

Tea and Beauty –Soetsu Yanagi and The Way of Tea–

January. 10th (Fri) – March. 23rd (Sun), 2014

Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), founder of the museum, had been strongly interested in ‘the way of tea’ and ‘its beauty’ throughout his life. He himself never became a grand master of tea ceremony, but he developed an original work concerning the way of tea from his position.

What Yanagi highly esteemed was free eyes of tea masters especially in the early times. He appraised keen intuitions by which tea masters chose tea utensils, making use of those which were not originally made for the purpose of the way of tea. It is even probable that they did not always know for what use the utensils had been intended. One of them is a tea-bowl called *Ido*, which was used in a daily life by the ordinary people in Korea. ‘They could comprehend intuitively. And because of their penetration, they saw truth.’ said Yanagi. Thus, Yanagi respected them as pioneers of aesthetics. These aesthetics became a guideline of the Mingei Movement Yanagi promoted, and also the most suggestive to the theory of Mingei aesthetics.

In addition to the utensils, Yanagi also mentioned the manner of the tea ceremony. Yanagi said that the manner performed in the tea ceremony by early tea masters was elevated into the simplest pattern or code of conduct required to handle utensils. They did not think out how to move and how to make a tea beforehand. The most efficient way of use became a universal law.

Yanagi regarded it is very important that Tea and Zen have been closely connected. ‘A tea cup, as well as a flower vase, makes the best theme for Zen meditation’, Yanagi stated in the speech at Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii in 1953. ‘To realize beauty and to practice belief are one and the same thing’, said Yanagi.

At the same time, Yanagi paid attention to the relationship between an ordinary life and the way of tea. He recommended adopting the way of tea to a daily life, not only in a tea room.

He wished that people would choose daily wares which could be made into tea utensils. Early tea masters, according to Yanagi, did not seek beauty apart from actual living.

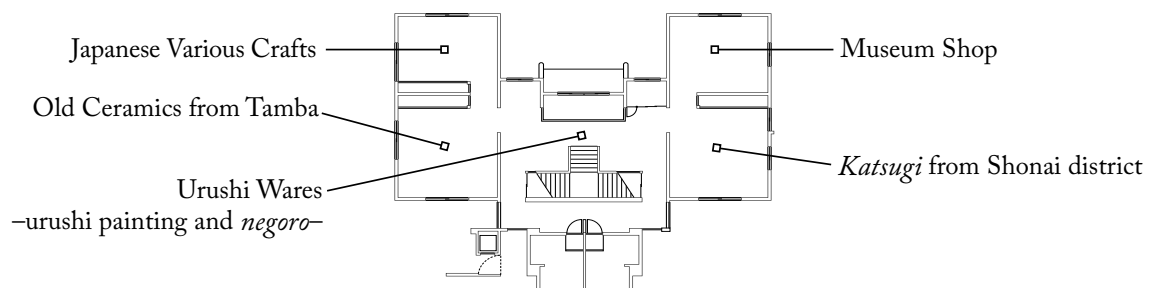
In December 1955 in his late years, Yanagi held a first Mingeikan-tea-ceremony. At that time Yanagi adopted tea utensils from the museum collection without being biased by an established idea of tea ceremony. Instead of sitting on tatami mat in the *seiza* style, chairs were arranged. Yanagi wrote in the 39th volume of Mingei Magazine that he was in charge of everything concerning the selection of utensils and interior arrangements. He also said that what he paid most attention to was interior arrangements and wondered how many people had noticed his intention.

Yanagi said, ‘When there are no beautiful utensils, there is no real Tea.’ He also wrote: ‘There are no differences between to practice the beauty and to practice the way of tea.’ and ‘To apprehend a beauty in crafts and crafts in beauty – that is the characteristic of Tea.’ After the first tea ceremony in the museum at the end of 1955, Yanagi became ill and regrettably he passed away in 1961. So the tea ceremony of his style was held only once and a very valuable record.

This exhibition re-transform the first Mingeikan-tea-ceremony, a special exhibition ‘Newly Selected Works for Tea Ceremony’ held in 1958 and others. In addition, tea utensils Yanagi used in the daily life are also on display, and honorably introduce how Yanagi considered the Way of Tea.

The beauty of tea utensils which tea masters in the early times selected –Yanagi called them ‘the beauty of simplicity’ or ‘the beauty of plainness’ and admired it deeply. It is beyond the duality of ugliness and beauty. The collection of the museum bears this beauty and therefore it has presented the standard of beauty.

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