A Socioeconomic Essay on Mingei Movement with Some Reference to the Arts and Crafts Movement in UK

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Abstract

According to the proposition brought about by Yanagi at its early stage, Mingei (Folk Crafts) are, originally, objects of household, by unknown craftsmen and for everyday use of ordinary people. Thanks to these properties, handicrafts become appreciative of beauty. In the theory of Mingei, the act of creation alone is not sufficient to give things beauty. All crafts have to have ‘after-life’ and beauty to a large extent arises from the way in which things are used in this after-life. That is why, the more objects are used, the more beautiful they become. As a matter of fact, however, a number of Mingei used to turn out different things.

Preface

The purpose of this paper is to explore the methodology of Mingei theory adopted by Muneyoshi Yanagi and also to discuss the points of problem proposed by some critics. One of the core elements of Mingei theory was taken from religious or Buddhist idea i.e. Tariki (the power of Other), which, in Yanagi’s theory, gives rise to the esoteric secret of creation of beauty of handicrafts. Yanagi’s claim for the originality of his own Mingei theory was one of the main targets of criticism raised by some critics. In this connection, I shall consider the difference between and the importance of the stages of so-called industrialization versus handicraft industry between UK and Japan of those days. The points raised by critics referring to Yanagi’s Originality are most likely come from so-called Euro-centrism.

An accidental encounter with Yi Dynasty wares made by ‘nameless craftsmen’ struck Yanagi, wherefrom a wonderful idea flashed into his mind in relation to a similar sort of ‘art’ in Japan, being attracted to what he initially called ‘people’s art’. Yanagi argued that Mingei was characterized by tradition and not by individuality. Producing things cheaply and in quantity, ‘unknown craftsmen’ gave the product a ‘free’ and ‘healthy’ beauty, which is usually observed in people’s everyday lives. As far as he was concerned, ‘art’ should be ‘unassuming’, the work of ‘non-individuality’ away from being associated with the individual creator.

It is the ‘unpretentious’, ‘pure’ and ‘simple’, and patient work with ‘humility’ that brings about great aesthetic value. The work is also to be carried out by using methods of trial and error in an ‘abandonment of egoism and pride’. The beauty that comes from ‘self-surrender’ is incomparably greater than that of any work of art produced by ‘individual genius’. In short, he equates the beauty of crafts with the beauty of society. The concept of folk craft beauty is, therefore, clearly dissociated in Yanagi’s mind from the idea of individual talent. No craftsman has within himself the power to create
beauty. According to Yanagi, it seems to be only in a ‘communal’ society in which people cooperate with one another that beauty would be born.

Cooperation binds not only man to another, but man to nature. There is always a ‘communal’ beauty in good craftwork and behind this beauty flows the blood of ‘love’ — the love of God, of nature, of justice, of other men, of work and of things. Cooperation is built on mutual love, which is itself to be brought about by crafts. Folk crafts can only be called the ‘communal arts’.

These practical, everyday utensils are not made by famous individual artists. The typical ‘beauty’ is used to be housed in the museums and art galleries. The ordinary craftsman is often interested in Mingei, not for its beauty, but for the money that was to be made from it. In the due course of socioeconomic development in the modern society, such kind of typical Mingei and/or ‘unknown craftsmen’ in the sense of Folk Craft people are steadily declining.

**Mingei and Idealistic Perception**

Folk crafts had to be made by and for the ordinary people. They were produced by the unlearned, of the unknown masses. Mingei was not an art but a craft. Yanagi’s most important thing about crafts was what the populace used to be concerned about in daily lives, and thus he had much contributed to arresting wide attention of lowbrow articles both at home and abroad. Such thing has never happened before at least in Japan.

In Yanagi’s opinion, ‘The greatest crafts are born of the nameless masses.’ Beautiful things could be created by anyone, provided that he was prepared to surrender his self and live in a ‘proper’ spiritual manner within the bounds of morality. Yanagi 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 the object belonged to. Contrary to commonly held theory, it is entirely wrong that beauty could only be produced by a few highly-talented people.

Yanagi was particularly anxious about that folk crafts would in fact end up as one of the arts. He, therefore, often prophesied that the intrusion of the craftsman’s individuality into his crafts would lead to expensiveness, artificialness, self-consciousness and an emphasis on decoration rather than on function. Referring to the special importance of ‘utilitarian’ aspect, Yanagi used to argue that it was because folk crafts were used that they were beautiful. However, the problem of beauty is not simply a problem of beauty. As the matter of fact, daily usefulness of common household objects does not necessarily go together with beautifulness, because it could be wasteful if they were easy to be dumped after using it briefly, or they could be kept unused as daily objects if they remained as some cherished collection. If there were so few of rich artistic works, people would become afraid to use them easy. In

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the course of time, most handicrafts lost their function and became more and more decorative, expensive works that could only be bought by a few rich people. As things now stand, these ‘art’ objects in general tended to become divorced from the ‘common people’. they often argued that beauty could not exist unless it contained elements of truth, goodness and holiness. What They were really aiming at was a clearly spiritual movement. It was impossible to come to terms with a Folk Craft Movement that was not spiritual. Thus the Movement could not be said to exist without its ethical and spiritual aspects. In this sense, the Movement tried to be a cultural movement.

From his own ‘direct perception’ (chokkan) personally experienced in ‘just looking’ at crafts, Yanagi proceed to develop his Mingei theory. He variously referred to as ‘the absolute foot rule’, ‘the selfless foot rule’ and ‘the foot rule that is not a foot rule’, whereby he used to determine beauty. Yanagi seemed to be trying to express his vision of ‘spirituality’ through the medium of folk crafts with strong concern about how folk crafts were made. In this way, the spiritual attitude of the craftsman could play much more decisive role in the theory, being apart from the objective existence of crafts made.

A brief outline of what Yanagi wrote about chokkan is as follows:

He directly linked nature, beauty and selflessness, showing close affinity to Buddhist ideas. Beauty was, in his opinion, born of natural, of the unconscious in man. For crafts to be beautiful, the craftsman should leave nature to do the creating. An Amidha [sic] Buddhist could be saved by reciting the nenbutsu prayer and denying his or her self. Salvation came from outside oneself, form what Yanagi called ‘self surrender’ (tarikido). Tariki was not denial of the self so much as freedom from the self. In a very similar way to the nenbutsu, the craftsman could attain a ‘pure land of beauty’ by surrendering his self to nature. In reference to the concept of ‘nature’, he included two meanings; one referred to the environment; the other to the inner or ‘god’. For him, nature was the higher reality. It sustained the masses, made them great and gave them strength. The ‘non-intellectual’ approach to beauty, as Yanagi argued, was essential to his concept of ‘direct perception’. As far as he was concerned, intellectualism gave rise to ‘art’, for crafts were a result of ‘unlearnedness’ (mugaku). An intellectual understanding of beauty, and a conscious attempt to produce beauty, merely produced what Yanagi thought was ugliness. Craftsmen did not create beauty; beauty was born.

In connection with such theoretical concepts as ‘direct perception’ and ‘self surrender’ or ‘beyond the self’, Yanagi often argued that beauty could be understood and created by anyone in Japanese society, regardless of his or her rank or education. In his appreciation of Japanese folk crafts, Yanagi aimed at putting aside all concepts of what constituted beauty and what did not. It also offered a means of seeing crafts without the intrusion of subjectivity and all its possible prejudices, allowing a thing to

2 "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." Mumeyoshi Yanagi, ‘Sakubutsu no Kohansei’ (The afterlife of crafts), Kögei 15, 1932, p. 56. (Owning trans. to Brian D. Moeran.).

3 A succinct memorandum by referring to Brian D. Moeran ‘Yanagi Muneyoshi and the Japanese Folk Craft Movement’, Nanzan Institute of Religion and Culture, Asian Folklore Studies @1981, pp.93-98.
be seen for what it was and to speak for itself.

In order to attain a 'pure land of beauty' in his sense, nobody can do without 'direct perception', whereby people can come to the land without the intrusion of subjectivity and all its possible prejudices. How much does it, then, appear probable that the concept of 'direct perception' itself has nothing to do with any kind of personal subjectivity or prejudices among people? The sense of 'direct perception' of Yanagi, therefore, seems to be incoherent to his logical explanation.

Aesthete's Beautility

As already mentioned, he used to repeat the assertion that craftsmen do not create beauty, but they realize themselves benefited with it through \(\text{Tariki}\) (the power of Other) as far as they devote themselves to do jobs without selfishness.

Through the term 'criterion of beauty' evolved by him, Yanagi himself articulated the qualities of supreme beauty inherent in common household objects hand-made by unknown craftsmen. The main points of his criterion for beauty are briefly summarized as follows:

(a) 'beauty of handcrafts', 'beauty of use function', 'beauty of tradition', 'beauty of naturalness'
(b) 'beauty of simplicity', 'beauty of irregularity', 'beauty of plurality', 'beauty of inexpensiveness'
(c) 'beauty of intimacy', 'beauty of health', 'beauty of sincerity and honest toil'
(d) 'beauty of selflessness and anonymity'

It seems that there are a variety of criteria which would bring about serious antagonism between groups. Criterion of group (a) are most strongly related to so-called tangible properties of handicrafts, and followed by group (b). Those of group (c) reflect mainly spiritual or idealistic aspects and could be elusive as well. Group (d) refers exceptionally to the religious or Buddhist idea, which played a central role in Yanagi's theory, and also sounds quaint and subjective.

One of the words frequently found in Yanagi's writings is 'nature' (shizen). The beauty of folk crafts largely depended on the natural environment on which all craftwork should be focused. Craftsmen, therefore, should ideally make use of natural materials and these materials ought to be obtainable locally.

Generally speaking, the \textit{Mingei} movement had been and is particular about aesthetic aspects, merely idealizing the folk crafts as having the supreme beauty of crafts. Yanagi confined his efforts rather to the attainment of his ideal within the genre of aestheticism than to external aims opened up to social environment and nature.

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4 The essential beauty of \textit{Mingei} is expressed coherently in his idea of the 'criterion of beauty in Japan' (nihon ni okeru bi no hyōjun) developed and published in 1927 as \textit{Kōgei no Michi} (The Way of Crafts), the authoritative book of \textit{Mingei} theory.
Points of Mingei Theory at Issue

Brian D. Moeran and Yoko Kikuchi are among harsh critics against the Mingei theory set forth by Yanagi and his associates. The main issues raised by Moeran and Kikuchi were how much the Mingei theory in effect owed to the ideas once evolved by Ruskin and Morris.

(1) beauty of functionality ⁵:

The society was considered to be greatly influenced by Ruskin and Morris, and its slogan, ‘ Yö soku Bi’ (Function equals Beauty), which also resonate with the Mingei aesthetics of the beauty of functionality, is a paraphrase of Yanagi’s words, ‘ Yö ni sokusurukoto to Bi ni sokusurukotowa Koge ni oite wa dōjidearu’ (the functional and the beautiful coincide in terms of crafts).

(2) ideals of peasant craft ⁶:

It is no accident that the western ideals of peasant craft and folk craft were so smoothly adopted, given that at that time Japanese society was in great turmoil, experiencing the revolt of poor peasants, workers, and women against the government after the outbreak of Komesōdo (Rice riot) in 1918, which spread all over Japan. The creation of unions was common and labour movements also became active in this period, triggered by the Russian revolution. However, it should also be remembered that these two peasant movements, which preceded or coincided with the Mingei movement, sprang from the ground cultivated by Ruskin, Morris and Tolstoy who idealized the peasants’ art and lifestyle. These three figures played a great role in reviving an interest in peasant art in Japan during the late 1910s to 1920s. Yanagi’s encouragement of them to create crafts embodying both original Japanese beauty and his own concept of a guild, which included the idea of a totally co-ordinated space creating a ‘art and beauty of life’, reveals his appropriation of John Ruskin’s ideas of the Guild of St George, William Morris’s ideas of Morris and Co. and red House, and in general the concept of guild socialism underlying the English Arts and Crafts movement.

(3) art as the expression of joy in labour ⁷:

Morris’s ‘art is man’s expression of his joy in labour’, ... Under the guidance of Yamamoto and Miyazawa, the peasants created functional crafts for their own enjoyment and also to earn money during the winter season when they could not work outside.

(4) cultural peculiarities but not unique to Japan ⁸:

...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 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 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 craft work. I would

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suggest, therefore, that although Yanagi’s theory of *mingei* does have certain cultural peculiarities, it is not unique to Japan.

(5) Yanagi’s spirituality and nationalistic opinions:

Tomimoto defended Yanagi by writing that although there appeared to be similarities in Yanagi’s and Morris’s work, this was not the case and he pointed the superiority of Yanagi’s spirituality compared with Morris’s spiritual quality. These strongly nationalistic opinions encouraged many more uncritical admirers to promote the idea in Japan and elsewhere that Yanagi was a pioneer of this kind of crafts movement.

(6) ‘intuition’ and ‘nothing’ to connect Occident and Orient:

...it is by intuition and not by intellect that we know Reality. Truth is grasped by intuitive experiences,...

He attempted to connect Occident and Orient through finding shared ideas such as ‘intuition’ and ‘nothing’ which corresponded to chokka [n] and mu.

(7) Yanagi’s originality questioned:

...Yanagi claimed that his ideas were original and owed nothing at all to Ruskin and Morris. Yanagi acknowledged Okuma’s book, published in the same year (1927) as his own, for giving information about Ruskin and Morris, but is it really true that Yanagi did not know anything about Ruskin and Morris before he developed his theory? Why did he suddenly develop an interest in crafts? What sparked his first interest in crafts? Did his interest truly come as a sudden revelation one day when he was just looking at the crafts themselves, as he claimed?

(8) ‘lesser art’ applied to folk crafts:

William Morris had tried similarly to upgrade ‘lesser art’ to the aesthetic position of ‘high art’ or ‘fine art’. Although the terminologies were different, Yanagi’s application of Western concepts derived from Morris is easily recognizable. In this sense, Yanagi’s categorization was taken from Western ideas, as were the new concepts expressed by the terms ‘fine art’ and ‘craft’. The readers of Yanagi’s *Mingei* theory should remember that the Japanese were not as aware of art and craft in Japan at that time as were people in Britain of their art and craft.

(9) dubious ignorance about Ruskin and Morris:

At the beginning of this paper, I quoted Yanagi’s claim that he did not know much about Ruskin and Morris before he read *Shakai Shisōka toshiteno Rasukin to Morisu* (Ruskin and Morris as Social Theorists) by Ōkuma Nobuyuki, published in 1927. ...It is difficult to believe that Yanagi as a member of the Shirakaba circle and a vigorous book reader did not know about Ruskin and Morris before 1927.

Yanagi’s ideas cannot be seen as isolated from these contemporary intellectuals; moreover, it is clearly possible to conclude that both Tomimoto’s and Leach could have influenced Yanagi’s ideas through their close contact with one another. Yanagi, as a vigorous reader, must surely have read Tomimoto’s articles and been aware of his innovative activities but the *Mingei* critics ever paid any

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10 Yuko Kikuchi, op. cit., 1997, p. 344.
11 Yuko Kikuchi, op. cit., 1994, p. 247, and do., p. 248. Kikuchi never seems to give up denouncing the Yanagi’s theory for his vague originality.
attention to Tomimoto’s activity before 1915. It is as though Yanagi did not know Tomimoto before that time.

10) Hybridity of *Mingei* theory:

Various elements beyond the influence of the ideas of Ruskin and Morris can be recognized in *Mingei* theory. However, this hybridity does not necessarily devalue Yanagi and the *Mingei* movement. In fact, Yanagi can be seen to have aimed his hybridization at extracting ‘oriental and innate’ Japanese beauty from modern occidental aesthetic ideas. ...Yanagi validated Japanese religious art and folk crafts using an Occidental discipline and constructed a discourse of Japanese ethnic identity by creating the hybrid theory of the ‘criterion of beauty’ in *Mingei*.

11) Humility towards the West and emulation:

Nevertheless, despite the analytical and calm statement, quoted above, Yanagi sometimes showed his honest and strongly emotional admiration for the West, and revealed his humility towards the West. ... Although he started from a position of admiration and humility towards the West, Yanagi struggled to make himself equal to Westerners.

12) A simulacrum of Orientalism:

Yanagi’s claiming to be an evaluator of Oriental beauty, having learned Occidental discipline and acquiring Orientalist eyes through people such as Lafcadio Hearn, Bernard Leach, Bruno Taut and Charlotte Perriand, constructed *tōyō* through his *Mingei* theory. So, on the one hand, Yanagi used Occidental discipline to validate his theories, and on the other, he constructed a Japanese and Oriental cultural identity by inventing a new spatial and temporal entity, *tōyō* (Orient), which paralleled the entities of classical, primitive and medieval Occident. What was original was ‘simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum.’

13) Originality in the way of synthesizing:

It has to be remembered that the *Mingei* movement has had, and still continues to have, a great impact both in Japan and abroad, probably because it fulfilled the psychological vacuum experienced by people living in an urban industrialized environment and it met the Western expectations of oriental exoticism, fed by the trend of *Japonisme*, which has continued since the nineteenth century. However, it continues to be significant also because of Yanagi’s personal flair in synthesizing the craft aesthetic with Buddhism and the eloquence of his speeches and writings about his theory, with its religious and spiritual tone. Originality exists, not in *Mingei* theory itself, but in the way Yanagi synthesized his concepts to make something that could be called the ‘Religion of Craft’ and in the way he provided a perception of a type of beauty which Idekawa called the ‘Mingei Yoshiki’ (*Mingei* Style) as one of the most significant styles in modern design history.

14) Inferiority complex and ethnic nationalism:

... inferiority complex towards the West? There can be little doubt that the existence of ambivalent feelings towards the West and the struggle in search of cultural nationalism among the intellectuals of

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17 Yuko Kikuchi, op. cit., 1994, p. 263.
this period affected Yanagi and the formation of *Mingei* theory. Likewise, the influence of Nishida and Suzuki, who sought spiritual nationalism, is particularly recognizable in the way Yanagi combined Buddhist aesthetics with *Mingei* theory in its later development. His project is not an isolated case in the social and historical context of Japan. Yanagi’s quest for national cultural identity developed together with the growth of Japanese cultural nationalism, particularly of ethnic nationalism, which became prominent from around 1890, in various fields including religion, language, art and architecture. The rise of cultural nationalism in Japan occurred as a reaction against the superficial Westernization encouraged by the government in the first half of the Meiji period (1868–1912) and against epistemological colonization by the Occident. It was also a result of the maturation and stabilization in accordance with the growth of national wealth and power. Nevertheless, this Japanese cultural nationalism was heavily dependent on Occidental ideas.

**Handicrafts and So-called Industrialization**

Yanagi himself repeatedly insisted on the ‘uniqueness’ of *Mingei* and often referred to that the Japanese Folk Craft Movement had no parallel elsewhere in the world. Nevertheless, the concept of a ‘folk’ art or craft generally seems to have occurred in the early industrialized societies at a certain stage following their industrialization. There have been preceding similar aesthetic ideals put forward particularly in Britain in the latter half of the 19th century. The Arts & Crafts Movement which flourished chiefly in England 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 tried to counter some of the social, moral and aesthetic problems that they saw as being brought about by the established capitalist economy.

In the light of his emphasis on ‘nature’ and ‘cooperation’, Yanagi criticized modern industrialized society, being the motive to the displeasure incurred through mechanization, greed and individualism. According to his idea, the more a society shifted from being based on a cooperative to a capitalist system of relations, the more its crafts generally made deteriorated.

With industrial capitalism, mechanized means of production replaced handwork and people became isolated from one another. This meant that naturalness yielded to artificialness and man was unable to be creative. Yanagi also argued that there was a close connection between the incentive for profit and the quality of work brought about under the wage labour relations. A craftsman had to feel ‘love’ for his work and this was hopeless when he made things merely for sale. The joy of work could be found in handicrafts, but it was absent in machine-made things, because ‘Love of profit robs a work of its beauty’. Beauty could not, in his view, be born under condition of wage labour. In modern times, thus, profit had become the sole motivation behind work. It was this greed for money that was marring the quality of crafts, beauty, and spirit. 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.19

The Meiji modernization policy was almost nothing but to catch up with the Western model of industrialization. It was during the late *Taishō* to the early *Shōwa* period that the *Mingei* movement

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19 These summary may sound too oversimplified and naturally ignored some of the essential factors, but we cannot go into detail here because of limited space.
developed. Being often known by the term ‘Taishō Democracy’, the Taishō period (1912-26) was the formative period for Mingei theory. Referring to a proviso of ‘Industrialization had only just begun in Japan so it was still too early to see the ills of industrial civilization.’ 20, Yuko Kikuchi has been tenacious of her critic with the dubious originality of Yanagi’s Mingei theory.

However, if the first half of Meiji can be categorized as a period of simply promoting modernization which was considered synonymous with Westernization, the latter half of the Meiji and all of Taishō period were more complex. Various ideological and philosophical problems emerged in the later stages of modernization. 21

I have tried to correct this impression by indicating that the Mingei movement needs to be seen in its social and historical context as a natural product of Japanese modernization and that Yanagi’s ideas have to be seen as reflecting the social and historical preoccupations of the late Meiji, the Taisho, and the early Showa periods. Taking this evidence into consideration, it is my contention that the period of the formation of the Mingei theory has to be seen as starting not in 1916 but in 1910, when Yanagi vigorously absorbed Western ideals by producing Shirakaba, while at the same time becoming more conscious of the gap to be filled between Western idealism and Japanese reality. 22

Handicrafts are occupations that involve making usable or decorative products by hand. All such products were handmade, often in the home. Putting-out system was widespread in Western Europe during past centuries before the Industrial Revolution broke out. Under the system, merchant-employers “put out” materials to rural producers who usually worked in their homes. 23

The putting-out system, however, undermined the restrictive regulations of the urban guilds and brought the first widespread industrial involvement of working people including women and children. Employees sometimes laboured in workshops, which had developed into so-called manufacture system, inducing eventually the birth of the revolution of industrial technology. The system of traditional handicraft was generally superseded by employment in factories during the course of the Industrial Revolution.

The age of the machine nearly did away with the traditional crafts by fostering mass production in advanced capitalist countries. During the mid-19th century, however, a reaction against the machine took place in Great Britain. Being called the Arts and Crafts Movement, it urged a new appreciation for decorative, handmade products. The movement did a great deal to bring about today’s interest in handicrafts, often as a hobby, for limited production of quality goods. Besides such advanced capitalist

21 do., p. 251.
22 do., p. 263.
23 Finished products were returned to the employers for payment on a piecework or wage basis. The advantages to the merchant-employer were the lower wage costs and increased efficiency due to a more extensive division of labour within the craft. Traditional cottage industries and handicrafts still continue to play an important role in the economies of many countries. They not only constitute major manufacturing activities in themselves but are also often the only available means to provide additional employment and raise the level of living for both rural and urban populations. In view of the growing world market for products of traditional cottage industries and for handicrafts, there is room for considerable expansion.
economy as England, there is a variety of capitalist economy that got into the industrialization later in the history. This was the case of Japan until the end of the Second World War. Japan was the country where an uneven mixture of the old and the new must inevitably coexist in order to support the national economy as a whole for the certain period of transition. Even various industrial sectors at the time were incompatible each other by its economic nature, forcible government enterprises and/or quangos at the same time could be placed with a number of conventional small and medium private enterprises even together with semi-feudal cottage industries including so-called autarky.  

**Modernity and Industrialism**

Capitalism is a social and/or economic system in which a country’s businesses and industry are controlled and run for profit and capital accumulation by private owners who are in full possession of property and the means of production. In other word, capitalism based on profit motive, free enterprise, efficiency through competition and a notion of freedom of choice. Nevertheless, in political practice, capitalist governments participate in economic regulation. The economic system in which, particularly, large-scale mechanized manufacturing industries are prevalent is fundamental feature of the industrial capitalism, which is characterized by modernized factory system rather than trade, farming, handicraft, etc.

Historically, the rise of modern society has been inextricably linked with the emergence of industrial society which means that to modernize a society is, namely, to industrialize it. All the features that are associated with modernity can be shown to be related to the set of changes that, no more than two centuries ago, brought into being the industrial type of society. Modernization is presumably understood to be the transformation from a traditional, rural, agrarian society to a secular, urban, industrial society.

As a matter of fact, the span of time over which modernization had taken place must be measured in centuries, although there were examples of accelerated case of modernization. In either case, modernization is a continuous and open-ended process and not a once-and-for-all-time phenomenon. It is by undergoing the comprehensive transformation of industrialization that societies become modern, because the terms industrialism and industrial society imply far more than the economic and technological components that make up their core. Industrialism is a way of life that encompasses profound economic, social, political, and cultural changes.  

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24 Among them there were overwhelmingly observed a variety of handicrafts businesses scattered all over Japan. At the times, the export of such conventional products as silk thread, various handicrafts, etc. played much more important role than those by newly established factories in reference to making up with chronic international balance deficit. As far as the people’s livelihood, economic mainstay had been chiefly supported by the semi-feudal peasantry and conventional handwork rather than the modernized factory work until the end of the World War second. It is quite probable, from this context, that some kind of traditional handicrafts acted as one of staples, which also contributed to cover the international deficit to a considerable extent.

25 The term ‘modern’ in general is a concept belonging or relating to the period in history from the end of the Middle Ages to the present day. This expression admits of wide interpretation and it would be advisable to get better understanding that the term is strongly associated with following groups of affairs within cultural, economic, ideological, or political contexts. Firstly, it refers to the certain period in history, modern history, which expands from the end of the Middle Ages to the
There seems to be a dynamic principle built into the very fabric of modern societies that does not allow them to settle, or to achieve equilibrium straightforwardly. Whatever the level of development, there are always "backward" regions and "peripheral" groups in which such industries as cottage industry and handicraft may survive for certain period of time even as a staple industry in modern society. Such a condition is not confined to the internal development of individual states. This is a persistent source of strain and conflict in modern world. The development is always irregular and uneven as is the case of handicraft in industrialized economy.

By attaching greater importance to the devotion of craftsmen rather than their skills, Yanagi invoked Buddhist idea 'the Other Power' as an explanation for the essence of Mingei beauty. Paying less attention to the joy of labour, his theory is unique in marked contrast to Morris’s. Yanagi’s concern about beauty was, consciously or subconsciously, absorbed in spiritual world in effect before civilization and modernization in the Orient. On the contrary, what Morris had tackled with was arts and crafts in the mid of industrial capitalism in advanced Europe. Morris’s concern referred about chiefly the craftsmen’s labour conditions in the society of the times and beauty with joy of labour. In Morris’s theory, it is crucial how and in what conditions the realization of labour takes place, attaching special importance to the social conditions available to people. Due to the difference of respective historical conditions inquired, the contrast between these two theorists is quite remarkable, particularly in their methods applied respectively, nevertheless there were seemingly a number of points in common.

Over the past century, British economy had undergone a remarkable transformation from agricultural stage to industrial capitalism, proudly showing off the famous reputation of ‘the world’s factory’. Handicraft as industry was almost unilaterally doomed as a result of rapid expansion led by powerful capitalist business. In Japan, the industry as a whole was at the threshold of changes, besides the government-led strategic sectors. The socioeconomic significance of handicrafts and its implication should be examined one by one in proper way at the different stages of capitalist development and industrialism particularly between Britain and Japan and a better understanding of Mingei would be expected. 26

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26 Further discussion of this matter in close connection with Mingei will be posted until next time.
Euro-centrism versus Orientalism

Kikuchi’s ‘Oriental Orientalism’ occupies the pivotal position in her critical assessment of Yanagi’s Mingei theory.27

(1) Orientalism as Japanese cultural nationalism 28:
Mingei theory as an ‘Oriental’ theory for what is deemed to be its greatest merit — ‘traditional authenticity’. The intention of this article is firstly the essential ‘Orientalness’ of Mingei theory by showing its ‘hybrid’ nature and the process of hybridization involved in the course of its formation; and secondly to show the strategic significance of ‘hybridity’ in the context of Japanese cultural nationalism in the dichotomic framework of Orient and Occident.

(2) to demystify the ‘Orientalness’ of Mingei 29:
It is hoped that this article will serve to demystify the essential ‘Orientalness’ of Mingei theory by showing the complex ‘hybrid’ aspect of Japanese modern art at the boundaries of Occident and Orient. It was attained through the appropriation of Occidental ideas, followed by the validation of Oriental ideas by Occidental ones and finally a stage of hybridization. As he had done with philosophy and religion, Yanagi re-evaluated Oriental art with his acquired Occidental-influenced ‘new eyes’ and created a hybrid idea of Occidental and Oriental religious art. The successful connection was made in his later development of Mingei theory, in which he creatively adopted terms culturally compatible both in Occident and Orient, such as unknown (mumei), no-thought (mushin), non-duality (funi) and Other Power (tariki), to describe divine supreme beauty. As original ideas were built up in this process of hybridization, he described a sense of Oriental cultural identity in Oriental spiritualism validated by the Occident.

(3) Tōyō as Japanocentric view 30:
Under the Japanese Imperialism from 1895 until 1945 it was transformed into a ‘Japanocentric’ view cast on ‘primitive’ others, in the research on the people in colonies. ...The idea of tōyō was increasingly politicized and inevitably led to the construction of a Japanese ethnic identity, thence to ultra-nationalism, imperialism and also to the justification of colonization. Through his hybridizing of Occidental and Oriental ideas, he highlighted the ‘innate and original’ Japaneseness and the ethnic cultural identity in Japanese Buddhist art. Yanagi’s predecessors, such as Okakura Tenshin and Itō Chuya, constructed tōyō to create a theory of Japanese ethnic identity in art and architecture which would reveal a distinctive ‘Japaneseness’ and ‘Japanese style’. Yanagi also constructed his own tōyō and, using Oriental disciplines, created narratives of essential Japaneseness and Orientalness. This is particularly evident in his theories on the crafts of Japan’s peripheries and colonies. Wakon yōsai (Japanese mind with western knowledge) was a slogan which symbolized the government’s idea that modernization and pure Japanese thought could be easily synthesized.

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Hybrid theory as defence strategy:

Not only the concepts of 'nation', 'nationality', 'culture' and 'ethnic race' borrowed, but the Japanese also had to borrow Occidental ideas and 'scientific' disciplines embedded in Western historiography to evolve their own national identity. This article will put forward the hypothesis that Occidental discipline has been translated and deeply integrated into modern Japan, producing a hybrid theory as a defence strategy. Although Mingei theory is clearly a Modernist theory, it was deemed, particularly in the Occident, to be an 'authentic and traditional' Oriental theory. This was partly due to Yanagi himself who created the impression of Orientalism by using Buddhist rhetoric. In Britain, this belief was reinforced through the "Oriental aesthetic" polemicized by Bernard Leach, father of "studio pottery".

General idea of Orientalism is meant by oriental character or style and/or an oriental trait or idiom. It is primarily a term used for the imitation or depiction of aspects of Eastern cultures in the West by writers, designers and artists. But due to the considerable change in the term's usage, it turned eventually out to be the term to describe a pervasive Western tradition, both academic and artistic, of prejudiced outsider interpretations of the East, shaped by the attitudes of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Orient is used to indicate the part of the earth of a given point, specifically the countries east of the Mediterranean, especially those of Eastern Asia. Furthermore, Oriental refers to belonging to, occurring in, or characteristic of, the countries east of the Mediterranean, especially, those of Eastern Asia, and also implies various features of or pertaining to the Orient, its affairs, or civilization etc. But because of the confusing scope (historical and geographic) of Oriental Studies in the West changing from time to time, the Oriental regions used to extend from the Middle East to sub-continental India to Indo-China. The term, Oriental, thus, refers often to goods and culture from the parts of East Asia traditionally occupied by East Asians and most Central Asians and Southeast Asians racially categorized as "Mongoloid". The term might be, occasionally, considered derogatory because of historical discrimination against Chinese and Japanese.

In the context of so-called Orientalism, the material basis of imperialist exploitation and exercise of power should not be made light of as the essential matter of the connection of its socioeconomic aspects.

This is evident, according to Said, in the creating of a consensus about the 'other', the Oriental nations, that encompassed not only the Western world but also the elites of the those nations, Western education, literature, and art became dominant because of the economic and political dominance of the imperialist countries. Power, or the lack thereof, therefore, lies at the heart of the Orientalist discourse and allows the stabilization of the consensus that is critical to the maintenance of dominance. (Orientalism)

In other words, it is very important to take into consideration that Orientalism is also underpinned

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by the deep-rooted custom of ‘Euro-centrism’. So-called *Euro-centrism* is the practice of viewing the world from a European perspective and with an implied belief, either consciously or subconsciously, in the preeminence of European culture.

The effects of these assumptions of European superiority increased during the period of European imperialism. ... Many European writers of this time construed the history of Europe as paradigmatic for the rest of the world. Other cultures were identified as having reached a stage through which Europe itself had already passed — primitive hunter-gatherer; farming; early civilisation; feudalism; and modern liberal-capitalism. (Euro-centrism).\(^{33}\)

For example, *the Brockhaus Enzyklopädie* of 1854 still has an ostensibly Euro-centric approach, claiming that Europe “due to its geographical situation and its cultural and political significance is clearly the most important of the five continents, over which it has gained a most influential government both in material and even more so in cultural aspects.”\(^{34}\)

**Conclusion**

Figuratively speaking, articles of handicrafts may be likened to foodstuffs for such kinds of professionals as agronomist, chef, dietician and gourmet, for example. Agronomist will pay much interest into cultivation, improvement of species and soil etc. Chef will pay much attention to cookery and food as such, and dietician will strongly be attracted by what kind of food people should eat to keep healthy. On the other hand, gourmet will want to know a lot about food and wines of high quality to enjoy choosing, eating and drinking. The purposes or viewpoints may differ widely in a number of lines, but nobody can be indifferent to the kind and quality of foodstuffs and the substance. Even though the points of interest for each expert may differ from person to person according to their metier, they must share much common things among the various kinds of expertise accordingly. Hybrid means literally something that is the product of mixing two or more different things. The concept indicates some newly created derivative of two species. A mule is, for example, a hybrid between a horse and a donkey and it comes into its own. Hybrid should be discriminated against mere adoption of implication from other expertise.

The aesthetic theory of crafts developed by Yanagi had close resemblance to that of Morris, but is it true enough, in the above mentioned sense, to say that Yanagi’s theory is nothing but a hybrid between ‘Occidental’ and ‘Orientalism’? It is reported that Yanagi strongly alleged himself the originality of *Mingei* theory, but he has been, as already introduced, criticized for being a follower of Morris without being noticed.

Although both the figures had, in common, played important roles respectively in the history of propagation and importance concerning arts and handicrafts industry, William Morris, in a figurative expression, seems to be much similar to dietician, chef, and agronomist as well, but Muneyoshi Yanagi seems to be chiefly active as gourmet and as foodstuff collector or a person with *getemono* in his word (bizarre tastes in food). The point in question, i.e. Yanagi’s originality against Morris in relation to the aesthetic theory concerning arts and crafts, is still open to further consideration from a critical

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\(^{33}\) Retrieved from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

\(^{34}\) Do.
viewpoint, especially with careful attention to socioeconomic conditions of the time.

From methodological viewpoints, furthermore, the setup of concepts and theories in each line must be quite different and independent each other rather than simple ‘hybridization’. It may occasionally happen that, simply due to things apparently being overlapping because their apparent interests are directed to the foodstuffs as such, some kind of combination or borrowing of ideas between different kinds of expertise, i.e. ‘hybrid’ or ‘Oriental Orientalism’ in the sense of Kikuchi, can be sometimes observed in and around the related professions.

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