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| Mingei [民芸] |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Developed in Japan in the mid-1920s, ‘Mingei’ denotes a concept that encompasses objects, aesthetics, and philosophy. Developed by three individuals — religious philosopher and aesthete Yanagi Muneyoshi (Sōetsu 柳宗悦, 1889-1961), and potters Hamada Shōji (浜田庄司, 1894-1978) and Kawai Kanjirō (河井寛次郎, 1890-1966) — Mingei recognises the beauty in humble folk crafted objects sold at markets. The three founding members conceived the term *minshū-teki kōgei* (craft with characteristics of people), eventually shortening it to Mingei. Typical Mingei objects were handcrafted wares from pre-modern eras produced in large quantities for everyday use. Yanagi claimed that their beauty — the simplicity, robustness, and honesty of the material — was ‘born, not made.’ As such, one could recognise the beauty of said objects through ‘direct perception’ or ‘seeing before knowing.’ A wide range of Japanese and non-Japanese ideas informed Mingei theory, including those of John Ruskin, William Morris, William Blake, Walt Whitman, Émile Mâle, and the works of British potter Bernard Leach (1887-1979). While Mingei began as a sense of appreciation, it developed into an artistic movement through research and propagation in the magazine *Kōgei* (*Craft* [1931-1951]). |
| Developed in Japan in the mid-1920s, ‘Mingei’ denotes a concept that encompasses objects, aesthetics, and philosophy. Developed by three individuals — religious philosopher and aesthete Yanagi Muneyoshi (Sōetsu 柳宗悦, 1889-1961), and potters Hamada Shōji (浜田庄司, 1894-1978) and Kawai Kanjirō (河井寛次郎, 1890-1966) — Mingei recognises the beauty in humble folk crafted objects sold at markets. The three founding members conceived the term *minshū-teki kōgei* (craft with characteristics of people), eventually shortening it to Mingei. Typical Mingei objects were handcrafted wares from pre-modern eras produced in large quantities for everyday use. Yanagi claimed that their beauty — the simplicity, robustness, and honesty of the material — was ‘born, not made.’ As such, one could recognise the beauty of said objects through ‘direct perception’ or ‘seeing before knowing.’ A wide range of Japanese and non-Japanese ideas informed Mingei theory, including those of John Ruskin, William Morris, William Blake, Walt Whitman, Émile Mâle, and the works of British potter Bernard Leach (1887-1979). While Mingei began as a sense of appreciation, it developed into an artistic movement through research and propagation in the magazine *Kōgei* (*Craft* [1931-1951]).  Founded in 1934, The Japan Folk Crafts Association (*Nippon Mingei Kyōkai*) established a nationwide network for Mingei, and some regional leaders began reviving declining local crafting practices through support, education, and promotion as ‘New Mingei.’ In 1936 Yanagi built a museum in Tokyo to house his collection and to demonstrate the beauty of Mingei.  Initially collected for beauty and later defined in terms of origins, Mingei was rife with contradictions: not all objects claiming to be Mingei were made for common people; the movement promoted handicrafts, which were increasingly costly in the industrialised world; while few New Mingei works achieved the aesthetic standard of Yanagi’s collection. Additionally, Mingei emerged at the time when crafts were taken up in Japan as a means of creative expression, and Yanagi’s claim that no work created consciously by an artist could surpass the beauty of Mingei alienated some artists and critics, especially those inspired by his ideas. Yanagi’s solution to this problem was his ‘Buddhist aesthetic,’ launched in 1948, in which he discussed two approaches to beauty — ‘self-power’ and ‘other-power’ — suggesting that in Buddha’s realm the distinction between beauty and ugliness ceases to exist.  Bernard Leach introduced the idea of Mingei in English in *A Potter’s Book* (1940). In the Western world where the memory of Arts and Crafts ethics lingered, Mingei provided a new and highly developed philosophy of creative life and aesthetic standard for post-World War II studio craftspeople, which spread in tandem with Zen teachings of spiritual freedom.  Image: cutter.jpg  Figure 1 Wick cutter  Kyoto, 20th century  Brass; 30.5 x 9.4cm  The Japan Folk Crafts Museum  Source: <http://www.mingeikan.or.jp/english/> |
| Further reading:  (Mingeikan)  (Brandt)  (Kikuchi)  (Nakami)  (Yanagi) |