

The Dharma Gate of Beauty – the concepts of beauty by Soetsu Yanagi

January 9 (Sat) – March 21 (Mon), 2016

The word 'mingei' has been getting more familiar among the public nowadays. In general, 'mingei' seems to be considered to cherish the beauty of daily works made by hand or to inherit and spread them. This is true, but when people examine the word more closely, they would understand that 'mingei' is also an idea to enrich mentally as well as to aim at improving their human nature triggered by the beauty of craft works.

Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), founder of the museum, spent his summer vacation at Jōhana Temple in Toyama prefecture in 1948. There he had studied the fourth vow of 'The Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life' and Yanagi completed writing 'The Dharma Gate of the Beauty' in one day, triggered by his study of the sutra. Yanagi recalled this experience later that he had been inspired by something somehow and that a door to the concept of beauty had suddenly opened in front of him ('Reminiscences of 40 years' 1959). In the same year, Yanagi first announced this thought to the public officially at the 2nd National Convention of the Japan Folk Craft Association (Shōkokuji Temple, Kyoto). Then in March of the following year, Yanagi published this book as a private edition and this is the birth of the Dharma gate of the beauty, which shows Yanagi's fundamental philosophy.

The Fourth Vow is one of the forty-eight vows by Hōzō Bosatsu (who later became Amida Buddha) and also called 'vow of no beauty and ugliness'. It says, 'If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not all be of one appearance, and should there be any difference in beauty, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.' Yanagi applied 'human and devas' to utensils. Moreover, Yanagi believed that the fact Hōzō Bosatsu had already attained Buddhahood and already become Amida Buddha proves that there should be no difference in beauty. Based on this belief, Yanagi tried to establish his own philosophy of the Buddhist aesthetics. In this way, Yanagi felt that the fundamental proposition why daily wares made by unknown craftspeople are connected with greatest beauty, which Yanagi had speculated for a long time, was gradually getting dispelled.

Yanagi first became famous as a philosopher of religion and contributed many articles as a member of the 'Shirakaba' school. He also published books relating to Christianity. It should be noted that Daisetz Suzuki, his beloved teacher at the Gakushuin Boys Senior High School, taught Buddhism to Yanagi and this also influenced his way of thinking. After Yanagi began to study the proposition on aesthetics, he still continued to devote himself in thinking of religion. It could be even said that Yanagi didn't consider the approach to aesthetics and philosophy of religion separately. Rather, he had seen deep relationship between reality where beautiful objects are born and religious truth.

After Yanagi wrote 'The Dharma Gate of Beauty', he published vigorously many books on Buddhism. 'Myōkōnin Genza of Inaba' in 1950, 'Nam-amida-butsu (Amida Buddha)' in 1955. 'Vow of No Beauty and Ugliness', 'Pure Land of Beauty', 'Buddhist Dharma and Beauty' published after 1957, together with 'The Dharma Gate of Beauty', are called a set of four books on Buddhist aesthetics. In 1959, he published 'Kokoro-uta' and from the following year, 'Soetsu Yanagi/ Selected Works on Religion' began to be published. This is Yanagi's compilation including articles on Christianity.

The museum houses many works relating to Buddhism such as paintings, ritual utensils and writings. Yanagi positioned objects which had been categorized into Buddhist Art so far as craft works served to Buddha, and continued to collect them. In addition to these craft works relating to Buddhism, works specifically indicated in the books 'Pure Land of Beauty', 'Buddhist Dharma and Beauty' and so on are shown in this exhibition. Besides, calligraphy, books and writings by Yanagi are on display and the aesthetics philosophy of the East Yanagi finally reached is introduced through the exhibition. Yanagi named the collection of the museum 'the standard of beauty' and kept them open to the public. The works housed in the museum also means the proof of Buddha's Vows, which Yanagi shed light on.

※ In this exhibition, many works are on display without any showcases so that visitors could see and feel objects directly. We would like to ask you not to touch them and to be careful in the gallery. Thank you for your cooperation.

Thematic Exhibition

Kanjiro Kawai

It will be 50 years after death of Kanjiro Kawai (1890-1966) next year. His works housed in the museum were all selected by Yanagi. They are mainly useful and simple works such as bowls and plates. They were decorated with bright color glazes in various techniques, like slip, dot and inlay.

Thematic Exhibition

Various Crafts of Joseon Dynasty

Yanagi noticed that daily wares of Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) bear beauty peculiar to Korea most richly. In this room, excellent works made in Joseon Dynasty, for example ceramics, wood works, metal and stone works, folk paintings, are exhibited and introduces the beauty of Joseon Dynasty crafts which colored the life.

Thematic Exhibition

Mingei of Europe (closed until Feb. 5th)

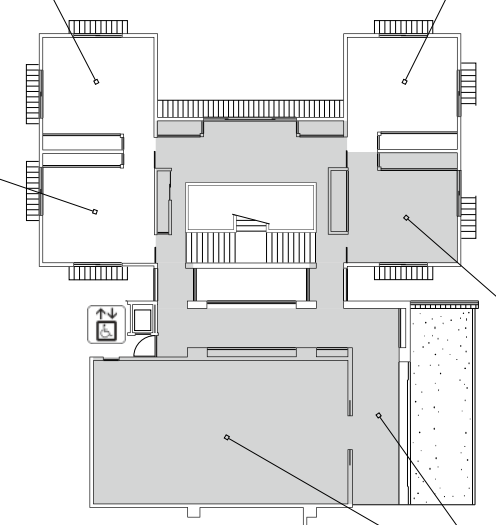
From Taisho to early Showa period, the eye to folk crafts made by unknown craftspeople, that is 'mingei' which hadn't been evaluated until then, were paid to those of Europe and other foreign countries. British slipware coated with slip is its representative. Here 'mingei' of Europe are on display from the museum collection.

Thematic Exhibition

Ceramics of Japan

The museum houses about 3800 pieces of ceramics of Japan like Seto, Tamba, and Imari from Tohoku to Kyushu, Okinawa. Most of them were made for ordinary people's use. In this room those ceramics especially from Edo period to early Showa are introduced.

SECOND FLOOR



Hidehira Bowl and Urushi Painting

Hidehira urushi bowls feature motifs painted with vermilion urushi and lozenges-shaped design with gold leaf. There is no confirmed theory for its origin and birthplace, but they were named Hidehira based on the story that they were originally made by order of Fujiwara Hidehira (? – 1187). You could see urushi wares in this room, for example Hidehira bowls with noble decoration and urushi paintings mainly with vermilion-color urushi.

Craft Works relating to Amida Buddha

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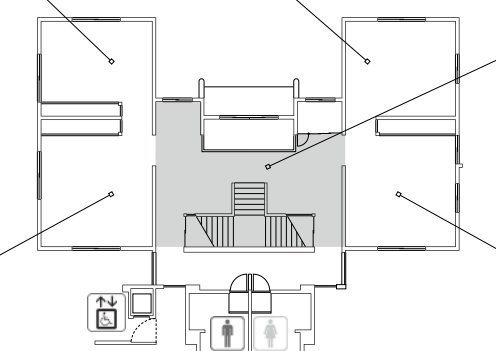
Thematic Exhibition

Special Exhibition

Special Exhibition

Thematic Exhibition

Museum Shop



Craft Works relating to Buddhism

Dyed and Woven Materials of Japan

Striped, checked or kasuri kimono which were woven with threads dyed with natural dyes such as indigo and bayberry are exhibited. In addition, *saki-ori* woven with waste threads or stripes tore up from used clothes, *kogin* stitched with cotton threads onto hemp ground, *tsutsu-gaki* costumes are also on display. These are healthy and steady works rooted in the life of various areas in Japan.

FIRST FLOOR