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**Mingei objects as an antidote to the mass production frenziness in the early / mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan.**

**Abstract**

Since the end of the 19th and during the first decades of the 20th century, Japan experienced an unprecedented 'attack' of the Western technological and scientific achievements, and consequently of the industrial miracle that had reached its peak in the West, especially in Great Britain and the United States. This resulted in the rapid, almost leveling up of the, until then, economically, socially and culturally controlled Japan, which however, during the Meiji period (1868-1912), began to renounce its traditional identity borrowing the Western ideology and lifestyle. The prosperity and richness of industrial development resulted in the disappearance of many traditional lifestyles and art forms, which, however, began to recover especially in the 1930s, under the guidance of the important artist and visionary Yanagi Sōetsu . This grandiose personality for the Japanese cultural history, managed to bring back to the forefront the traditional arts and crafts of the country and through the famous Mingei Movement managed to create a new consumer perception in the Japanese markets. These new traditional handmade products constituted a new form of cultural / commercial reaction to the wretched capitalist industrial production, as they brought along with their primal functional and aesthetic qualities, the ethical and social values of the Japanese which had begun to extinct.

**Keywords:** Mingei Movement, arts and crafts, Japan, industrialization, Meiji period, Yanagi Sōetsu.

## Introduction

The late 1860s found Japan to measure its strength through the undisputed willingness of its roughly 60 million people<sup>1</sup> to work hard in order to rebuild the country after the long isolation period of the about two previous centuries. With the West as a model from an ideological, social, commercial, technological and scientific point of view, the Japanese succeeded in a relatively short period of time to achieve what many European countries could not for centuries.

During this period, which lasted for about 44 years and was called the Meiji period (明治 時代 Meiji-jidai), or Meiji era (1868-1912), Japan managed to be totally reformed in every respect.<sup>2</sup> The once-traditional Japanese society found new models through the Western way of life and thought, and was soon transformed from an isolated feudal, strictly conservative system into a Westernized social unit, distinct from each other in Asia. The same changes were gradually made in the areas of mass production, domestic politics, education, defense and general military ideals as well as in the diplomatic relations of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Within this constantly changing socio-political and ideological framework, industrial development came rather timidly in the beginning with the appearance of light manufacturing and transport infrastructure and a series of several innovative technological initiatives in the agriculture sector, which helped economy thrive in the first only years of the 1870s.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, during this decade there was an unprecedented increase in almost every sector of industry, mainly in textiles through raw materials processing such as wool, cotton and silk, which boosted the private initiative (cotton mills establishment, building pilot reeling plants for private factories, incentives for the use of steam power etc). The contribution of specific factors that made Japan one of the strongest industrial and military countries in the world in such a short time proved to be particularly significant. Initially, the large supply of unskilled workforce willing to work and be educated in combination with the value of railways, mainly as a means of transporting raw materials in remote and inaccessible areas, played a major role. However, the cooperation of local businesses with more than 2500 foreign experts on issues such as education, science and several military sections was equally important.

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Fig. 1. Japanese female industrial workers preparing cocoons in hot water for spinning silk.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Japan was already the leading Asian country in the textiles manufacturing industry, and had made great advances in shipping, mining, banking and chemical industries, too. This was advocated by the indiscriminate adoption of the basic principles of the Western capitalist system that shaped a new type of challenging, economic market for the country, strengthening in particular the, already strong, private production sector.<sup>5</sup>

The country had already rebuilt its forces and from a mere traditional, rural, remote region in the 19th century world map, it was transformed into a great economic and industrial power in the very first decades of the 20th century. Enjoying its newly-established wealth, it soon developed a powerful army, similar to the European ones, which made it a world-renowned military force. All this strengthened its imperial aspirations for more wealth and power, something that would soon lead it to destruction during the great destructive war.<sup>6</sup>

The intense and rapid industrialization of the country has had a serious impact on many areas of production, one of which was the sector of traditional handcrafted objects such as textiles, metalwork and ceramics. The traditional handicraft activity of the country, and especially the traditional applied arts field, began to recede before this extreme, almost indiscriminate wave of industrialization of almost everything.

Authentic materials, age-old techniques, and along with them moral, social, ideological and cultural values of centuries, were in danger of getting extinct in the midst of the industrial flare-up. What was the reaction of the Japanese in this new order of things? How did they perceive the threat as regards their old, traditional values through the Westernized way of thinking and mass production? Who was the inspirer of this coordinated reaction and what were his positions? The famous Mingei Movement, the characteristics and representatives of which will be analyzed below, was the response to all above.

### **Traditional arts and crafts before the Meiji period**

In the long history of Japan and until the time of its rapid industrialization, there was an interdependent, non-differentiated relationship between fine and applied arts, and both constituted integral elements of the everyday Japanese culture. Pre-industrial societies, with strong influences from the Zhen Buddhism philosophy that supported the harmony and simplicity between arts and the daily life of the Japanese, had developed important mechanisms of interaction in concepts such as decoration,

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beauty, ideology and functionality, resulting in the uninterrupted and indispensable coexistence of almost all forms of arts and crafts.<sup>7</sup> This was also supported by the unfettered use of local, natural raw materials such as clay, paper, bamboo, various types of metals and wood, materials that were suitable for the manufacture of both ordinary items of everyday use and religious, ritual or pure art objects.

Generally speaking, however, we find that the Japanese arts were directly contracted with religion and consequently with the virtues deriving from the teachings of its great masters.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it was inconceivable that an object of art or handicraft was not contracted with symbolisms or allegories usually tangential to the concepts of good morals and high personal or social values.

According to Sigur, Japanese tradition did not recognize fine arts as superior applied arts, *'as in the light of Japan's universally acknowledged high aesthetic standards in all media across its history, everything was 'fine art' and had been all along'*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, traditional architecture, sculpture, scroll and screen painting, calligraphy were associated unconditionally with archaeogenic pottery, masks, bronzes, lacquers and textiles, but also with other types of art forms such as the flower arrangement technique (ikebana) and the sacred tea ritual (chado) in such a way that the daily life of the Japanese would reach high standards.

In some periods of Japanese history, such as during the vibrant Edo period, every form of art and craft acquired a different meaning than in previous periods. For example, it was then that formerly anonymous painters, sculptors and craftsmen began to become known, to gain more money and have a better social position. Nevertheless, the beautiful and functional objects made only for the rich and privileged patrons in the past centuries, in a rather odd way, began to appeal to a wider market audience, thus allowing more people to enjoy the beautiful things in life during the Edo period. Due to the particularly extended period of national isolation, important concepts of aesthetics such as 'shibu-sa' (simple, subtle imperfection with internal effects) and 'iki' (aesthetic ideal, urban, elegant, simple, sophisticated) were strongly promoted in Japan in almost all walks of life. In this new aesthetic culture, the wisdom of everyday life and the primordial cultural traditions of even the most remote regions of the country were mingled resulting in the creation of utilitarian objects of high aesthetic value.

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Other kinds of art, mainly performing, acquired for many people of power a form of anti-militaristic ideology.<sup>10</sup> For example, lords and samurais of every social rank were almost addicted in theatre acting or tea ceremony activities and they soon started to constitute a new model of 'art makers' that would allay the phenomenal eagerness for fights and wars which had haunted Japan for centuries.<sup>11</sup>

During the same period, both Patrons and artists sharing the same views on aesthetics began experimenting with many materials combining them together, aiming at creating objects of high functional and / or intellectual value, rejecting any difference between arts and handicrafts. What was most important and understood by all was the word *skill*, which should prevail on the final form and function of objects of every kind.

It is easily understood that this attitude was totally different from the classic Western view of art in general. European and American fine art objects were at the time distinctly differentiated from the crafted objects which were thought to be items of lesser quality and value. But as it is widely known, despised applied arts and crafts found the place they really deserved next to the fine arts, only in the second half of the 19th century in England. The famous Arts and Crafts Movement under the guidance of the entrepreneur, designer, writer and socialist William Morris and the enlightened theoretician John Ruskin upgraded the hitherto discarded applied arts by equating them with the fine arts. This was a serious attempt to offset the devastating advance of machinery of the Industrial Revolution in Britain that had brought only misfortunes in the field of good product design.<sup>12</sup> But what was the fate of the respective arts and crafts in the industrialized Japan of the first decades of the 20th century? Was it similar to the one of the 19<sup>th</sup> century British applied arts? Was the momentum of the Industrial Revolution so strong in the country as to threaten the cultural balance of centuries through 'the questioning of traditional arts and handicrafts values'? The matter of fact is that folk crafts, i.e. objects of daily use, in which both decorative and fine art items might be included, began to be replaced by cheap imports and machine-made, massively produced, goods of lesser material and technique quality. This was, of course, only one interpretation of this new status quo in the area of folk arts. At a second reading the phenomenon of mass production hid an even more important and more terrible interpretation: these new objects were

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inanimate, without the deep meaning of Japanese culture, without the moral and spiritual values of Japanese history, without the possibility of passing on to the new generation the proud truth of the long-standing Japanese tradition. All these rendered them not just indifferent, but dangerous objects for the development of Japanese culture itself.

### **Handmade objects and the Mingei<sup>13</sup> Movement: the role of Yanagi Sōetsu**

During the 1920s, the idea of finding a new line of distraction of the persistent, farfetched replication of Western civilization in the field of fine and applied arts and hence of the leveling industrialization of everything, was born. The much promising Mingei Movement, also known as 'art of the people', was a monumental mound to this foreign wave of new industrial aesthetic and ethical order, as it challenged Japanese society to redefine the concepts of art and craft themselves. The main points of the Movement focused on the importance of the production of the everyday objects made by unknown, ordinary people, addressed to everyone, in contrast to the unique works of art of earlier periods which were addressed only to the noble and wealthy patrons.

The Mingei Movement, which reached its peak in the 1930s but continued at a strong pace after 1945, represented almost all forms of arts and crafts such as furniture, textiles, clothing, cutlery and other domestic utensils and objects all crafted by hand using old, folk techniques that were either lost or dying out during the industrialization era.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it seemed to be based on local creations from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, that is from the arts and crafts tradition of the late Edo or early Meiji periods, but also from earlier times, as regards mainly pure art objects, such as religious sculptures or painting.<sup>15</sup> Every single object made during Mingei Movement time had its own story as it represented another similar item from a certain region of Japan which would be threatened, as would thousands like that, by the forgetfulness and contempt of the rapidly expanding mass production craze in Japan. Inter alia, though, the Movement can be seen as a well structured method aimed to the preservation of Japan's art treasures. The main person behind this ambitious and at the same time desperate attempt to save the cultural history of Japan, as regards its folk treasures, was Sōetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), philosopher and artist

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himself.<sup>16</sup> Born in Tokyo into a distinguished family from the high social class, he experienced the turmoil of the Japanese modernization in intense stress and agony.<sup>17</sup> Gradually his profound interest in Japanese tradition, but above all in the uncontrolled industrialization and the consequent moral and cultural deterioration of the national character of the country, in combination with his upper-class background, became an explosive but creative mixture that would put barriers to the issue of abject Westernization. Coming in contact with other intellectual circles of the same ideological views, he became a founding member of the *Shirakabaha* art and philosophy society (白樺派), (White Birch Society) in 1910, and at the same time started writing in the homonymous magazine. Soon the Society began showing keen interest in many forms of art, other than European, including folk art, which annoyed particularly the official art critics of the State. Although the publication of the magazine stopped in 1923, Yanagi's interest in the Japanese folk arts and crafts became even stronger.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 2. (left) Mingei enameled ceramic plate in a 17<sup>th</sup> century motif, Gifu prefecture. Figure 3. (right) Two-handled baskets (*akebi zuru*), 1940s.

However, before all of this, he had shown his preoccupied interest in the ceramics of Joseon Dynasty<sup>19</sup>, primarily in the way they were produced in neighboring Korea. In

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1916 he visited this country trying to discover the grandeur of the strange beauty, symmetry and functionality of these objects, but also their symbolic significance in all social classes. After having purchased mostly several types of ceramics objects made by local craftsmen, he devoted time to study their form, shape, colors, and the particular way of their production. Finally in 1924 he managed to establish in Seoul, the Korean Folk Art Museum ('Korean Folk- arts Gallery '), a great and innovative effort to rescue traditional Korean arts.

Soon after he began to shift his interest in Japanese rich cultural heritage and specifically in Buddhist art which was unknown to him as it remained marginalized by the western wave of technological and ideological innovations.<sup>20</sup> The famous folk Buddha sculptural works of the Edo period called *Mokujiki* was the initiative for his long trips in many remote areas of the country where he also came across with the unpretentious craftworks of the ordinary, anonymous people of Japan and which he found extremely impressive. He soon started collecting many objects of this 'national treasure' which was vanishing rapidly, at the time. His collection was big enough to include a wide range of Japanese folk art items such as pottery, textiles and clothing, small pieces of furniture, lacquer ware, woodwork and metalwork.

His acquaintance with the English potter Bernard Leach (1887-1979) proved to be catalytic for his subsequent plans. Leach, on one of his long journeys to Japan, aimed at understanding Japanese pottery<sup>21</sup> and spreading it all over the world, but also at 'grafting' the traditional Japanese culture with the ideology of Western civilization.

But it would be fairer to say that despite the large cultural differences and the geographical distance between them during the fifty years of their friendship, the ideological effect they developed was reciprocal.<sup>22</sup> The holistic cultural impact by Leach made him be enormously inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and specifically by the John Ruskin's radical theories as well as William Morris's vision to fight against the neo-industrial status quo in England and bring back the craft ideals. On the other hand, Yanagi strongly advocated that this return to the traditional Japanese folk art would have to involve anonymous craftsmen, not branded artists or Guilds, and the produced objects should be inexpensive enough to

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be accessible to everybody not only to the rich, as it was the case in England. Of course this choice made him right, especially in 1926 when he decided to establish the Mingei Movement which saved, in a way, Japanese folk crafts from oblivion and restored their reputation in the national collective memory. It was obvious that the Japanese had to be trained in a way that could make them appreciate the value of their traditional arts, and for that reason Yanagi, following Morris's steps, began to publish his own books and articles, but also to give lectures on this very important issue.<sup>23</sup>

This rather propagandistic activity led him to found the Association of Japanese Folk Crafts in 1934 and then to publish a complete series of magazines titled *Kogei* (*Crafts*), the articles of which covered the developments in the field of traditional crafts and exalted their national importance. All this led to the founding of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo in 1936, which meant the official protection of the State to the, until then, threatened with marginalization folk arts and crafts. Being the President of the establishment, Yanagi began to be engaged in various activities that primarily involved research for the promotion of the Museum itself. These included many trips across the country to remote and isolated areas such as the Okinawa island off the Chinese coast and the Tohoku region, north of Tokyo, aiming at identifying and collecting rare or unknown items of everyday use and thus exhibiting them in one of the Museum's periodical exhibitions.

### **Production and consumption of Mingei goods.**

Mingei items had to be strong, durable, reliable and also attractive in simplified forms and patterns in order to cover daily life needs. This is why they could be produced in big numbers. They had also had some type of symbolism as their sublime, profound, simple and occasionally subdued colors were closely associated with a good and calm life, or even a humble allegiance to Nature itself. Of course, it is easy to understand that they could be made only by good-hearted, honest and unselfish people, as they were strongly related with their way of living. These craftsmen and artisans also were aware of the need to constantly innovate such objects in terms of color and form in order to satisfy the demands of the rising commoner class, especially in the urban centers of Japan, who always competed with their peers.<sup>24</sup>

The matter of fact is that there were special features and principles the Mingei folk arts and crafts should have and comply with, accordingly, most of which were

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proposed by Yanagi who was fully conscious of the special characteristics and symbolisms of the Japanese traditional crafts. On the other hand, Japanese public should be well prepared to know the essential characteristics of this new way of production in order to understand and support it commercially.<sup>25</sup> First, as stated before, Mingei objects had to be produced in large quantities and made thoroughly by hand. This can be easily explained as their large production number was inextricably woven with their necessity in terms of functional use, whereas their hand-made nature constituted the basic principle of the Movement. They also had to be not just functional, but massively used. Yanagi claimed that their beauty came from their actual usage, not simply from their structural qualities. And of course, it was their use that would give them their cultural and regional identity.



Fig. 4. Handmade rectangular box with lid, wood and lacquer, 1930s.

They also should be inexpensive, but not cheap in any sense, chaste, restrained and practical in design. In contrast to heavily decorated luxury items, the simplicity and inexpensiveness was what should give to these items their charm. Dear and intricate objects would not reflect the Mingei Movement's fundamental ideology and would be inaccessible to the masses. Their design should also have evolved

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smoothly over time to best suit the needs of those using them. This would reflect Japanese culture's appreciation for regional diversity, and indeed Mingei items often had special characteristics unique to specific areas of the country. Each object represented a small cultural legacy that gave it a value beyond its aesthetics.

Anonymity was another important issue as far as their making concerns. That was a particularly significant parameter in the traditional production of such objects in any region of Japan and consequently individual artists should not expect recognition. The basic idea was that they should be appreciated as objects of the masses, not attributed to specific artisans.<sup>26</sup> The production intention of these objects had multiple objectives. One of the most important was to be an essential part of the general culture reform of the 1930s in Japan which was indispensable in terms of the country's national identity which was to be lost for the reasons we have already mentioned. Equally important was the reason for the economic upgrading of the local, mainly rural, communities, especially in areas that were either remote and neglected or economically weak such as Tohoku or San'in. Thus, several Mingei projects were intended to boost the local farm village economies by expanding and rationalizing many low-cost industries concerning the production of traditional utilitarian items mainly ceramics, textiles and woodwork. By doing so, both off-season labor and local morale and spirit, which were particularly demoralized by the gradual collapse of the rural economy at the time, would be also boosted and uplifted in a beneficial way for the local communities.<sup>27</sup> In order to achieve this new way of production Yanagi and his colleagues believed that local communities had to be stimulated in a way that could generate their genuine interest and attention in making such objects. In collaboration with the local authorities, they organized a series of juried exhibitions in which locals, in many cases the young, could submit their crafted items in order to claim one of the many cash prizes awarded to the winners. After the end of the competition the organizers were offered either to buy or to arrange the sale of the prize-winning objects, as this would constitute a strong incentive for the rest to take part to such competitions which were arranged very often.

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In general, Mingei Movement was particularly effective in the 1930s, in terms of economic, cultural, and ethical regeneration of the country. It helped rural population overcome the unemployment problems they faced for a long time by working at their

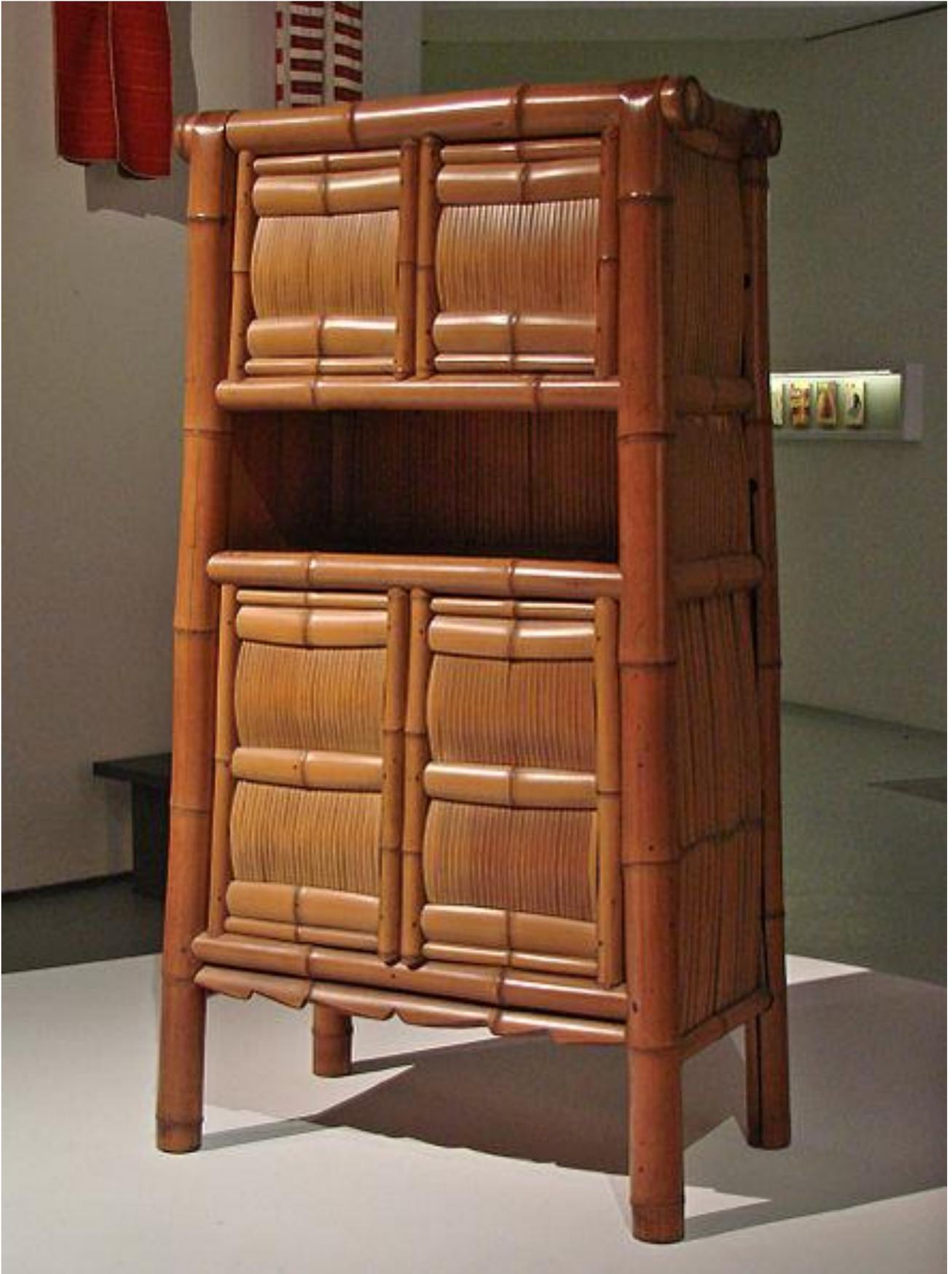


Fig. 5. Beautifully crafted bamboo cupboard, 1930s.

own place without needing to move to urban centers to seek work and at the same time enhanced, through creation, the national spiritual and cultural mobilization which was so much sought after at that period.<sup>28</sup> Soon Mingei folk arts and crafts acquired significant commercial value and became desirable objects through mainly their cultural reinvention. In urban centers, department stores played a crucial role in their consumption not only during the 1930s, but also after the war years. Perhaps, the most notable and possibly effective department store where they were first exhibited in large numbers was that of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, a place where the aesthetic, functional and cultural qualities of the items were highly praised. This constituted a rather bounding example for the modern retail department stores that grew in Japan according to the western standards which, inter alia, were introduced to the country after certain innovations such as the regional development, the utilization of capital and mainly the new patterns of employment.<sup>29</sup>

The goal achieved by the Japan Folk Arts Museum was to convince the newly founded department stores of the big urban centers to handle Mingei objects as high quality consuming goods which could affect positively lifestyle. Department stores adopted the idea of exhibition, an exceptional way of selling in stores of this kind, by organizing temporary but impressive shows of Mingei works in special exhibition spaces, promoting in a way the idea *that genuine arts and crafts should be integrated into everyday life*.<sup>30</sup> Of course, department stores proceeded in this action mainly because they wanted to open up a new market; nevertheless, through this type of cultural events they managed to activate the general public's interest in Mingei objects and their importance as far as their authenticity and national identity concerns. The tangible heritage of Japan and its social and aesthetic connotations seemed to have been rediscovered through the regeneration of arts and crafts which would compete industrialized products for many more decades.<sup>31</sup> After the Second World War the Movement would be particularly influential in the art of other countries, especially the U.S. in the field of ceramics, but this is another case which will be examined individually.

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## Table of figures

Fig. 1. <https://www.historytoday.com/janet-hunter/japanese-women-work-1880-1920>

Fig.2. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Poterie\\_\(lesprit\\_Mingei\)\\_ \(2991417240\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Poterie_(lesprit_Mingei)_ (2991417240))

Fig. 3. © Mingei International Museum Collections

Fig. 4. © Mingei International Museum Collections

Fig. 5. © Musée du quai Branly

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Out of this total, about 45% was a certified workforce of various specialties, mainly agricultural work.

<sup>2</sup>This period was named after Emperor Meiji, who was succeeded by Emperor Taishō ('Great Justice', in English) in the very next period (1912-1926).

<sup>3</sup>The already established contacts with the West, mainly England, France and the U.S.A., were the occasion for the sending of special groups of Japanese scientists and diplomats to these countries for the sole purpose of deriving ideas from the way of life, thinking and action of the West, especially in the field of industry which was at its peak at that time. This political mission, known as the Iwakura Mission, helped the country to quickly join the rhythms of the Western mode of industrial production and to become in only a few decades a major competitive force in this field.

<sup>4</sup>INKSTER, Ian, *Japanese Industrialization: Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 2001, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>The already known since the 18th century *zaibatsu families* constituted forms of closed, strict family businesses which were actively involved and prevailed in important areas of the Japanese economy during the Meiji period. By the end of the 1920s they had managed to become the focus of the economic, commercial and industrial activity in the country, and they had gained power to influence political developments. These include names known even in our days such as Mitsui, Sumitomo and Mitsubishi.

<sup>6</sup>MEYER, Milton, *Japan: A Concise History*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 1993, p. 98.

<sup>7</sup>Zen Buddhism dictated also an harmonious and spiritual relationship with nature. It implied profound respect for Nature and its phenomena, its sources and products considering them sacred.

<sup>8</sup>REEVE, John, *Japanese Art in Detail*, London: British Museum Press, 2005, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup>SIGUR, Hannah, *The Influence of Japanese Art on Design*, Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup>This, of course, happened within the framework of the unification of the various regions of the country under the Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu. During the Edo period, peace began to dominate Japan after a long period of civil war, which helped in the normalization of everyday life, in the better and more specialized production of domestic products, and thus in the

growth of economy. The opening of new channels, roads and bridge building facilitated the transportation of products, while new methods and techniques made agriculture even stronger.

<sup>11</sup>HAYS, Jeffrey, 'Edo period art: samurai art, urban art, decorative and genre painting'. Available in: <http://factsanddetails.com/japan/cat20/sub129/item696.html>, access on 8/11/2018.

<sup>12</sup>MORRIS, William & KELVIN, Norman, *William Morris on Art and Socialism*, New York: Dover Publications, 1999, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>13</sup>This term is a combination of two different concepts. Its first composite *min* (民) stands for the simple, common people, while its second one *gei* (芸) stands for the art concept. Etymologically there is another explanation: it is an abbreviation for the phrase *minshuteki kōgei* (民衆の工芸), which literally means popular industrial arts.

<sup>14</sup>MARQUET, Christophe, *Yanagi Sōetsu et l'invention des « arts populaires »: remise en perspective*, Ciproango, Cahier D' Etudes Japonais, n°16, 2009, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup>The matter of fact was that traditional Japanese painting was not affected by industrialization itself, but was severely threatened by the warped perception of the Japanese for copying any Western art and science model. Thus Western style painting (Yōga) was officially promoted by the government, who sent talented young artists to study abroad. The artists of this style formed the Meiji Bijutsukai (Meiji Fine Arts Society) to hold its own exhibitions and to promote a high interest in Western art. Additionally, many Western artists were also invited to visit Japan in order to establish an art curriculum in Japanese schools. The Yōga, style encompassed many techniques used in the European and American art of painting such as oil and dry pastels, watercolors, ink sketches, lithography, etching, oil painting and many others.

<sup>16</sup>The Japan Folk Crafts Museum, 'History of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum and Founder Sōetsu Yanagi. Available at: <http://www.mingeikan.or.jp/english/about/>, access on 11/11/2018.

<sup>17</sup>KIKUCHI, Yuko, 'A Japanese William Morris, Yanagi Soetsu and 'Mingei' Theory,' *The William Morris Society*, New York, 12.2 (Spring), 1997, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup>KIKUCHI, Yuko, *ibid*, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup>Josean Dynasty was a Korean kingdom that lasted for approximately five centuries, (1392-1912). The ceramics of that era underwent numerous transformations generally divided into three major periods: the early, the middle, and the late period. Korean white porcelain wares of that era were particularly praised as they represented the Confucian high ethics such as prudence, saving and disambiguation.

<sup>20</sup>HARUHARA, Yoko, 'The Korean roots beneath Japan's folk art movement'. Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2016/05/03/arts/korean-roots-beneath-japans-folk-art-movement/#.W-imUTFoSM9>, access on 11/11/2018.

<sup>21</sup>The most famous English potter of the time shed light to the unknown and much admired world of the Japanese ceramics and this was much supported by the relation he developed with one of the most renowned Japanese potters of the time, Shoji Hamada (1894-1978). Leach's worldwide known publication *A Potter's Book*, (1940), constituted the Bible for the Western potters and ceramic artists as they first had the chance to come in contact with a variety of precious ancient techniques, materials and effects.

<sup>22</sup>YANAGI, Sōetsu, *The Unknown Craftsman, A Japanese insight to the Beauty*, Tokyo: Korashna International, 1989, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup>MOERAN, Brian, *Folk Art Potters of Japan: Beyond an Anthropology of Aesthetics*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup>HARUHARA, Yoko, 'The Golden Age of Mingei: Keeping up with the Joneses, Edo Style', *The Japan Times*, May 2009, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup>ASO, Noriko, *Public Properties: Museums in Imperial Japan*, London: Duke University Press, 2014, p. 193.

<sup>26</sup>This idea has changed over the time and the last decades, many people agree that society should welcome and encourage the work of craftsmen who help keep traditions and culture alive by promoting them as brilliant examples to be imitated.

<sup>27</sup>BRANDT, Kim, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan*, London: Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 139, 140.

<sup>28</sup>BRANDT, Kim, *ibid*, p. 141.

<sup>29</sup>BLUESTONE, Barry et al., *The Retail Revolution: Market Transformation, Investment, and Labor in the Modern Department Store*, Boston, MA: Auburn House, 1981, p. 98.

<sup>30</sup>ASO, Noriko, *ibid*, p. 194.

<sup>31</sup>KUNIK, Damien, 'Mouvement des Arts populaires et études folkloriques' *Cipango* (En ligne), no. 16, 2009, p. 374.