

The Golden-age of MINGEI

– life and beauty in Edo period

April 4th (Tue) – June 18th (Sun), 2017

THE JAPAN FOLK CRAFTS MUSEUM

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It was 1925 when the word ‘*mingei*’ was coined. Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), who was a member of literary group *Shirakaba* and religious philosopher, newly found the aesthetic value in utilitarian objects used by ordinary people together with Kanjiro Kawai (1890-1966) and Shoji Hamada (1894-1978). They called those daily objects which had never been evaluated so far ‘*minshu-teki koge*’ (people’s crafts), for short *mingei*.

Most of them were made by anonymous craftspeople, carefully, honestly, and sincerely. To cover a daily life, it is essential that objects should be reasonable, strong and reliable. They were produced in large numbers, so their forms and patterns had been simplified. Besides, their deep, plain, and subdued colors contain a pray for a safe life or submissive humbleness to nature. It is easy to imagine that craftspeople should have been in honest and unselfish minds. Thus, they bear beauty without intentions.

These *mingei* works which are deeply related to people’s lives could be found everywhere in the world. Compared to other countries in the world, Japan characteristically extends north to south, and a wide variety of craft works have been produced. Especially, Edo period could be said the golden age of *mingei*. Yanagi said, ‘It was Tokugawa period when crafts had become for ordinary people, had been digested as purely Japanese, and then had developed’ (*Nihon Mingeikan ni tsuite* (About the Japan Folk Crafts Museum), 1941). As he pointed out, urban culture had been flourished among ordinary people during Edo period, and then crafts had been also spreading among them, which had been only for the nobles and warriors until then. Thus, various folk crafts had been highly developed, and local industries had been also promoted.

Owing to the period of national isolation and the peaceful society for 300 years, a unique aesthetics of Japan like ‘*shibu-sa* (simple, subtle, imperfection with inner implications)’ and ‘*iki* (aesthetic ideal, urban, stylish, simple, sophisticated)’ were promoted. In these aesthetics, wisdom of daily life or tradition of minds in each district has been crystallized as ‘*mingei*’, crafts based on daily life. It is natural that most of the collection of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum were produced during Edo period.

This exhibition introduces a wide variety of works; ceramics of Seto, Mino, Tamba, and various kilns in Kyushu such as Imari, Karatsu, Shodai, and Satsuma/ folk paintings *Otsu-e* which were drawn around Otsu in Shiga prefecture, and *doro-e*, landscape paintings drawn in Nagasaki, Osaka, and Edo(Tokyo)/ textiles for bedding in *tsutsu-gaki* dyeing technique, ceremonial hood garment for women in Shonai area in Yamagata prefecture called *katsugi*, *haori* coat made from deer skin of master carpenters/ *urushi* bowls, trays with *urushi* paintings, boxes for sweets with designs in shells, adjuster for a hook above an open hearth, signboards, and sea chest/ iron kettle, candle holder, baskets. About 200 pieces are selected and on display.

Mingei works made in Edo period are filled with Japanese characteristics. It would be an honor if visitors would enjoy an essence of the beauty in *mingei* works, which clearly reflects Japanese sense of beauty or design sense.

Thematic Exhibition

Joseon Ceramics – from Goryeo to early Joseon Dynasty-

Celadon porcelains were produced in the Korean peninsula in Goryeo period, and then various ceramics such as Buncheong wares white porcelains began to be produced. Here, ceramics of the Korean peninsula are briefly introduced focusing on Buncheong wares.

Thematic Exhibition

Joseon Crafts and Methods – curving, engraving

Soetsu Yanagi, founder of the museum, was fascinated with their ‘shape’ when he first saw Joseon ceramics. This room focuses on the shapes of sculptures and ceramics. In addition, works produced in sculptural techniques like curving or engraving are also on display.

Special Exhibition

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Thematic Exhibition

Crafts of Africa

The museum collected various crafts of Africa especially after 1980’s. Masks, costumes made from raffia or tree barks, ceramic jars, knife-shaped money, etc. All these objects were rooted in their daily lives, and most of them were deeply related to beliefs and prayers, which have delivered us primitive feeling.

Thematic Exhibition

Ceramics of Meiji, Taisho, and Showa

Ceramics of Japan of the museum collection were produced in various areas such as Kyushu, San’in, Chubu, and Tohoku. Most of them were used by ordinary people in daily life, and produced in folk kilns. Focused on ceramics produced after Meiji period, this room introduces works which developed tradition of Edo period.

SECOND FLOOR

Kanjiro Kawai and Shoji Hamada

Soetsu Yanagi began to promote *Mingei* Movement in 1925 together with potters Kanjiro Kawai and Shoji Hamada, and then this movement had been developed through their deep communication and stable relationship. On display in this room are about 50 pieces of their works from the museum collection.

Thematic Exhibition

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A folding screen based on the tale of the Soga Brothers’ revenge, *tanroku-bon*, wood-block printed books with red, yellow, and green colors applied; this room introduces paintings during Edo period except famous folk paintings such as *Otsu-e*, *doro-e*, and *ema*(votive tablets).

Special Exhibition

Museum Shop

FIRST FLOOR

The Golden-age of MINGEI – life and beauty in Edo period

Here *urushi* lacquer works like trays and bowls with paintings and porcelains like *sometsuke* with paintings in a *gosu* pigment on clean and cool white ground are on display. Their forms, colors, and patterns show us Japanese unique aesthetics in daily life.

Special Exhibition

Dyeings and Weavings of Vietnam

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country, and 54 ethnic groups are officially recognized by Vietnamese government. Most of them inhabit in northern highland areas or central delta areas. Recently, Vietnamese weaving and dyeing works which were collected around 1987 in Vietnam are donated to the museum, and here costumes and weaving textiles selected are on display. They show us characteristics of each ethnic group.

Thematic Exhibition