

Folk Crafts or *Mingei* in the 20th and 21st Centuries

Haruhiko Fujita
Osaka University

Abstract

'Folk Crafts (*Mingei*)' was a new concept of beauty coined by Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889-1961), Kawai Kanjiro (1890-1966), and Hamada Shoji (1894-1978) in December 1925. The Japan Folk Crafts Museum Establishment Prospectus was published in April 1926 including Tomimoto Kenkichi (1886-1963). In 1928, the Folk Crafts Museum (*Mingei-kan*) was opened in Ueno, Tokyo. In 1936, the Japan Folk Crafts Museum (*Nihon Mingei-kan*) was opened in Komaba, Tokyo.

Following the Japan Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo, the Kurashiki Folk Crafts Museum in Okayama Prefecture opened in 1948 after World War II. The first director of the Kurashiki Folk Crafts Museum was Tonomura Kichinosuke (1898-1993). After opening the Kurashiki Folk Crafts Museum, crafts museums were opened in the nearby Ohara Museum of Art in the 1960s and 1970s. Kurashiki City in Okayama Prefecture is an important city for both modern art and traditional folk crafts. In 1961, Serizawa Keisuke (1895-1984) drew a concept map for the Ohara Museum of Crafts Gallery.

The China Academy of Art (CAA) is a provincial public fine arts college located in Hangzhou City, Zhejiang, along with the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. The CAA is an important art academy in China. The Bauhaus exhibition hall of the China Academy of Art is the largest museum in Asia. Japanese architect Kuma Kengo (1954-) designed and opened the Crafts Museum of the China Academy of Art in 2015.

Keywords: *Art; Craft; Folk Crafts; Design; Academy of Art; Architecture*

INTRODUCTION

Folk Crafts (*Mingei*), a term used in Japan in 1925-26, is somewhat similar to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, which opened in London, England in 1888. However, the 16th Arts and Crafts Exhibition included a mass production section from 1935 onwards. The Japan Folk Crafts Museum, which was held in 1936, emphasized single-produced crafts and traditional folk crafts, and the various folk craft museums that opened in various parts of Japan after World War II from 1948 also valued original productions.

Folk Crafts (*Mingei*) is an abbreviation for 'people's crafts,' and the people and crafts were the basis of folk crafts. The people are the many ordinary people who make up the nation and society. The masses and common people are ordinary people without any special status or property. The people are also ordinary people, and they value the works of many people.

Folk Crafts (*Mingei*), which started in 1925, is basically the same even in the 2020s, almost a hundred years later, but there are some differences. The International Arts and Crafts exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2005 also focused on Japanese Folk Crafts (1).

The Japan Folk Crafts Museum Establishment Prospectus, 1926

Kawai Kanjiro (河井寛次郎 1890-1966) and Hamada Shoji (濱田庄司 1894-1978) were ceramic artists who graduated from the Ceramics Department of the Tokyo Higher Technical School. Tomimoto Kenkichi (富本憲吉 1886-1963) entered the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and majored in architecture and interior decoration (2).

Tomimoto went to London to study at his own expense in November 1908. Tomimoto studied stained glass in the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London in 1909. Tomimoto returned to Japan in 1910 and later became a ceramic artist as well (3).

In April 1926, Yanagi Muneyoshi (柳宗悦 1889-1961), Kawai Kanjiro, and Hamada Shoji, including Tomimoto Kenkichi, published the Japan Folk Crafts Museum Establishment Prospectus (4) (Fig 1).

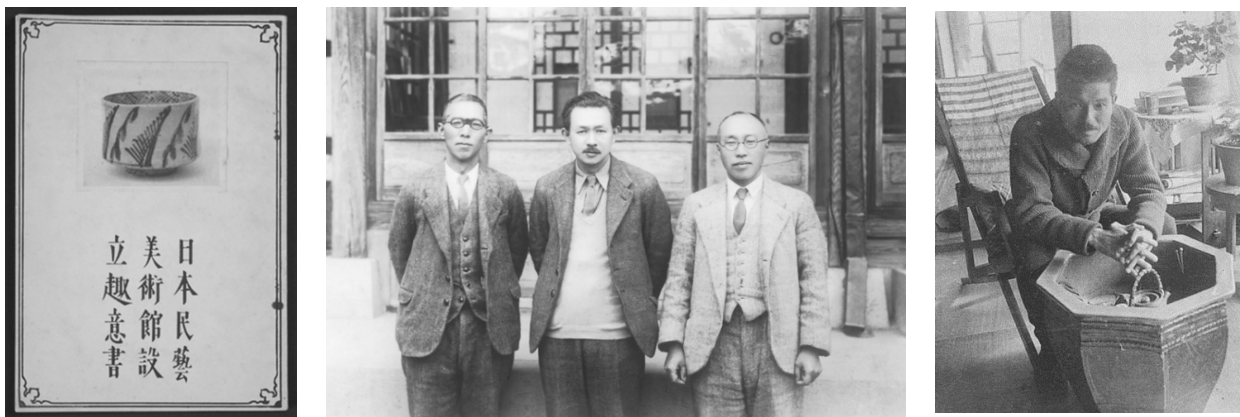


Figure 1: The Japan Folk Crafts Museum Establishment Prospectus, 1926

Kawai Kanjiro, Yanagi Muneyoshi, Hamada Shoji, Tomimoto Kenkichi

The Folk Crafts Museum in the Tairei Memorial Domestic Products Promotion, 1928

The Tairei Memorial Domestic Products Promotion Tokyo Exhibition was set up in Ueno Park. The Folk Craft Museum, which was set up by Yanagi Muneyoshi, Takabayashi Hyoe (高林兵衛 1892-1950) and others, was a very traditional building (Fig 2), but the other buildings were of modern architecture. Many modern buildings were built in Ueno (5).

Kurahashi Tojirou (倉橋藤治郎 1887-1946), who served as secretary-general of the Tairei Memorial Domestic Products Promotion Tokyo Exhibition and commissioned the exhibition at the Folk Crafts Museum. Kurahashi also graduated from the Ceramics Department of the Osaka Higher Technical School.

In 1931, Takabayashi and Yanagi opened the Japanese Folk Crafts Art Museum at Takabayashi's home in Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture, but it was closed after only two years.



Figure 2: The Folk Crafts Museum, 1928

The Japan Folk Crafts Museum, 1936

Yanagi Muneyoshi moved to Kyoto after the Great Kanto Earthquake in September 1923, and moved again to Tokyo, Meguro Komaba in January 1935. In March, Yanagi received an offer from businessman Ohara Magosaburo (大原孫三郎 1880-1943) for financial assistance in opening an art museum, and in October 1936, Yanagi opened the museum next to his residence in Komaba, Tokyo. The first Japan Folk Crafts Museum (日本民藝館) was opened (Fig 3).

The important Japan Folk Crafts Museum opened in Komaba, Tokyo in 1936 as Japanese wooden buildings. Yanagi Muneyoshi House was designed by Yanagi himself. He purchased a Nagayamon Gate along the Nikko Highway in Tochigi Prefecture (6). The Japan Folk Crafts Museum was most necessary for the design of the main building because it is a wooden museum.

The Japan Folk Crafts Museum is important, but it was temporarily closed in March 1945, when Japan was about to lose the war. They reunited in December 1945 after the war, but closed again in January 1947. However, it was officially reopened in March 1947.



Figure 3: The Japan Folk Crafts Museum, 1936

After World War II, folk crafts museums opened one after another in various parts of Japan

After the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, the Kurashiki Museum of Folk Crafts (倉敷民藝館) was opened in 1948. The first director was Tonomura Kichinosuke (外村吉之介 1898-1993). After opening the Kurashiki Folk Crafts Museum, crafts museums were opened in the nearby Ohara Museum of Art in the 1960s and 1970s. Kurashiki City in Okayama Prefecture is an important city for both modern art and traditional folk crafts (Fig 4).

Following the Kurashiki Folk Crafts Museum in Okayama Prefecture, a folk crafts museum was opened in the prefectural capital of Tottori Prefecture in December of the following year, 1949. It was established as the Tottori Folk Crafts Museum (鳥取民藝館) by Yoshida Shoya (吉田璋也 1898-1972), a doctor and folk arts activist, and was renamed the Tottori Folk Crafts Museum (鳥取民藝美術館) the following year (Fig 4). However, the English names are the same.

The Matsumoto Folk Craft Museum (Nagano) opened in 1962. The Kumamoto International Folk Craft Museum and the Toyama Folk Craft Museum (Municipal Folkcraft Village) opened in 1965. After that, folk craft museums and craft museums were opened in various parts of Japan, including Gifu, Ehime, Hyogo, Osaka, Kyoto, Shimane, Tochigi, Shizuoka, Tokyo, Aichi, Yamagata, Miyagi prefectures.



Figure 4: Kurashiki Museum of Folk Crafts, 1948(left) / Tottori Folk Crafts Museum, 1949

Plan for Craft Art Gallery of Ohara Museum of Art, 1961~1970

In 1961, Serizawa Keisuke (芹沢銈介 1895-1984) drew a concept map for the Craft Art Gallery of Ohara Museum of Art (大原美術館工芸館). Serizawa graduated from the Industrial Design Department of the Tokyo Higher Technical School. The above diagram is the original plan of the Ohara Museum of Art, and the Serizawa Museum was in the back right. The drawing below is Serizawa's proposal, and the Serizawa Museum is placed on the right side of the front as it is today.

In 1961, Serizawa established a pottery museum that permanently displayed works by Tomimoto Kenkichi, Bernard Leach (1887-1979), Kawai Kanjiro, and Hamada Shoji. In 1963, the Munakata Shiko (棟方志功 1903-1975) Print Gallery and the Serizawa Keisuke Dyeing Gallery in the Craft Art Gallery of Ohara Museum of Art were also completed. In 1970, the third phase of the Oriental Art Gallery of Ohara Museum of Art was completed, with Serizawa in charge. (Fig 5)



Figure 5: Craft Art Gallery of Ohara Museum of Art, 1961, 1963, 1970.

Crafts Museum of the China Academy of Art, 2015

The China Academy of Art (中国美术学院 CAA) in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, along with the Central Academy of Fine Arts (中央美术学院 CAFA) in Beijing, is an important art academy in China (7). The Bauhaus Exhibition Hall of the China Academy of Art is the largest in Asia or the world's largest hall outside of Germany.

Japanese architect Kuma Kengo (隈研吾 1954-) designed and opened Crafts Museum of the China Academy of Art (國美民藝博物館) in 2015 (Fig 6). Kuma Kengo's roof tiles and glass tiles are close to folk art (8). Kuma previously worked on postmodern architecture such as the M2 Building in Tokyo, but since then he has also focused on traditional Japanese and architecture appropriate for all parts of the world. Kuma designed and constructed large buildings around the world. He emphasizes properties and land in various places such as China, France, and British (Scotland) in his designs.



Figure 6: Crafts Museum of the China Academy of Art (國美民藝博物館), 2015, Kuma Kengo.

Kuma Kengo's roof tiles and glass tiles are similar to the folk crafts of the China Academy of Art (Fig 7). Also in 2015, the School of Arts and Crafts or Handicraft Academy was opened in the China Academy of Art (Fig 8). The Crafts Museum may have recently become a simple Art Museum, but it attaches great importance to arts and crafts. Kuma Kengo's tiles used for the roof and glass are close to *Mingei*. The Crafts Museum is the largest museum of the China Academy of

Art, so it recently became the Museum of the China Academy of Art. However, this Museum values folk crafts from China and East Asia, including Japan (9).



Figure 7: The China Academy of Art, Crafts Museum, 2015, Kuma Kengo.

Figure 8: The China Academy of Art, School of Arts and Crafts (手工艺术学院), 2015

Conclusion

Folk crafts and folk crafts museums in the 20th and 21st centuries are interesting. Yanagi Muneyoshi, Kawai Kanjiro, and Hamada Shoji, who started folk crafts, were involved not only in ceramics, metalwork, and wood, but also in the production of buildings such as folk crafts museums. Serizawa Keisuke was more of a dyer than a potter, but he showed an interest in building craft museums and actually cooperated in the construction of many craft museums. Kuma Kengo established the Folk Crafts Museum at the China Academy of Fine Arts in 2015, and the building itself has become a museum of folk arts and crafts. Kuma Kengo is an architect who has constructed buildings all over the world, and also places importance on the architecture and landscapes of each country. The International Arts and Crafts exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2005 also focused on Japanese Folk Crafts.

Notes

1. Karen Livingstone and Linda Parry, ed., *International Arts and Crafts* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2005), 296-337.
2. Soetsu Yanagi with the cooperation of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, *SOETSU YANAGI: Selected Essays on Japanese Folk Crafts*, trans. Michael Brase (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2017), 75-86.
3. *Kenkichi Tomimoto* (Tokyo: The Asahi Shimbun Company, 1986), 171-197.
4. Tanya Harrod, *The CRAFTS in BRITAIN in the 20th Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 180-192.
5. *100 Years of Mingei: The Folk Crafts Movement* (Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 2021), 76-77.

6. *100 Years of Mingei: The Folk Crafts Movement*, 114-115.
7. Christine Tsui, “China and Design Education since 1949” in *Encyclopedia of East Asian Design*, ed. Haruhiko Fujita and Christine Guth (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 119-122.
8. Kengo Kuma and Kenneth Frampton, *KENGO KUMA: Complete Works* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 330-335.
9. Haruhiko Fujita, *The Century of MINGEI: Arts, Crafts, and Architecture of the World* (Kyoto, Tokyo: Tankosha), 藤田治彦『民藝の世紀』, 淡交社, 2024.

Author Biography

Haruhiko Fujita

Dr. Haruhiko Fujita is a Professor Emeritus at Osaka University. He studied with Reyner Banham (1922-1988) at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1979 and Vincent Scully (1920-2017) at Yale University in 1980. Around 2010, he served as deputy director of a design school held every summer at the University of Bologna in Italy. He is currently mainly studying the history of art and architecture education. He and Christine Guth edited and published the *Encyclopedia of East Asian Design* from Bloomsbury Visual Arts in 2020. He has held the “Arts & Crafts and Design: From William Morris to Frank Lloyd Wright” exhibition at various museums in Japan, and has also held many commemorative lectures.