

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

## The Sakubei Yamamoto Collection

(Japan)

Ref N° 2010-36

### PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

#### 1 SUMMARY

The collection of annotated paintings and diaries of Sakubei Yamamoto are a unique record of the rapid development of the Japanese coal mining industry. The collection is of international importance in relation to the incredibly rapid and autonomous development of Japanese industry, which had ramifications for the region and the world. The collection shows the impact of western technologies when transferred to a traditional eastern culture, an issue of continuing global significance. The existence of such an unusual and authentic documentary source enhances this global story. The collection also is an important documentary source in relation to the World Heritage nomination being developed for Japan's industrial development, providing a human face to the industrial sites included in the nomination.

Sakubei Yamamoto (1892-1984) lived with his family at the coal mines of the Chikuho region in Kyushu from the age of seven, was apprenticed to a pickaxe smith at a mine in 1904 when he was 12, and worked variously as a mine blacksmith and miner until the age of 63 in 1955, when he became a security guard at a mine and started painting his memories, drawing information from his diaries. Sakubei Yamamoto had little formal education, but by the age of 21 in 1913 began keeping notebooks and diaries in which he recorded events. These form part of the collection.

Coal mining was an essential part of the equally rapid emergence of industry in Japan from 1850 onwards, when the country was opened up to the western world. Japan is unusual if not unique among non-western nations in undertaking this industrial transformation on its own terms, without being colonised and without substantial foreign investment, to become the second largest economy in the world by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the Meiji Era (1868-1912) Japan went through enormous social and economic turmoil, as the earlier dominance of the Samurai class and regional Han governance was replaced by a more centralised national government than the preceding Tokugawa government had ever been. The new government took over as a national project the stimulation and oversight of the industrial growth of the nation. Coal provided one of the early export commodities that helped finance the industrial revolution that saw Japan grow from a craft-based society in the 1850s to a world naval and industrial power by the First World War. Japanese coal, from the Chikuho coal field in Kyushu among others, where Sakubei lived and worked, was exported to China, Hong Kong and Singapore to fuel the steamships of Asia and the western Pacific. The rapid expansion of coal mining demanded a much increased workforce, and miners during the period recorded by Sakubei Yamamoto included former rural workers, both men and women and their children, tradesmen, ex-convicts, and foreign labourers. These were all first-generation miners with no tradition of mining, who brought with them a range of customs and beliefs illustrated by the Yamamoto paintings.

Coal mining sites from the Meiji Era, together with the remains of steel works, docks and shipyards, form the basis of a World Heritage nomination being developed by the Prefectural and City governments of Kyushu and Yamaguchi in western Japan. The Sakubei collection is a personal testimony to the developments during the late Meiji era and into the later twentieth century, when the industrial revolution was still being acted out in the coal mining industry of Chikuho. The collection combines naive art with text, informed by diaries written during the events being depicted, painted by a man who lived through the events and worked literally at the coal-face. It is highly unusual in a

Japanese context as a private record created by a working man, whereas the dominant records of the period are official government and business papers. The Sakubei paintings have a rawness and immediacy that is totally missing from the official record, and the collection is a totally authentic personal view of a period of great historical significance to the world.

## **2        *DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR***

### **2.1 Name**

The Tagawa City, Kyushu, Japan, and the Fukuoka Prefectural University (nomination lodged by Dr Michael Pearson on behalf of Nobukatu Ito, Mayor of Tagawa City, Tatsuo Aso, Director of the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum, and Professor Sen-ichi Moriyama, Fukuoka Prefectural University).

### **2.2      Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated**

Tagawa City owns the paintings and part of the diary and notebook collection of Sakubei Yamamoto, which is held in the city's Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum. The Museum cooperates closely with the Fukuoka Prefectural University in Tagawa, that houses and researches the bulk of the Sakubei Yamamoto diaries and notebooks. Both bodies are initiating the nomination.

### **2.3      Contact person (s)**

Dr Michael Pearson is acting as contact person for the nomination on behalf of Tagawa City and Fukuoka Prefectural University. Ms Koko Kato is the project leader coordinating the Tagawa nominators inputs.

Nobukatsu Ito, Mayor of Tagawa City, Tatsuo Aso, Director of the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum, and Professor Sen-ichi Moriyama and Mutsumi Hayashi, Head of Libraries and Archives, Fukuoka Prefectural University, have executive decision making powers in relation to the collection and nomination.

### **2.4      Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)**

#### **1.      Contact for issues to do with the nomination:**

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#### **Contacts with owners/managers in Japan:**

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### **3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE**

#### **3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated**

The collection of Sakubei Yamamoto being nominated consists of the following:

- 585 paintings, 6 diaries, 8 notebooks/memorandum books and 28 papers and assorted documents, owned and managed by the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum;
- 4 paintings, 59 diaries, and 7 notebooks/memorandum books owned by the Yamamoto family and managed by Fukuoka Prefectural University Library.

#### **3.2 Description**

The 585 paintings, 6 diaries, 8 notebooks/memorandum books and 28 papers and assorted documents, held by Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum are catalogued in the Museum's cataloguing system.

The diaries, notebooks and assorted papers of Sakubei Yamamoto housed in the Fukuoka Prefectural University Library are catalogued in the institution's cataloguing system.

#### ***Provenance***

Sakubei Yamamoto donated a collection of 275 water colour paintings to Tagawa City Library between 1964 and 1967, and these were transferred to the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical

Museum for storage and display in 1979, at the request of the artist. In 1997, three water colour paintings were donated by an individual to the Museum. Another painting was donated by an individual to the museum in 2010.

The family of Sakubei Yamamoto donated a collection of 296 black and white ink paintings to Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum in 1992. In 1996 the family donated a further ten black and white ink paintings to the Museum. Sakubei Yamamoto donated 8 notebooks in 1979 ( Showa 54), transferred from the Tagawa City Library. The Yamamoto family donated 6 diaries and other papers in 1988 (Showa 63). Professor Naoki Tanaka donated 7 script papers in 2000 (Heisei 12).

The Yamamoto family entered into an agreement with the Fukuoka Prefectural University in 2002 to enable the collection of Sakubei Yamamoto's diaries and notebooks and papers owned by the family to be housed, conserved and researched by the University. These documents had been identified by Professor Moriyama when Sakubei's house was being demolished, and sought the family's permission to house them in the University.

### ***Condition and storage arrangements***

The Sakubei Yamamoto collection held by Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum is in good condition and housed in temperature and humidity controlled storage in the museum. Condition assessment and conservation advice is provided by professional archives conservators in the Tagawa Art Museum. The painting collection is currently housed in a series of Paulownia timber boxes, wrapped in acid free paper but with insufficient separation between paintings. The Museum has funds and a design to construct a new shelving system to allow individual horizontal storage of each painting in secure cabinets. This will be completed by mid-2010. Storage of the Museum's diaries, notebooks and papers will be incorporated into the new storage facility.

The Museum does not allow the display of the original water colour paintings, due to their sensitivity to light, and only display copies. Pen and ink paintings are more robust, and can be displayed and made available for loan to other galleries and museums. (see Museum Policies in section 6 of this nomination). All 584 paintings in the museum are also digitalized in a data file, allowing public access without exposing the originals.

The Fukuoka Prefectural University diaries and notebooks are stored in the Libraries archive store. Each diary and notebook is wrapped in acid free paper and individually stored in an acid-free archive box.

### ***Referees***

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Specializing in Social Science, Japan Modern History, Member of Kyushu Yamaguchi World Heritage Committee, Member of Cultural Agency World Heritage Working Committee.

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#### **4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA**

##### **4.1 Is authenticity established?**

The collection was obtained directly from the author or from his family shortly after his death, and the authenticity and provenance of the works is very well established.

##### **4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?**

The collection is of international importance in relation to the incredibly rapid and autonomous development of Japanese industry in the Meiji era (1868-1912) and on into the twentieth century. Japan's industrialisation had ramifications for the region and the world, and the collection shows the impact of western technologies when transferred to a traditional eastern culture, an issue of continuing global significance. The existence of such an unusual and authentic documentary source enhances this global story. It also is an important documentary source in relation to the World Heritage nomination being developed for Japan's industrial development, providing a human face to the industrial sites included in the nomination.

The Sakubei Yamamoto collection is an irreplaceable element of the world's heritage, as it is a unique expression of the living and working conditions of male and female miners in Japan during its rise to world prominence as an economic power. This aspect of Japanese history, as part of the shared experience of the world's humanity, is expressed in this collection by a working class participant who worked as a miner and mine blacksmith for over 50 years, during this period of great historical change. The collection presents that history in a distinctive and highly creative form that is not paralleled in any other documentary resource. The diaries, notebooks and paintings are linked in a documentary and pictorial representation of observed events and background.

##### **4.3 Is one *or more* of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style (f) social, spiritual and community significance satisfied?**

Four of the criteria are satisfied by the Yamaoto Sakubei collection:

###### **Criterion 1 – Time:**

The Sakubei Yamamoto collection is a unique expression of the living and working conditions of male and female miners (including foreign labour miners) in Japan during its rise to world prominence as an economic power in the first half of the twentieth century. The paintings are evocative of the harsh and dangerous conditions in which miners worked and the changes in mining technology, as seen from a miner's perspective. The paintings and diaries reflect a period of enormous change, presenting graphically memories and records from the turn of the century to after the Second World War. Japan's experience is a microcosm of the fundamental changes in social and cultural conditions of working class labour experienced in many non-Western countries with developing industries based on western technologies. The Sakubei paintings are a startling, rare and authentic representation of that experience and time

###### **Criterion 2 – Place:**

The Sakubei Yamamoto paintings and diaries are very specifically related to the mines in the Chikuho Coal Field of Kyushu, where Sakubei Yamamoto worked for 56 years in a number of roles including miner, mine blacksmith and mine caretaker. The paintings reflect the period of

rapid change in the mines of the region, during which mining went from largely pre-mechanical manual extraction of coal by husband and wife teams, to modern mechanized mining. In doing so, Chikuho is a window onto the wider industrialization of Japan and the history of the spread of the industrial revolution across the world.

### **Criterion 3 – People:**

The Sakubei Yamamoto collection reflects in image and text the miner's responses to the social, industrial and political changes that fundamentally transformed Japan during the first half of the twentieth century. The paintings depict labour disputes and retribution, changing technology and working practices, the disparate attitudes of management and labour, foreign labour issues, and reflect the pre- and post- World War One and World War Two changes in the coal mining industry. They also depict the life and pastimes of the miner families, traditional cultural activities as well as new ones evolving as a response to industrialisation. Because of the rapid development of Japanese industry and mining, the vast majority of miners came from other backgrounds, mainly being farmers, and they brought those customs, traditions and superstitions with them to the mines.

The paintings reflect a range of intangible cultural practices related to the development of a mining community arising from a rural background. For example, a dance and song famous across Japan, the Tanko bushi, or 'miners dance' originating about the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, features the chimneys of the Ita Pit and the pollution resulting from the coal mines and a similar dance for the Bon celebrations is depicted in the paintings. Still danced in Chikuho, the Tanko bushi song was recorded in 1932, and went on to be a recording and radio hit.

The paintings give an immediacy to the understanding of the impacts of industrialisation on those who worked in the mines that is usually not available in the written word, and not represented at all in official records.

### **Criterion 5 – Form and style:**

The Sakubei Yamamoto paintings are a naïve art form that is comparable to some degree to the work of British artist L.S. Lowry (1887-1976), Sakubei's near contemporary. Lowry painted the working class conditions of Midlands UK, but Lowry was a professional painter who observed industrial towns, whereas Sakubei Yamamoto was a miner and blacksmith experiencing the conditions first hand, who only turned painter in his old age. The naïve style reflects the background of the painter, and adds to the authenticity of the representation of mining and mining communities, observed with an intimacy that a more skilled artist would probably never have experienced.

#### **4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?**

##### ***Rarity***

The Sakubei Yamamoto paintings are rare in being an extensive and detailed depiction of a very wide range of experiences of a mining community in a time of great change, recorded by a mine worker who experienced these changes first hand over a half century period. Outwardly equivalent collections elsewhere are overwhelmingly depictions by trained artists observing at one point in time. Sakubei Yamamoto's paintings and diaries are rare because they are an expression of the personal experience of these changes in social and cultural conditions over a lifetime. A number of Sakubei Yamamoto's paintings not included in this nomination are also held by local individuals and bodies in the Chikuho area. However the paintings represented in the nomination consists of by far the biggest collection of Sakubei's work, and many of the others are copies done by Sakubei of paintings or themes already represented in the nominated collection. As far as is known, the diary and notebook collection is represented in the nomination in its entirety.

##### ***Integrity***

The collection is of high integrity. The paintings are intact and in good condition, and while some of the early diaries and notebooks are suffering deterioration of their bindings, they are now stabilised and kept in controlled conditions, and are not at risk of accelerated decay.

**Threats**

The collection is in the control of the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum and the Fukuoka Prefectural University Library, and is subject to secure storage and professional conservation attention. There are no threats to the security of the collection.

**Management planning**

While no management plan exists as yet for either repository or its collections, the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum has a statement of collection policy for the Sakubei Yamamoto paintings, and the Fukuoka Prefectural University Library is developing policies to guarantee the ongoing conservation of the diaries and notebooks in its control.

**5 LEGAL INFORMATION**

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

The nominated collection is owned variously by the Tagawa City and the Yamamoto family.

Owner contacts;

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 Mayor of Tagawa City  
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Yamamoto family representative:  
 Teruo Yamamoto  
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**Table 5.1 Ownership and copyright**

<b>Element of collection</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Copyright holder</b>	<b>Custodian</b>
Paintings, Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum	Tagawa City	Yamamoto family	Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum
Diaries, notebooks and papers, Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum	Tagawa City	Yamamoto family	Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum
Paintings, Fukuoka Prefectural University	Yamamoto family	Yamamoto family	Fukuoka Prefectural University Library
Diaries, notebooks and papers, Fukuoka Prefectural University	Yamamoto family	Yamamoto family	Fukuoka Prefectural

## 5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

### Custodians:

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## 5.3 Legal status:

### (a) Category of ownership.

Local government organization (Tagawa City), and private (Yamamoto family).

### (b) Accessibility.

The original material in the collections held by the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum and the Fukuoka Prefectural University Library are generally not accessible to the public. The Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum has produced an illustrated catalogue, and has its collection of paintings digitised for access by visitors and for transfer to other interested parties. Copies of a selection of paintings and diaries and notebooks are on display at any given time in the Museum's galleries, together with material on Sakubei Yamamoto's life. Translations of the texts on the paintings, together with photographs of each painting, have been published and the book is available in the Museum shop.

The Fukuoka Prefectural University Library has an ongoing program involving community members in the translation of the diaries and notebooks from Chikuho dialect into standard Japanese. These transcripts are being published progressively as a sufficient number of documents are translated to make up a volume. To date about half of the combined University and Museum collection has been published. Photocopies of the diaries and notebooks are also available for scholars wishing the access the original text.

### (c) Copyright status

Copyright in the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum painting and diary, notebook and papers collection (for reproduction purposes) is retained by the Yamamoto family. Tagawa City signed a memorandum with Yamamotos in 2000, under which Tagawa City is responsible of storing and preserving the art work, and has rights to use them for museum and commercial purposes. Any profit derived from the collection by commercial activities goes to the Yamamoto family as copyright holder.

Copyright in the Fukuoka Prefectural University Library paintings and diary, notebook and papers collection (for reproduction purposes) is retained by the Yamamoto family. The University has signed an agreement with the Yamamoto family outlining the custodian and copyright arrangements.

(d) Responsible administration

The Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum is responsible for the safekeeping of its collection by right of ownership. The Fukuoka Prefectural University Library is responsible for the safekeeping of its collection by signed agreement with the Yamamoto family. In both cases that responsibility is exercised through the processes available to each body to ensure the conservation, access and security of its collections generally.

(e) Other factors

The Sakubei Yamamoto paintings in the initial collection of the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum were designated in 1996 as Tangible Folk Cultural Property under the cultural property protection ordinance of Fukuoka Prefecture. The designation was renewed in 2002 to include the additional painting acquired by the Museum, and will be renewed again in 2010 to recognise the additional painting acquired in 2009.

The cultural property protection ordinance of Fukuoka Prefecture requires the Museum to protect and conserve the collection in good storage conditions with specified environmental controls. The Prefecture can monitor management conditions without notice, and the Museum must seek approval for the loan of any material to other institutions, and must report any damage or threats to the collection.

## **6 MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage?**

A formal management plan has not yet been completed for either the Museum's or the Library's collections. Both institutions have undertaken to produce a management plan that coordinates the management of the Sakubei Yamamoto collection. The Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum has a management policy that satisfies part of the requirements of a management plan.

## **7 CONSULTATION**

### **7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional *Memory of the World* committee**

The nomination has been initiated by and developed in conjunction with the owners and custodians of the Sakubei Yamamoto Collection. Dr Michael Pearson acts as their contact and author of their nomination in English. The nomination has been checked and authorised by the owners and custodians. Attachment 6 is the agreement of the Yamamoto Family to the nomination.

Discussions and correspondence have been had with Ms Roslyn Russell, Chair of the Memory of the World Bureau, and Mr Ray Edmundson, Chair of MOW Committee Asia Pacific, outlining this nomination and seeking their advice. There is as yet no Japan National MOW Committee, but the nomination has been discussed with and gained support from several members of the Japan UNESCO Committee. The City of Tagawa wants to proceed quickly with the nomination, so wishes to submit it on its own behalf rather than take the more complex and time-consuming route of seeking Japan UNESCO submission.

## **PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

### **8 ASSESSMENT OF RISK**

#### **8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage**

The Sakubei Yamamoto Collection is under no identified threats. The collection is in the custodianship of a local government agency and a university library, both with stable administration in a country with stable government and economic wellbeing. The collection is stored in secure and environmentally stable conditions (see 3.2 above), and steps are being taken to upgrade storage conditions even further, and to document the management processes, already largely in place, in a formal management plan.

Access to the collection is strictly controlled so as to protect the documents from deterioration, and public and research access is primarily provided by way of digital, photocopy and transcribed versions of the original material, which are also largely used for display purposes.

### **9 ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION**

#### **9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage (see 3.3)**

The Sakubei Yamamoto Collection is held in two repositories, the Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum and the Fukuoka Prefectural University Library. The collection components have been transferred to the current custodians either by the author himself, or by his family soon after his death. The collection therefore has experienced professional curatorial conditions since leaving the hands of its creator or his heirs. The preservation history is therefore fully known.

The conditions of storage and display are outlined at section 3.2 and Attachment 4. Both custodians have undertaken to upgrade their already adequate storage facilities to better protect the collection. The custodians have access to their own in-house archival and curatorial staff and to the advice of the curatorial and conservation staff employed in the City of Tagawa art museum and by other heritage agencies of the Fukuoka Prefecture.