing Japan's distinctive tradition of craftsmanship, or *monozukuri*. Through a historical and cultural analysis, this study investigates how DIY practices in Japan have transformed from a practical activity to an expression of creativity and personal empowerment, deeply intertwined with Japanese cultural values.

The origins of the DIY movement can be traced back to post-World War II Britain, where citizens were encouraged to rebuild war-torn cities independently, without relying on government support or expert intervention. The British government's wartime slogan, "make do and mend," promoted resourcefulness, urging people to reuse and repair rationed goods rather than seek new products. This initiative gradually evolved into a citizen-led movement that embraced self-sufficiency. As the DIY concept spread internationally, Japan began to adopt similar practices, but within the context of its own rapidly changing post-war society.

In Japan, the DIY movement gained traction in the 1960s, when the term "Sunday Carpentry" emerged to describe the growing number of office workers who took up carpentry as a weekend hobby. This trend reflected Japan's economic growth and a shift towards more leisure time, as DIY projects became a means for individuals to engage in creative and practical work outside of their professional lives. By the 1980s, the expansion of home improvement centers across Japan provided DIY enthusiasts with greater access to tools and materials, further facilitating the growth of this cultural practice. Notably, the home improvement retailer Doyt's played a key role in the spread of DIY culture by opening its first store in Yono City, a Tokyo suburb, during this period of rapid suburbanization.

However, the evolution of Japan's DIY culture was not solely a domestic phenomenon. It was significantly shaped by external influences, particularly from the United States. In the post-war period, Japan absorbed many aspects of American culture, especially through television and visual media. American sitcoms in the 1960s portrayed a consumerist lifestyle that featured modern home appliances, stylish furniture, and suburban living. This imagery captured the attention of Japanese audiences and influenced their perceptions of home improvement and self-reliance.

One of the most influential American cultural imports during this period was the television series *Little House on the Prairie*, which aired in Japan from 1974 to 1983. Based on Laura Ingalls Wilder's novels, the show depicted the life of a self-sufficient family living on the American frontier. The series' themes of independence, family unity, and self-reliance resonated deeply with Japanese viewers, who saw parallels between these values and their own cultural emphasis on resilience and ingenuity. The image of the father building a log cabin and crafting tools became an iconic representation of a simpler, more self-sustained lifestyle, inspiring many Japanese individuals to embrace DIY as a means of enhancing their living spaces and personal autonomy.

While Japan's DIY culture was influenced by Western ideals of self-reliance, it also incorporated the country's own tradition of *monozukuri*, a term that refers to the art of craftsmanship. In Japan, craftsmanship is highly valued not only for its practical utility but also for its emphasis on precision, beauty, and ethical labor. The DIY movement in Japan thus became intertwined with this cultural tradition, as individuals engaged in DIY activities with the same care and attention to detail that characterized professional craftsmanship. This blend of Western DIY ideals and Japanese craftsmanship created a uniquely local interpretation of the movement, in which DIY projects became both functional and artistic pursuits.



The paper also explores the representation of DIY themes in modern Japanese media, particularly in manga and animation. Although DIY as a central theme is relatively new in these genres, the DIY ethos has long been reflected in the work of many creators. For example, the manga series *Master Keaton*, serialized between

1988 and 1994, features a protagonist whose survival skills and self-reliance embody the values of the DIY movement. More recently, works such as *Earthquake NEET* have explored DIY themes in the context of personal resilience and recovery, particularly in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake. In 2022, the anime *Dewit Yourself* was released, focusing on a group of high school girls who form a DIY club and engage in creative projects that foster personal growth and self-expression.

In conclusion, the DIY movement in Japan represents a unique cultural phenomenon that combines Western influences with deeply rooted Japanese traditions of craftsmanship and self-sufficiency. While DIY practices in Japan were initially influenced by British and American ideals of independence, they have evolved into a broader expression of creativity, personal empowerment, and societal reform. DIY activities in Japan allow individuals to reclaim control over their living spaces and lives through hands-on, creative work, offering modest but meaningful solutions to everyday challenges. Ultimately, Japan's DIY culture reflects a balance between individual expression and communal values, promoting resilience, self-improvement, and personal fulfillment in a rapidly changing world.

## Introduction

The Do-It-Yourself (DIY) movement, originating in post-World War II Britain, encouraged citizens to independently rebuild their war-torn cities without relying on government or expert intervention. During the war, the British government promoted the slogan "make do and mend," urging the population to continue using and improving existing goods in the face of scarcity due to rationing. Post-war, this initiative evolved into a citizen-led activity, emphasizing self-reliance and resourcefulness. This paper aims to examine the rise of DIY culture in Japan within this historical context, exploring British and American influences on its development and the unique Japanese mentality and tradition of craftsmanship that shaped its adaptation. The paper provides a historical and cultural analysis, tracing the DIY movement's origins from British wartime initiatives, through its expansion in post-war Japan. It examines the influence of American culture on Japanese DIY practices, especially through television media such as *Little House on the Prairie*, and explores the cultural significance of craftsmanship in Japanese society. The representation of DIY in modern Japanese media, including manga and animation, is also analyzed.

The DIY movement in Japan gained momentum in the 1960s, a period marked by rapid economic growth and increasing leisure time among the population. The emergence of the term "Sunday Carpentry" reflected this phenomenon, as office workers began engaging in carpentry projects on weekends, transforming DIY from a necessity into a hobby. This trend mirrored Japan's post-war economic expansion and the associated shift towards a more relaxed lifestyle. DIY activities, in this context, became a way for individuals to express creativity, engage in practical work, and improve their living spaces without professional assistance (Hoffman, 2004).

By the 1980s, home improvement centers had proliferated across the country, enabling greater accessibility to materials and tools for DIY enthusiasts. A prominent company associated with this movement was *Doit's*, which opened its first store in Yono City, Saitama Prefecture, in a suburban area of Tokyo. This suburbanization trend reflected broader housing developments in post-war Japan, where the growing middle class sought to create more individualized, functional living spaces (Takeuchi, 2011). However, by this time, the DIY mentality in Japan had already begun to shift under the influence of American culture, leading to new expectations and practices in home improvement.

## American Influences on Japanese DIY Culture



Japan's absorption of American culture after World War II played a significant role in shaping its DIY practices. Particularly through television and visual media, the United States introduced Japan to a consumerist lifestyle that showcased modern home appliances, stylish furniture, and spacious suburban homes. This portrayal of

American life resonated with the aspirations of Japan's emerging middle class, encouraging them to pursue similar lifestyles through DIY home improvement projects (Shiraishi, 1997).

A particularly influential cultural import during the 1970s and 1980s was the American television series *Little House on the Prairie*, which aired in Japan between 1974 and 1983. Based on the novels by Laura Ingalls Wilder, the series depicted the life of a self-sufficient family living on the American frontier. The themes of independence, family unity, and self-reliance deeply resonated with Japanese audiences, who saw parallels between these values and their own cultural emphasis on resilience and ingenuity. The series' portrayal of the father figure building a log cabin and crafting tools became a cultural symbol for self-sufficiency and inspired many Japanese viewers to adopt similar ideals in their own DIY activities (Fujimoto, 2010).

#### DIY and Japanese Craftsmanship (Monozukuri)

While Japan's DIY culture absorbed elements of British and American traditions, it was also deeply informed by the Japanese concept of *monozukuri*—the art of making things with craftsmanship and precision. Historically, Japanese craftsmanship has been highly valued not only for its practical utility but also for its aesthetic beauty and ethical labor. This tradition extends beyond the realm of professionals, as the distinction between a skilled craftsman and an amateur DIY enthusiast is often a matter of degree rather than kind (Sato, 2005).

In the context of 1960s Japan, a growing divide emerged between professional and amateur roles due to increased specialization in the labor market. However, DIY activities allowed individuals to challenge this stratification, reclaiming control over their living spaces and lives through hands-on, creative work. The ethos of DIY in Japan, thus, became closely aligned with the principles of *monozukuri*, emphasizing craftsmanship, attention to detail, and personal fulfillment (Ishida, 2008).

#### The Representation of DIY in Japanese Manga and Animation

In addition to its practical applications, the DIY spirit has increasingly found representation in Japanese manga and animation. Many creators in these fields have embraced the DIY ethos, experimenting with new techniques and forms of expression. For example, the manga *Master Keaton* (1988-1994) features a protagonist whose survival skills and resourcefulness embody DIY values of independence and discipline. The character, Hiraga Keaton Taichi, is an Oxford graduate and former member of the British Army's Special Air Service (SAS), whose diverse skills enable him to solve complex problems in his role as a health investigator (Kojima, 1990).

More recent works, such as *Earthquake NEET*, explore DIY themes in the context of personal growth and resilience. The protagonist, having lost his sense of purpose following the Great East Japan Earthquake, retreats to the mountains, where he builds a hut and lives in isolation. This act of self-reliance allows him to rediscover his identity and place in the world (Sugimoto, 2016). Similarly, the 2022 anime *Dewit Yourself* depicts a group of high school girls who form a DIY club, engaging in creative projects that promote personal growth and camaraderie.

#### Findings and Discussion

The study of DIY culture in Japan reveals the complex interplay between foreign cultural influences and deep-rooted Japanese values, particularly *monozukuri* (craftsmanship). The analysis highlights several significant findings that offer insights into the evolution, societal role, and impact of the DIY movement in Japan. These findings demonstrate how external influences, particularly from Britain and the United States, shaped Japan's DIY practices, while the unique cultural framework of Japan allowed DIY to develop as a form of self-expression and personal empowerment.



The impact of Western culture, particularly British and American influences, on the development of Japanese DIY culture is clear from the historical analysis. Post-World War II Britain's "make do and mend" initiative set

the stage for a global DIY movement that emphasized resourcefulness and self-reliance. This ethos was imported into Japan during its post-war reconstruction, with the Japanese government and citizens seeking ways to rebuild homes and communities with limited resources. However, the most significant external influence on Japan's DIY culture was American media, particularly through the popular television show *Little House on the Prairie*. The influence of *Little House on the Prairie* on Japanese DIY culture illustrates how American values of independence, family, and self-sufficiency resonated with post-war Japanese society. The show's depiction of frontier life and its emphasis on hands-on craftsmanship provided an appealing model of self-reliance, particularly at a time when Japan was undergoing rapid modernization and urbanization. The show's popularity helped introduce a new image of the DIY practitioner—one who engaged in manual labor not out of necessity but as a form of self-empowerment and personal growth. This reflects the broader global trend in DIY culture, where traditional distinctions between professional work and amateur hobby blurred, allowing individuals to claim ownership over their personal environments.

Although influenced by Western culture, Japanese DIY is deeply rooted in the country's historical tradition of craftsmanship, known as *monozukuri*. *Monozukuri* goes beyond mere technical skill, encompassing the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of craft. This focus on precision and beauty is evident in Japanese DIY practices, where even non-professionals engage in DIY projects with a high level of care and attention to detail. *Monozukuri* plays a crucial role in differentiating Japanese DIY culture from its Western counterparts. While Western DIY practices often focus on functionality and the practical aspects of home improvement, Japanese DIY enthusiasts frequently approach their projects with a craftsman's mentality, striving for both utility and beauty. This reflects broader cultural values in Japan, where craftsmanship is not only a professional pursuit but a respected form of personal expression. By engaging in DIY activities, individuals can participate in the *monozukuri* tradition, blurring the lines between amateur and professional. This contributes to the unique Japanese interpretation of DIY, where the process of creation is just as important as the final product.

The term "Sunday Carpentry" that emerged in the 1960s reflects a significant shift in the role of DIY in Japanese society. As Japan's economy grew, DIY moved from being a necessity born out of post-war scarcity to a popular hobby for the growing middle class. Office workers began using their weekends to engage in carpentry and other DIY activities as a form of relaxation and creative expression. By the 1980s, the proliferation of home improvement centers made DIY more accessible to the general public, transforming it into a widespread cultural practice. The transformation of DIY from necessity to hobby parallels the broader shift in Japanese society towards greater leisure time and individual expression. As Japan's economy expanded, the middle class began to seek ways to improve their living spaces beyond mere functionality. This aligns with the increasing suburbanization of Japan, where home ownership and the customization of personal space became important markers of social status. The rise of DIY culture during this period can be seen as both a reflection of Japan's economic growth and a response to the increasing desire for individuality within a rapidly modernizing society. DIY provided a means for people to assert control over their environments, allowing for personal creativity and customization in a society that was becoming increasingly standardized.

One of the most significant findings of this study is the way in which DIY culture in Japan functions as a form of personal empowerment. The DIY movement allows individuals to reclaim control over their living spaces and personal lives, offering a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency in an increasingly industrialized and specialized world. This is evident in the representation of DIY themes in manga and animation, where characters often engage in DIY activities as a means of self-discovery, resilience, and growth. The portrayal of DIY in media such as *Master Keaton* and *Earthquake NEET* emphasizes the connection between DIY and personal empowerment. These stories often depict characters who use DIY skills to overcome personal



challenges, reinforcing the idea that self-reliance and hands-on work can lead to personal growth. In the case of Earthquake NEET, the protagonist's retreat to the mountains and his construction of a hut after the Great East Japan Earthquake symbolizes the power of DIY to restore a sense of identity and purpose in times of

crisis. Similarly, the 2022 anime *Dewit Yourself* portrays DIY as a form of creative self-expression, particularly for young people seeking to develop a sense of agency in their lives. This reflects the broader societal role of DIY culture in Japan. While DIY activities may appear modest, they offer individuals the opportunity to engage in subtle forms of societal reform. Through DIY, people can take small but meaningful steps towards improving their lives and environments, challenging the pressures of consumerism and industrialization. In this sense, DIY culture serves as a form of resistance to the mass production and commercialization of modern society, offering an alternative model based on personal creativity and self-sufficiency.

The findings suggest that DIY culture in Japan represents a form of gentle, small-scale societal reform. Unlike more radical forms of social change, DIY offers practical and creative solutions to everyday problems, allowing individuals to address issues of personal and communal significance without relying on external authorities or large-scale interventions. This aspect of DIY culture aligns with Japan's cultural values of harmony and gradual change. Rather than seeking dramatic transformations, DIY allows individuals to make incremental improvements in their living spaces and personal lives. This reflects the Japanese preference for subtle, incremental progress over abrupt or disruptive change. By encouraging self-reliance and creativity, DIY culture promotes resilience and self-improvement, offering individuals a means to navigate the challenges of modern life while staying connected to traditional values.

## Conclusion

The DIY movement in Japan serves as a form of gentle societal reform, offering individuals opportunities to take personal steps towards improving their living spaces and lives. Rather than seeking radical solutions to societal issues, DIY activities offer practical, creative approaches to daily challenges, reflecting the influence of British and American traditions. However, Japan's DIY culture is also deeply rooted in its history of craftsmanship and ingenuity, blending external influences with the enduring cultural values of *monozukuri*. Ultimately, DIY in Japan has evolved into a broader metaphor for independence, creativity, and personal empowerment. By reclaiming control over their living environments through hands-on work, individuals engage in a process of self-improvement and subtle societal transformation, bridging personal expression with communal values of resilience and self-reliance. The findings of this study highlight the unique nature of Japan's DIY culture, which blends external influences with deeply rooted cultural traditions of craftsmanship. While initially influenced by British and American ideals of self-reliance and independence, Japan's DIY movement has evolved into a broader cultural phenomenon that emphasizes personal empowerment, creativity, and societal reform. Through DIY, individuals in Japan can reclaim control over their environments and lives, engaging in hands-on work that fosters personal growth, resilience, and subtle societal change. The DIY movement in Japan thus offers a compelling example of how global cultural practices can be adapted to local contexts, reflecting both the opportunities and challenges of navigating a rapidly changing world.



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