

# Yanagi Muneyoshi and the Japanese Folk Craft Movement

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## *Introduction*

In this article I intend to discuss the historical background and ideology of the Japanese Folk Craft Movement, concentrating in particular on the life and work of its founder, Yanagi Muneyoshi. My aim is not only to describe the thought of a man whose work has not yet adequately been translated into English (see Leach 1972), but also to suggest that Yanagi's concept of *mingei*, or folk craft, should not necessarily be seen as uniquely Japanese. A similar aesthetic ideal has been developed in other societies, notably that put forward by leaders of the British Arts and Crafts Movement in the late 19th century.

## *Historical Background of the Japanese Folk Craft Movement*

The Japanese Folk Craft Movement may be said to have begun in the late 1920s, almost three quarters of a century after Japan first opened its doors to Western industrial technology, and to have centred on the teachings of one man, Yanagi Muneyoshi.<sup>1</sup> Yanagi was born in 1889. His father was of high rank in the Japanese Navy, but died when Muneyoshi was only two years old and the boy was brought up by his mother. He was sent to the Peers' School (*Gakushūin Kōtōka*) before entering the Department of Philosophy & Letters at the Tokyo Imperial University in 1911.

It was during his final year at the Peers' School that Yanagi, together with some friends who were all interested in literature and art, started publication of the now famous magazine, *Shirakaba*. Two members of this group, Shiga Naoya and Musha-no-Kōji Saneatsu, became well known writers as a result of their contributions to this magazine.

Yanagi himself wrote more than seventy articles for it, including poems, translations and critical essays. Publication of the *Shirakaba* continued monthly for 14 years until the great Kantō earthquake of 1923 (Yanagi 1938: 115; Mizuo 1978: 85). During this time, the Shirakaba group 'led progressive thought in the study of Western literature, art and philosophy . . . The young men searched the horizons of Western art and thought, ancient and modern' (Leach 1972: 93).

In 1919, Yanagi was appointed Professor of Religious Studies at Tōyō University, and in the same year published the first of a series of articles on Korean culture. He was so fond of that country that he began to plan and finally opened a Korean Folk Art Gallery (*Chōsen Minzoku Bijutsukan*) in one of the old palace buildings in Seoul.

Yanagi's early interest in Korea stemmed primarily from his liking for Yi Dynasty (1392–1910) ceramics. Indeed, the Japanese Folk Craft Movement was itself a result of Yanagi's enthusiasm for Korean pottery, for when he learned that Yi Dynasty wares had for the most part been made by 'nameless craftsmen', he felt that there had to be a similar sort of 'art' in Japan. He thus became interested in what he initially called 'people's art' (Yanagi 1949: 7), for the way in which it accorded with his ideals of beauty (Kumakura 1972: 67). Once he discovered that there was a popular art in his own country, Yanagi started planning a folk craft museum for Japan.

Although, finally, Yanagi's folk craft ideal was a combination of philosophical, religious and aesthetic elements, in the early days he appears to have been primarily concerned with 'beauty'. While he went around collecting all kinds of objects that fitted his idea of what was 'beautiful', he began to realize that his taste was hardly that of the average educated person, and that his collection was not of the kind that could be seen displayed in the museums and art galleries of his time. Reflecting upon the matter, he gradually realized that all the objects that he liked had been made to be used in the normal person's everyday life. In other words, they had a 'common' nature which was a far cry from the 'aristocratic' *objets d'art* favoured by art critics, historians and dealers in antiques. Moreover, these practical, everyday utensils had not been made by famous artists, but were the work of 'unknown craftsmen' who produced things cheaply and in quantity. This was what gave them a 'free' and 'healthy' beauty (Yanagi 1954b: 212 ff; 1976: 32 ff).

Yanagi was particularly fond of looking for this kind of craftwork in the street and temple markets of Kyōto, to which city he had moved with his family in 1923 after the Kantō earthquake. The word that the women stall-operators in these markets used for such common or garden items was *getemono* ('vulgar thing'). Yanagi himself adopted this word

for some time, before finding that it was picked up by critics and journalists and sometimes attributed unfortunate nuances evoked by the concept of 'vulgarity'. In order to overcome such misunderstanding, he had no alternative but to think of some other word to describe his 'people's art' (Mizuo 1978: 17; Tsurumi 1976: 189-190). In 1925, after considerable discussion between Yanagi and two potter friends, Hamada Shōji (1894-1978) and Kawai Kanjirō (1890-1966), the phrase that was coined to describe the craftsman's work was *mingei*. This was a hybrid term, formed from *minshū*, meaning 'common people', and *kōgei*, 'craft'. Yanagi translated it into English as 'folk craft' (not 'folk art'), since he wished to stop people from conceiving of *mingei* as an individually-inspired 'high' art (cf. Hamada in Leach 1976: 90-91).

The term *mingei* was applied to things that were functional, used in people's everyday lives, 'unpretentious', 'pure' and 'simple'. Yanagi argued that *mingei* was characterized by tradition and not by individuality. As far as he was concerned, 'art' should not be associated with the individual creator; it should be 'unassuming', the work of 'non-individuality' (Yanagi 1949: 14). Beauty could exist 'without heroes' (ibid. p. 6).

Enquiries soon revealed, however, that the 'unknown craftsman' had all but disappeared. Mass production and competitive pricing had effectively put a stop to public demand for craftwork. Yanagi deplored the way in which communities of craftsmen such as potters or laquerers had been forced to give up their work and take up some other occupation for a livelihood. He felt that it was precisely because such people had worked together over the centuries, patiently, with 'humility', using methods of trial and error in an 'abandonment of egoism and pride' that their work had great aesthetic value.

The general public needed to be educated in the beauty of Japanese crafts. Yanagi set about propagating his views in a series of articles, books and lectures, and his first complete work *Kōgei no Michi* (*The Way of Crafts*) was published in 1928. In 1931, he started a magazine *Kōgei* (*Crafts*) in which he, and a close circle of friends who thought like him, were able to air their views. The Folk Craft Movement, as such, really began with publication of this magazine, and the number of Yanagi's followers increased considerably as a result of their reading its contents. The first edition of *Kōgei* ran to 500 copies; the last (Vol. 120), to 2,000 copies. In 1952, *Kōgei* was absorbed by a second magazine *Mingei* (first published in 1939). *Mingei* remains the official organ of the Japan Folk Craft Association (*Nihon Mingei Kyōkai*), which was founded in 1931 by Yanagi and friends—mainly potters like Kawai Kanjirō and Tomimoto Kenkichi.

Yanagi did not confine himself to literary activities, but spent considerable time travelling around Japan, seeking out and actively encouraging craftsmen to continue or go back to their work. Yanagi was himself encouraged in his 'evangelical' work by a director of Takashimaya Department Store, Kawakatsu Ken'ichi (Mizuo 1978: 118), and received some financial support from private sources, wealthy businessmen such as Yamamoto Tamesaburō, owner of the Royal Hotel in Ōsaka, and Ōhara Magosaburō, President of the Kurashiki Rayon Company (Tsurumi 1976: 209). It was the latter who provided the sum of 100,000 yen needed for the purchase of land, the building and furnishing of the Japan Folk Craft Museum (*Nihon Mingeikan*), opened in 1935 (Yanagi 1954a: 14).

There are three manifestations of the Folk Craft Movement. First of all, there is the Folk Craft Museum, which exhibits objects that are seen to be 'truly *mingei*'. Yanagi intended the Museum to establish a 'standard of beauty' (Yanagi 1936: 3). Secondly, there is the Folk Craft Association, which promotes Yanagi's ideals throughout the country and publishes two monthly magazines. Finally, there is the folk craft shop, Takumi, which acts as a major retail sales outlet in Tokyo. Although Takumi was founded as long ago as 1933, it was only in the 1950s, that sales began to show a noticeable increase, and the movement as a whole to receive national, and even international, attention. By about 1960, Yanagi's ideas had become known not just to a small group of people living in Tokyo, Kyōto and Ōsaka, but—as a result of publicity by the media—to almost everyone in Japan. There was an enormous demand for hand-made folk crafts, which many people thought included such things as tooth-picks and log cabins. This demand came to be labelled the '*mingei* boom' and continued until the mid-70s, after which it has gradually declined. Craftsmen who had been struggling to make ends meet before and just after the Pacific War, suddenly found themselves comparatively well-off; potters in particular benefited financially from the 'boom'. With all the publicity surrounding folk crafts, new kilns were set up everywhere. So far as the purists were concerned, the day of the 'instant potter' had come to accompany the other 'instants' of everyday life in Japan—coffee, noodles and geisha. The average craftsman was interested in *mingei*, not for its beauty, but for the money that was to be made from it.

One of the problems currently facing leaders of the Folk Craft Movement is the way in which the meaning of *mingei* has come to be interpreted by people who are not directly acquainted with Yanagi's works (cf. Hamada in Leach 1976: 91). It is the average man in the street's interpretation of what constitutes *mingei* that saddens and frus-

trates the movement's leaders. What is perhaps worse, so far as the latter are concerned, is that it has also affected the way in which craftsmen themselves have come to view their work.

A second problem is that interpretation of Yanagi's ideals has varied within the movement itself. In the beginning, potters such as Tomimoto Kenkichi and Kawai Kanjirō were closely involved with the concept of *mingei*, but in time their own work developed in such a manner that they felt it necessary to dissociate themselves from the Folk Craft Movement. Tomimoto actually went so far as to set up his own organization, the *Shinshōkai* (New Craftsmen's Association) in 1947. Yanagi had in part expected this sort of thing to happen; Tomimoto and Kawai were, after all, artist craftsmen in search of a new means of expression in their own idiom. What really upset Yanagi and others close to him was the decision by one of his non-craftsmen followers, Miyake Chūichi, to break away and form his own group with its separate ideology. In 1949, Miyake built his own Japan Craft Museum (*Nihon Kōgeikan*) and then, ten years later, founded the Japan Folk Craft Society (*Nihon Mingei Kyōdan*). He also started publishing a monthly magazine *Nihon no Mingei* (*Japan's Folk Crafts*), and in this he has time and again taken issue with Yanagi, arguing that the latter has made folk crafts into an 'art' form by stressing beauty over function, by promoting such artist-craftsmen as Leach, Kawai and Hamada, and by refusing to take economic issues into account when referring to the functional aspects of *mingei*. To a certain extent, perhaps, Miyake's criticisms are not ill-founded, but the manner in which he has made them has left much to be desired. During his lifetime, Yanagi, to his credit, did not want to involve the whole Folk Craft Movement in what was mainly a personal vendetta against himself. He therefore remained silent in the face of criticism that has often been vitriolic.

Miyake is now an old man, well over 70 years of age. He runs what many see as a 'one man band' which will fade away with its leader's death.\* The Folk Craft Association, for its part, has survived the death of Yanagi in 1961, but its new leaders—consisting of people like Yanagi's son, Munemichi, and the art historian Mizuo Hiroshi—are now faced with a variety of problems. Some of these are financial: the Folk Craft Museum in Tokyo is in need of repair; its magnificent collection of items (most of which have never been shown to the public) urgently require proper storage facilities. But the Folk Craft Association has not the financial wherewithal to carry out such major tasks. Its private

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\* After this article had been completed, I learned that Miyake Chūichi died in April 1980. At present, his wife has taken over as head of the *Mingei Kyōdan*. (B.M.)

backers have long since died, and a request to the national government for funds would appear to be the only way to solve such financial problems.

Other problems are ideological. The Folk Craft Association's magazine *Mingei* is published monthly and distributed to about 5,000 of its members all over the country. Yet, Yanagi Munemichi and Mizuo Hiroshi know that people are not really reading articles published in the magazine. Subscription is a form of passive membership; craftsmen, in particular, take the magazine to keep the 'people in Tokyo' happy.

By far the most active members of both the Folk Craft Association and the Folk Craft Society are women. Young housewives regularly attend summer seminars; they travel round the country visiting craftsmen's workshops and buying much of their work. Yet many will argue that it is the housewives who do not understand the meaning of 'true *mingei*' and who cannot appreciate 'proper beauty'. It is perhaps not surprising therefore to find that rural craftsmen now tend to dismiss the Folk Craft Movement as another urban elitist fashion whose followers have failed to come to grips with their problems. The new leadership somehow has to counteract disinterest, remain faithful to Yanagi's original ideas, yet update them to present-day realities. The intensity with which many craftsmen now criticise the Folk Craft Movement reveals, paradoxically, how much they had pinned their hopes on Yanagi's ideology.

### *The Japanese Folk Craft Ideal*

Now that I have described the historical background of the Japanese Folk Craft Movement, I would like to examine the nature of the ideals that Yanagi expounded. In that he was concerned with the 'beauty' of objects which he labelled 'folk crafts', and outlined the various criteria which in his opinion created such 'beauty', Yanagi may be said to have written about aesthetics. However, the Japanese Folk Craft Movement was not envisaged simply as an 'art' movement, but as something more fundamental to man's existence:

"This movement of ours is most active in the field of crafts, but it is not simply a craft movement. Rather, what we are really aiming at is a clearly spiritual movement. Thus the Folk Craft Movement cannot be said to exist without its ethical and spiritual aspects . . . I am not suggesting that a craftsman has to be a moralist or religious preacher; each man can keep to his own profession. What I do say is that a craftsman is first and foremost a human being, and as a human being his life has to be founded on spirit-

uality . . . When one reviews the history of crafts, one cannot avoid the fact that every great period of craftsmanship was founded on an ethical and religious doctrine . . . The problem of beauty is not simply a problem of beauty; beauty cannot exist unless it contains elements of truth, goodness and holiness. If we reflect on this, we will realize that it is impossible to come to terms with a Folk Craft Movement that is not spiritual. In this sense, the Folk Craft Movement should try to be a cultural movement.” (Yanagi 1946: 21–2)

I would like to stress here that Yanagi’s primary concern was with what I shall call modern man’s ‘spiritual’ attitude, and that he chose to express his vision of ‘spirituality’ through the medium of folk crafts. He was, therefore, concerned with *how* folk crafts were made, rather than with these crafts as objects in themselves. Provided that they were made according to a certain set of rules laid down by himself, they would naturally accord with his concept of ‘beauty’. This is a point not fully understood by many devotees of *mingei*, who concentrate on the aesthetic impact of craftwork and ignore the spiritual attitude of the craftsman.

How, then, did Yanagi think that *mingei* ought to be made and on what basis was he able to determine the difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ crafts? Yanagi himself emphasized that he did not intend to start a ‘movement’; he did not begin with a preconceived theory of art which he then tried to apply to Japanese folk crafts. Things were much simpler. He had no aesthetic ideas at all, but just looked at craft objects and experienced a certain ‘mental shock’ (Yanagi 1946: 1). It was from his own personal experience in ‘just looking’ at crafts that Yanagi proceeded to develop his *mingei* theory. This experience he called ‘direct perception’ (*chokkan*) which he variously referred to as ‘the absolute footrule’, ‘the selfless footrule’ and ‘the footrule that is not a footrule’ and which he used to determine beauty (Yanagi 1954a: 31–2; 43–4; 1955: 7).

Let me quote a free adaptation of what Yanagi wrote about *chokkan*:

“When you look at things, your eyes can be clouded by knowledge, by habit or by the wish to assert yourself. But this is not the way to look at things. There should be nothing coming between the person who is seeing and the thing that is seen. A thing should be seen for what it is. This is ‘direct perception’—just seeing things. You enter into the thing; the thing communicates with your heart. When the two become one, you have direct perception. To know about something, without seeing it directly gives rise to pointless judgement.” (Yanagi 1932: 56)

And

“ In order to see things properly, you should look at them directly. But to do this, you must not prejudge them. Direct perception must come before criticism.<sup>2</sup> If you allow your learning to come before direct perception, then your eye will be dulled. To know and then to look is the same as not looking at all. In order to come into contact with beauty itself, you have no need of intellectual analysis, for this only impedes your perception. Without direct perception, you will never understand beauty.” (*ibid.* p. 58)

Direct perception, then, defies logical explanation. Yanagi argued that it was ‘ beyond the self ’ (Yanagi 1955 : 8) and that it offered a means of seeing crafts without the intrusion of subjectivity and all its possible prejudices. In his appreciation of Japanese folk crafts, therefore, Yanagi aimed at putting aside all concepts of what constituted beauty and what did not, and at allowing a thing to be seen for what it was and to speak for itself. Direct perception was a method of aesthetic appreciation that could be applied by *anyone*, and ‘ good ’ and ‘ beautiful ’ folk crafts could be recognized as such by *anyone*, provided that he or she made use of direct perception. Yanagi argued that if *chokkan* was ‘ subjective ’ or ‘ arbitrary ’, than it was not ‘ direct ’ perception at all (Yanagi 1954a : 27–8).

As I mentioned above, so far as crafts were concerned, Yanagi’s main emphasis was on ‘ beauty ’. Beauty was, in his opinion, unchanging, created by an immutable spirit. Sung period ceramics, or medieval Gothic churches were products of the same spirit; ‘ true ’ man was unchanging, unaffected by cultural or historical background. The present and the past were linked by beauty (Yanagi 1955 : 336).

*Mingei* has been roughly defined by Hamada Shōji as ‘ health, naturalness and beauty ’ (Leach 1976 : 123). Two broad categorizations of the content of Yanagi’s folk craft theory may, I think, be usefully made. These are what I shall call the ‘ moral ’ and ‘ utilitarian ’ aspects of *mingei*. The first is, strictly speaking, ‘ extra-aesthetic ’ since it concerns the way in which folk crafts are made; the second centres on their social use. The ‘ moral ’ aspect concerns the craftsman, the ‘ utilitarian ’ one the craft itself as object.

I would like to start by looking at the moral aspect of folk craft theory. One word which frequently occurs in Yanagi’s writings is ‘ nature ’ (*shizen*), for all craftwork should in his opinion be ‘ focused on nature ’. Craftsmen should ideally make use of natural materials and these materials ought to be obtainable locally. The beauty of folk crafts, therefore, largely depended on the natural environment in which the



craftsman worked (Yanagi 1954b: 151 ff).

But Yanagi's concept of 'nature' included two meanings: one referred to the environment; the other to the inner self or 'god'. Yanagi did not accept the notion that nature was but a shadow or reflection of a higher reality. For him, nature *was* the higher reality. It sustained the masses, made them great and gave them strength (1955: 175). He directly linked nature, beauty and selflessness, and it is here that his thought differs most radically, perhaps, from Western art theories and shows close affinity to Buddhist ideas. Beauty was, in his opinion, born of the natural, of the unconscious in man (1955: 161). For crafts to be beautiful, the craftsman should leave nature to do the creating; salvation came from outside oneself, from what Yanagi called 'self surrender' (*tarikidō*) (1978: 309). *Tariki* was not denial of the self so much as freedom from the self. Just as an Amidha Buddhist could be saved by reciting the *nenbutsu* prayer and denying his or her self, so the craftsman could attain a 'pure land of beauty' by surrendering his self to nature. No craftsman had within himself the power to create beauty; the beauty that came from 'self surrender' was incomparably greater than that of any work of art produced by 'individual genius' (1954b: 325 ff).

This argument led Yanagi to suggest that it was only in a 'communal' society in which people cooperated with one another that beauty would be born. Cooperation bound not only one man to another, but man to nature. There was always a 'communal' beauty in good craftwork and behind this beauty flowed the blood of 'love'—the love of God, of nature, of justice, of other men, of work and of things. Cooperation was built on mutual love, which was itself brought about by crafts. Folk crafts could only be called the 'communal arts' (*sic*) (1955: 238–9).<sup>3</sup>

In the light of this emphasis that beauty derived from 'nature' and 'cooperation', it is not surprising to find Yanagi criticising modern industrialized society. Three things in particular incurred his displeasure: mechanization, greed and individualism. He felt, therefore, that the more a society shifted from being based on a cooperative to a capitalist system of relations, the more its crafts generally deteriorated. With industrial capitalism, mechanized means of production replaced handwork and people became isolated from one another. This meant that naturalness yielded to artificiality and man was unable to be creative; while the joy of work could be found in handicrafts, it was absent in machine-made things (1955: 90–3).

Yanagi further argued that there was a close connection between the incentive for profit and the quality of work produced under a capitalist system of wage labour relations. A craftsman had to feel 'love'

for his work and this was impossible when he made things merely for sale. 'Love of profit robs a work of its beauty'. Beauty could not, in his opinion, be born under conditions of wage labour. In the 20th century people were working because they had to, not because they wanted to, whereas in the past the opposite had been the case. In the world of crafts, a master had loved his apprentices and they in turn had responded by doing their utmost to please their master; consequently their work had been good. In modern times, however, profit had become the sole motivation behind work; it was this greed for money that was destroying crafts, beauty, the world and man's spirit (1955: 128-133).

Yanagi claimed that it was impossible for 'bad' craftwork to be created in a 'good' society and he concluded from this that 'a system which does not guarantee the existence of beauty cannot be called a right and proper system' (1955: 235). In short, he equated the beauty of crafts with the beauty of society. The concept of folk craft beauty was, therefore, clearly dissociated in Yanagi's mind from the idea of individual talent. *Anyone* could create beautiful things, provided that he was prepared to surrender his self and live in a 'proper' spiritual manner within the bounds of morality. 'The greatest crafts are born of the nameless masses' (1955: 148-9), wrote Yanagi, who was convinced that real beauty could only be appreciated once one forgot all about names—names of *who* had produced an object, of *what* particular period or civilization or style that object belonged to. The commonly held theory that beauty could only be produced by a few highly-talented people was, in his opinion, entirely wrong.

It is at this point that we come back to the 'non-intellectual' approach to beauty which, it will be remembered, Yanagi argued was essential to his concept of 'direct perception'. As far as he was concerned, intellectualism gave rise to 'art' while crafts were a result of 'unlearnedness' (*mugaku*) (1955: 117). Craftsmen did not create beauty; beauty was born (1955: 62; cf. Hamada in Leach 1976: 94). An intellectual understanding of beauty, and a conscious attempt to produce beauty, merely produced what Yanagi thought was ugliness.

He was particularly concerned that folk crafts would in fact end up as one of the arts and he prophesied that the intrusion of the craftsman's 'self' into his work would lead to high prices, 'artification', self-consciousness and an emphasis on decoration rather than on function (1955: 102). It is here that we come to my second broad categorization of Yanagi's folk craft theory: its 'utilitarian' aspect. Yanagi argued that it was because folk crafts were used that they were beautiful. If a craft was not used it would lose its *raison d'être*. It was use which gave a

thing life; it was misuse that killed it. The more a thing was used, the more beautiful it became. That was why, in Yanagi's opinion, the act of creation alone was not sufficient to give a thing beauty. All crafts had an 'after-life' and beauty to a large extent derived from the way in which things were used in this after-life (Yanagi 1932: 61-5).

Yanagi's concept of beauty deriving from function extended to the pricing of folk crafts; he felt that if things were to be used by the average man in the street, they would have to be cheap, and this was only possible if they were made in large quantities. He therefore rejected the generally held idea that there is an inverse relation between quality and quantity in the appreciation of beauty and art. So far as he was concerned, works by individual artists became highly evaluated precisely because they were produced in limited numbers. Because there were so few of such artistic works, people became afraid to use them; they lost their function and became entirely decorative, expensive works that could only be bought by a few rich people. Consequently, these 'art' objects became divorced from the 'common people' (1955: 154). Folk crafts, on the other hand, had to be made by and for the ordinary people; they were born of the unlearned, of the unknown masses (1955: 40). *Mingei* was not an art but a craft.

### *Conclusion*

In this article, I have given an outline of the historical background of the Japanese Folk Craft Movement and of the theoretical ideals propounded by its founder, Yanagi Muneyoshi. There are two points that I would like to make in conclusion: one of them concerns the social circumstances surrounding the concept of 'folk art'; the other, Yanagi's aesthetic doctrine of 'direct perception'.

Firstly, I would suggest that the concept of a 'folk' art or craft generally occurs in highly urbanized societies at a certain stage following their industrialization. This point is important because Yanagi himself tended to emphasize the 'uniqueness' of *mingei* and to suggest that the Japanese Folk Craft Movement had no parallel elsewhere in the world (Yanagi 1946: 3-4). I would argue that, on the contrary, there have been similar aesthetic ideals put forward in other societies, particularly in England in the latter half of the 19th century.

Indeed, I think that the Arts & Crafts Movement which flourished in Britain during the 1880s and 1890s may be seen as the earliest example of a 'folk art' movement. Critics such as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and William Morris aimed to counter some of the social, moral and aesthetic materialism that they saw as being brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Although there has been some argument to the

contrary (Mizuo 1978: 20–3; Jugaku 1935; Tonomura 1973), it seems to me that much of Yanagi's theory of *mingei* has developed from the work of William Morris (1834–96). There are several parallels in the thought of the two men, both of whom advocated that: (i) simplicity and fitness for purpose gave rise to beauty; (ii) crafts belonged to the 'common people', rather than to an aristocratic elite; (iii) they were not created by individual genius, but resulted from a cooperative tradition; (iv) the craftsman relied on natural materials, remained 'close to nature' and (v) took pleasure in his work; and (vi) commerce destroyed good craftwork. I would suggest, therefore, that although Yanagi's theory of *mingei* does have certain cultural peculiarities, it is not unique to Japan.

My second point stems from Yanagi's concern for social and moral attitudes in his discussion of *mingei*. By emphasizing such theoretical concepts as 'direct perception' and 'self surrender', Yanagi made it clear that beauty could be understood and created by *anyone* in Japanese society, regardless of his or her rank or education. Moreover, in his description of the content of beauty, Yanagi set out an ideal image of society in which people lived in cooperation and self-denial. This image is interesting in that it closely parallels the ideal of Japanese society, as portrayed by sociologists (cf. Nakane 1970) and by most Japanese people themselves, whereby the individual is expected to subordinate his personal interests to those of the group to which he belongs. Thus, according to both social and *mingei* aesthetic ideals society is a harmonious entity in which the individual should surrender himself to the ideals of 'group solidarity' (*minna to issho*) on the one hand, and of 'beauty' (*bi*) on the other. The extent to which such ideals are actually practised in everyday life remains, of course, a matter for further discussion.

#### NOTES

1. Later in life, Yanagi sometimes made use of the Chinese pronunciation of the characters with which his name Muneyoshi was formed to call himself Yanagi Sōetsu. This is the name by which he is generally known in England and America (cf. Leach 1972).

2. In practice, one cannot make a critical judgement on the basis of 'direct perception', because that judgement will not be a 'direct' comment, but a later reflection upon the original experience. It would appear inevitable, therefore, that Yanagi's concept of *chokkan* cannot in fact logically provide a 'standard of beauty'; extra-aesthetic values are bound to take precedence in the appreciation of Japanese folk crafts (cf. Moeran 1980).

3. The word here used by Yanagi was *bijutsu*, or 'art'. It is interesting to note that in the early days of the Folk Craft Movement, neither Yanagi nor any of his friends had fixed on the idea that *mingei* was a 'craft' rather than 'art' form. In a letter to Bernard Leach in 1927, Hamada calls the planned museum in Tokyo the *Nihon Mingei*

*Bijutsukan*, or *Japan Folk Art Museum* (Leach 1976: 91). Leach himself always referred to *mingei* as 'folk art', and Yanagi has often been criticised for setting *mingei* on a pedestal and making it into an art form, despite his theoretical emphasis on the notion of craft.

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