

# The Korean Crafts Collection of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum and its Founder, Yanagi Muneyoshi

## Introduction

In this article, I look at the relationship between Korea and Yanagi Muneyoshi 柳宗悦 (1889–1961, Figure 1), one of the representative thinkers of modern Japan and the founder of the folk crafts movement in Japan, and introduce the 1,600 items of crafts related to Korea among the collection of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, which was founded by Yanagi in 1936 (Figure 2).

Yanagi became fascinated with Korean art and culture starting from his 20s. He praised its beauty in numerous articles and devoted himself to introducing and preserving the unique culture of the Korean people. With a discerning eye and superb taste, he completed the collection of Korean crafts and held exhibitions in the museum to let the world see and appreciate the true value of Korean crafts.



**Figure 1.** Yanagi Muneyoshi at the Japan Folk Crafts Museum (1954)

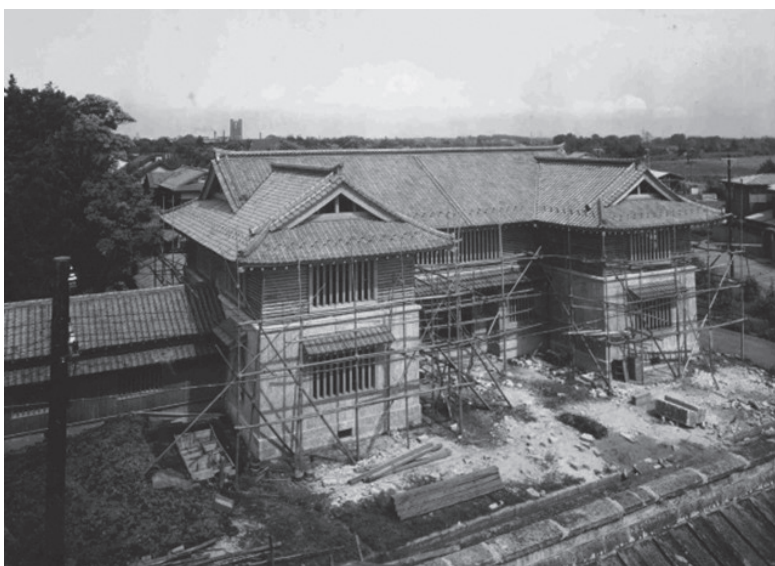


Figure 2. The Japan Folk Crafts Museum being Built (1936)

The museum's Korean crafts collection, which mainly consists of items from the Joseon dynasty, boasts an unrivaled number and quality within Japan. It is the product of Yanagi's own insight and legwork to gather them across the Korean peninsula from the 1910s to the 1930s.

The figures who helped his activities were his best friends the Asakawa brothers, Asakawa Noritaka 浅川伯教<sup>1</sup> and Asakawa Takumi 浅川巧.<sup>2</sup> Noritaka, who was the older brother, brought Yanagi together with the ceramics of Joseon, while the younger brother, Takumi, played the role of connecting Yanagi with many people in Korea. The three shared the sense of genuine respect for the culture and people of Japan's neighboring country. If it were not for the Asakawa brothers, Yanagi would not have been able to carry out his work in Korea, let

alone fulfill his dream of establishing the Japan Folk Crafts Museum.

How did Yanagi meet with the Asakawa brothers, and how did this relationship deepen his ties with Korea? This article reflects upon Yanagi's life to find out.

Incidentally, this year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> year since the Joseon Folk Art Museum, which forms the roots of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, was established,<sup>3</sup> and the following year is the 60<sup>th</sup> year since the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and Korea. It is thus quite meaningful for me to have a chance to introduce Yanagi Muneyoshi at such a time, and I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Academy of Korean Studies for giving me this opportunity. I also earnestly hope that the publication of this journal will further encourage the people of Japan and Korea to extend an understanding stance towards one another.

In writing this article, I use the terms "Korea" to refer to South Korea after 1945 and "Joseon" to refer to the Korean peninsula before 1945 in accordance with the terms used in the source material. Likewise, I use the term "Keijō" to refer to Seoul between 1910 and 1945. Finally, I use the terms "Joseon dynasty" and "Yi dynasty" interchangeably depending on the term used in the source material.

## Yanagi Muneyoshi and the Era of *Shirakaba*

Yanagi Muneyoshi was born on March 21, 1889, in present-day Minato, Tokyo. Although Muneyoshi is the correct reading of his name, the kanji are often mistakenly read as Sōetsu. His father, Yanagi Murayoshi 柳樽悦, had contributed to the Meiji state by laying the groundwork for the modern navy of Japan and was also a renowned mathematician.

The year 1889, in which Yanagi Muneyoshi was born, was also the year when the Constitution of the Empire of Japan was proclaimed. After setting the modern state system into place, Japan, fought the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 and proceeded to enter the ranks of powerful imperialistic nations such as Europe and the United States. Yanagi was

1 Asakawa Noritaka 浅川伯教 (1884–1964) went to Korea in 1913 and worked as an elementary schoolteacher while dreaming of becoming a sculptor. He devoted his life to studying the history of Korean ceramics. His investigations of the hundreds of kiln sites across the Korean peninsula form the foundation of research in Korean ceramic history today.

2 Asakawa Takumi 浅川巧 (1890–1931). Born in Yamanashi Prefecture, he followed the footsteps of his older brother, Noritaka, and went to Korea in 1914. While serving at the Forestry Experiment Station of the Government-General, he conducted research on Korean crafts together with his older brother and contributed to Yanagi's achievements in Korea. His life and accomplishments are described in detail in Takasaki 1996, 2009.

3 The Joseon Folk Art Museum closed in 1945.

born and grew up during this tumultuous period, which played a large role in forming in thoughts.

Yanagi was distinct from his fellow young people during then, however, in the way he distanced himself from the madness of the times and respected the values of the individual over those of the state, the militaristic designs of which he was skeptical.

It was the magazine *Shirakaba* (*White Birch*) that provided the space for Yanagi to form such a temperament and way of thought (Figure 3). The magazine, which was first published in 1910, was a literary magazine founded by graduates of the Peers School (Gakushūin) such as Mushanokōji Saneatsu 武者小路実篤 and Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉. Influenced by Christianity and Tolstoy's literature, the magazine believed in living in a way that remained faithful to oneself and developed one's individuality. It is without doubt that the spirit of these figures influenced Yanagi considerably.

Although Yanagi was the youngest member of this literary coterie, he actively participated in the magazine as one of its central figures. He was particularly respected when it came to the area of art and displayed his skills



Figure 3. The Cover of the First Issue of *Shirakaba* 白樺

in the editing of artwork as well in the planning and arrangement of the exhibitions held by *Shirakaba*.

The magazine not only introduced the literary works of the members but also devoted many pages to introducing Western modern art. It was *Shirakaba* that introduced the works of the now well-known artists such as Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Paul Cézanne, and Vincent Willem van Gogh as well as the sculptor Auguste Rodin in Japan early on.

It is worth noting the exchange with Rodin, who is called the Father of Modern Sculpture. The members of *Shirakaba*, who greatly admired Rodin's work, corresponded with Rodin through letters they wrote in person and published a special issue on him. Rodin was touched by their enthusiasm and sent three of his works to Japan as a gift. One of them is "Madam Rodin," which is visible in the photograph of Yanagi in his study at home (Figure 4).

Following this, the members of *Shirakaba* including Yanagi came up with the plan in 1917 to establish the Shirakaba Art Museum in order to make these works they had received from Rodin open to the public. This was during a time when there were no art museums displaying Western art. Although this plan



Figure 4. 24-year-old Yanagi Muneyoshi in his Study at Home (1913)

Note: The sculpture on the table shows "Madam Rodin," and the framed painting on the wall is a copy of Gogh's "Cypress."

was unfortunately unrealized, their dreams and activities left a large trace in the history of museums in Japan.

### Encounter with the Ceramics of Joseon, and Travel to the Korean Peninsula

After graduating from Tokyo Imperial University in 1913, Yanagi Muneyoshi married the singer Nakajima Kaneko 中島兼子 the following year and moved to Abiko, Chiba Prefecture, where he lived for seven years. It was during his time here when he encountered the important people and objects that would prove irreplaceable in his life.

In 1914, Asakawa Noritaka, a subscriber of the magazine *Shirakaba* who dreamt of becoming a sculptor, visited from Keijō to see the sculptures by Rodin. The present he brought with him during this visit was the white porcelain jar dating from the Joseon dynasty (Figure 5). Even Yanagi himself would not have imaged that this object would so greatly influence his life after that.



**Figure 5.** Faceted Jar with Autumn Flower Design in Underglaze Cobalt Blue 青花草花文面取瓶, from the earlier half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the Joseon dynasty), a gift from Asakawa Noritaka  
Note: This is the lower piece of the originally gourd-shaped bottle.

Yanagi (1981a, 334) writes about how moved he was during this encounter with the object: “I had not even dreamed, not even until the day before, that I would be able to read the warmth, nobility, and magnificence of humans from that cold earthenware.”<sup>4</sup> He was astonished at the mystery of beauty in which an everyday item created by an ordinary craftsman could retain beauty comparable to a work of art made by an extraordinarily talented artist. This incident compelled Yanagi to largely change the standards of beauty he had originally harbored until then.

Later in life, Yanagi (1981i, 202) recalled that “it is deeply moving to think how developing a liking for an artifact of Joseon in this way became an incident that decided many directions of my life.” Like his words, subsequent events took place as if led by his encounter with this ceramic of Joseon. In addition to his unique aesthetics, which argued that remarkable beauty lied in the utensils of everyday life, Yanagi’s unique theory of culture, which argued that daily tools were the mirror that reflected the thoughts and lives of people, and the warm gaze, which he directed towards the marginal areas and people out of the respect for the diversity of culture they held, stemmed from the way the artifact of Joseon deeply moved him.

The first time Yanagi set out to travel to Joseon was in August 1916. After boarding the ferry at Shimonoseki and upon his arrival at Busan, where he was met by Noritaka, he immediately toured the antique shops, discovered, and bought “Jar with cloud and bamboo design in underglaze iron brown” (Figure 6). This marked the beginning of his collection of the ceramics of Joseon. The evaluation of the ceramics from the Joseon dynasty at that time, however, was low not only among the Japanese but even among Koreans as well. Yanagi (1981i, 200) recalled that “back then, there were not enough people who looked back at and reflected on times such as the Yi dynasty, and I was often ridiculed for buying worthless things.”

After traveling to Jinju, Haeinsa Temple, and Gyeongju, the capital of Silla where Bulguksa Temple and Seokguram Grotto were, Yanagi headed to Keijō, where he stayed for around two weeks at Asakawa Takumi’s house near

<sup>4</sup> This article cites mainly from *Yanagi Muneyoshi zenshū* (*The Complete Works of Yanagi Muneyoshi*). The characters take the new character form in principle, and the syllabary spelling has been converted to the modern usage. While certain terms in the text may seem inappropriate from today’s perspective, they have been unchanged in consideration of their historicity.



**Figure 6.** Jar with Cloud and Bamboo Design in Underglaze Iron Brown 鉄砂雲竹文壺, earlier half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century during the Joseon dynasty, 24.7 cm x 22.5 cm

Seodaemun. Takumi was a person who enjoyed his life among Koreans and used Korean tableware in his everyday life.

This lifestyle left a strong impression on Yanagi at the same time it delighted him. Together with the Asakawa brothers, Yanagi visited antique shops virtually every day and bought up items such as ceramics and woodwork that had been used among ordinary people. Although Yanagi and Takumi became close friends, sadly Takumi died at the young age of 41.

Starting from this first visit to Korea in 1916, Yanagi traveled around the Korean peninsula from time to time and continued to investigate and collect ceramics and various kinds of woodwork. The number of times he visited the country until his last visit in 1940 amount to 21, which, considering the conditions of travel and transportation back then, shows just how fond he was of Joseon.

### As a Friend of Joseon

In 1919, three years after Yanagi Muneyoshi traveled to the Korean peninsula for the first time, the March First Independence Movement took place in

opposition to Japanese colonial rule. Although voices shouting for independence and liberation of the country shook the entire Korean peninsula, the Japanese police and military proceeded to suppress them.

Pained by the event, Yanagi wrote a manuscript titled “Thinking of Koreans,”<sup>5</sup> which was published in the *Yomiuri shinbun* from May 20 to May 24. An excerpt from this manuscript writes, “In my view, what connects countries and brings people together is not science but art, not politics but religion, and not wisdom but emotion. Only by religious or artistic understanding can we appreciate the human spirit from inside and elicit unlimited love through this experience. Japan has sent their soldiers and politicians to Joseon, aiming to rule the country. However, it is the religious leaders and artists who know the true meaning of friendship and peace” (Yanagi 1981d, 31).

Yanagi was 30 years old at that time. This article was the first time he wrote about Joseon. At that time, very few people spoke out critically about the oppression by the Japanese government. Most of the scholars, literary figures, and religious leaders stayed silent. Yanagi, however, as if resisting the flow of the times, expressed his respect and affection towards the people of Joseon and continued to release writings criticizing the acts committed by the Japanese government.

The article titled “A Letter to a Korean Friend,”<sup>6</sup> which Yanagi wrote in April the following year, is one of his writings in which he expressed his deep affection towards Korean culture. He wrote, “These days, I am almost completely preoccupied with the affairs of Joseon. I myself do not know why this has happened. Where can we find the adequate words to explain our emotions? When I think of how you must feel and your loneliness, tears secretly fill my eyes” (Yanagi 1981e, 33), and that “at least in the case that Japan is in the wrong, I, as a person who was born in Japan, hope to apologize to you on its behalf” (Yanagi 1981e, 35).

5 “Chōsenjin o omou” was translated into English and printed in *The Japan Advertiser* on August 13, 1919, and translated into Korean and printed in *DongA ilbo* on April 12, 1920.

6 “Chōsen no tomo ni okuru sho” [A Letter to a Korean Friend] was translated into Korean and serialized in *DongA ilbo* in April 1920 until it was ordered to be discontinued. In Japan, it was published in the magazine *Kaizō* in June 1920, but a large portion of it was censored and deleted. It was translated to English and printed in *The Japan Advertiser* in June 1920 under the title “Young Japan to Young Korea.”

Among his writings on Joseon, it is the article titled “For a Korean Architecture that Will Soon Be Lost”<sup>7</sup> that fully displayed its social impact. In it, Yanagi wrote about the beauty of Gwanghwamun Gate, the main gates to Gyeongbokgung Palace, which was at that time on the verge of being torn down due to the construction of the Japanese Government-General Building. He also expressed his sorrow of having to part with the structure as well as his opposition against the violence of the Government-General.

Although this article was featured in the September issue of the magazine *Kaizō* (*Reconstruction*) in 1922, parts that the government judged as inappropriate were censored. In August that same year, however, the Korean translation of the article was printed in *DongA ilbo* and caused large repercussions throughout the Korean society, eliciting sympathy among the people and leading to the formation of public opinion opposing the demolition of Gwanghwamun Gate. As a result, in 1927, the gate was deconstructed and moved<sup>8</sup> to the north side of Geonchunmun Gate, which stood at the east of Gyeongbokgung Palace, ultimately preventing it from being torn down.

O Gwanghwamun Gate, the long life you were destined to have is being cut short. How bitter and lonely you must feel. I shall cross the sea once again to see you while you are still intact. Wait for me. Before I do, though, I wish to leave behind this article. The people you know well who gave birth to you are being ordered to stay silent. I want to let you know while you are still standing that there is someone in this world who loves and cherishes you on their behalf. (Yanagi 1981h, 153)

The excerpt above particularly well expresses how Yanagi felt towards Gwanghwamun Gate. Ye Yonghae, who was the editorial writer and a member of the deliberation committee of cultural assets at *Hankook ilbo*, later said that Koreans during then had took in Yanagi’s article by replacing the word

“Gwanghwamun” with “Korean people.”

It was a dangerous act to express criticism towards the government during then. In fact, Yanagi’s wife, Kaneko, recalled that their house had been under surveillance by the Special Higher Police, who was in charge of controlling ideology, since Yanagi was acquainted with Korean students in Japan who were involved in the independence movement (Mizuno 1981). Yanagi (1981i, 201) himself also writes that “I was treated as a dangerous figure and followed by the police whenever I visited Joseon.” Kaneko, as a singer, also accompanied her husband whenever he went to Joseon and held musical recitals for Koreans from time to time to encourage them. The figures who helped Kaneko’s activities in Joseon were the members of the literary magazine *Pyeheo* (*The Ruins*),<sup>9</sup> Nam Gung-byeok and Yeong Sang-seop, who had grown close with Yanagi and Kaneko while they were studying abroad in Japan.



**Figure 7.** A Postcard from around 1925 that Shows Gwanghwamun Gate before Dismantled and Moved

Note: The Japanese Government-General Building of Joseon is visible behind the gate.

7 “Ushinawaren to suru ichi Chōsen kenchiku no tame ni” was translated into Korean and printed in *DongA ilbo* from August 24 to August 28, 1922.

8 Although Gwanghwamun Gate was dismantled and moved thanks to the efforts of Yanagi, it was once again lost due to a fire during the Korean War that began in 1950 (Figure 3). In 1968, it was reconstructed using reinforced concrete in front of Gyeongbokgung Palace during the Park Chung-hee regime. Finally, in 2010, under the Lee Myung-bak government, it was rebuilt at its original location by using traditional construction methods, and the Korean sign was replaced with a sign written in classical Chinese as it had originally been.

9 A literary magazine that was published in July 1920 in Joseon. The Korean society was filled with disappointment and despair over the failure of the March First Independence Movement when the magazine was first published. The name of the magazine, *Pyeheo* (*The Ruins*), contains the aspirations to overcome the devastated reality of Joseon under Japanese colonial rule and build a new Joseon.

## The Founding of the Joseon Folk Art Museum

Thus Yanagi Muneyoshi, upon discovering the beauty of Korea in the artifacts and architecture created by the Korean people, developed a deep sense of respect towards them and continued to be a friend of Korea in carrying out his activities. For him, this was a way of expressing the gratitude he felt towards the objects of Korea.

In late 1920, Yanagi and Asakawa Takumi together came up with the plan to build the Joseon Folk Art Museum in order to introduce the splendor and magnificence of Korean folk art. Yanagi (1981c, 80) writes, “In any sense, I would like to convey the beauty of Joseon to people in this museum. I wish to conjure the warm human spirit of this nation expressed in these items in front of their eyes. In addition, I hope this will serve as an event leading to the preservation and new revival of this now disappearing art.”

It is also worth noting Yanagi’s distinctive view in his decision regarding the museum’s location. This is evident in his words: “After much deliberation, I have decided to build the museum not in Tokyo but in Keijō. It is my opinion that that the works of Joseon, which particularly have an intimate relationship with the Korean people and the nature of Korea, should be placed among the Korean people forever. It is only natural to return what has been born in that land to that land” (Yanagi 1981c, 80).

Exhibitions were held in Tokyo and Keijō to prepare for the museum’s founding. In May 1921, the Ryūitsusō Gallery in Kanda, Tokyo, held the Joseon Folk Art Exhibition (Figure 8) for the first time in Japan. Over 200 pieces of ceramics, metalwork, folk paintings, woodwork, and stone crafts from the Joseon period that members of the *Shirakaba* coterie including Yanagi, the Asakawa brothers, and Shiga Naoya had collected were put on display.

In October 1922, the Exhibition of the Ceramics of the Yi Dynasty was held under the title of the First Exhibition of Joseon Folk Art at Korean Aristocrats Hall (Figure 9). This exhibition featured over 400 pieces of ceramics from the Joseon dynasty that had been collected by Yanagi, the Asakawa brothers, and their Korean acquaintances. The photograph of the exhibition hall shows *Jar with Grapes and Squirrels Design in Underglaze Cobalt Blue and Iron Brown*, (Figure 10), *Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design in Underglaze Iron Brown* (Figure 11), along with Yanagi at the center, and Asakawa Noritaka on the left end.

While continuing to make such preparations, Yanagi, together with the Asakawa brothers, devoted himself to collecting items for the museum. The collection of the museum consisted of over 2,000 pieces<sup>10</sup> of various craftwork from the Joseon dynasty including ceramics in underglaze cobalt blue (blue and white porcelain), underglaze iron brown, underglaze copper red, and white porcelain, woodwork such as small tray tables and furniture, metalwork, stone crafts, and paintings. The ceramics of the collection also included items collected by Tomita Gisaku 富田儀作, the entrepreneur who had based himself in Joseon and attempted to revive Goryeo ware.

Looking back at this time, Yanagi (1981i, 201) writes, “Because it was a project I was carrying out after examining the beauty of the items, I continued to increase the collection little by little without any hesitation. Since I was a young man with a college degree who had no source of income whatsoever, I did not expect to be able to collect expensive items. Thankfully, it was during a fortunate time when there were still sufficiently beautiful pieces available among cheap items as well.”

Yanagi (1981b, 622) also recalls Takumi’s enthusiasm: “Some items were extracted from the dark corners of antique shops after catching his eye. Other items were carried out on his back from houses of people living deep in the mountains and transported over long distances. Still other items were acquired after he paid money he needed for necessities. In essence, he was the one who gave birth to the collection.”

Yanagi’s long-cherished dream of opening the Joseon Folk Art Museum (Figure 12) was fulfilled in April 1924. Although it was not easy to gather funds and secure a building to serve as the museum, ultimately the Government-General allowed the use of Jipgyeongdang Hall within the palace grounds of Gyeongbokgung Palace as the space for the museum. In addition, the Government-General also ordered that the term “folk” be deleted from museum’s name, although Yanagi refused to comply. This was because he firmly believed that the understanding of the superior art of Joseon was connected to the understanding of the people who had given birth to it.

Around 100 pieces from the collection of the Joseon Folk Art Museum were transferred to the Japan Folk Crafts Museum later when the latter

10 While the official number of items in the collection of the Joseon Folk Art Museum is unclear, it is said to have reached around 2,000 pieces in October 1927 (*Keizō nippō*, October 10, 1927).



Figure 8. Yanagi Muneyoshi at the Joseon Folk Art Exhibition (1921)



Figure 10. Jar with Grapes and Squirrels Design in Underglaze Cobalt Blue and Iron Brown  
鉄砂青花葡萄栗鼠文壺, Joseon dynasty, early 18<sup>th</sup> century, 34.9 cm x 28.5 cm



Figure 11. Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design in Underglaze Iron Brown  
鉄砂雲龍文壺, Joseon dynasty, 17<sup>th</sup> century, 31.0 cm x 31.04 cm



Figure 9. Yanagi Muneyoshi (center) and Asakawa Noritaka (left end) at the Exhibition of the Ceramics of the Yi Dynasty (Seoul, 1922)



Figure 12. Exhibition Inside the Joseon Folk Art Museum (around 1924)

opened in 1936 and remain there until the present. The rest of the collection was managed by Asakawa Noritaka until August 1945, after which the US occupation forces in Korea had it transferred to the National Folk Museum of Korea, which had been founded by the folklorist Song Seok-ha. This museum was in turn absorbed by the Namsam Annex Building of the National Museum of Korea, which took over the collection of the former Joseon Folk Art Museum, although specific details of the collection are unknown.

### Crafts from Korea among the Collection of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum

Currently, there are approximately 1,600 pieces of crafts with ties to the Korean peninsula housed at the Japan Folk Crafts Museum. The quality and quantity of these works are prominent among museums of art in Japan. They mainly consist of items that Yanagi Muneyoshi and the Asakawa brothers acquired throughout the Korean peninsula from the 1910s to the 1930s. This section introduces these items by category below.

#### *Ceramics*

The Korean crafts collection owned by the Japan Folk Crafts Museum mainly consists of ceramics from the Joseon dynasty, particularly from the latter half of the dynasty. While the collection includes ceramics from the Goryeo dynasty and the earlier half of the Joseon dynasty as well, it is centered on the approximately 600 pieces dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The crafts dating from the early Joseon dynasty include *buncheon* ware tea bowls and bottles as well as Ido tea bowls. The crafts dating from the mid-to late Joseon dynasty consist of white porcelain jars and ritual vessels without patterns, jars, bottles, and dishes decorated by underglaze cobalt blue, copper red, and iron brown, jars and basins and dishes colored with black glaze or amber color glaze, as well as many water droppers in various shapes including fish, frogs, birds, peaches, and houses. The ceramics has been highly appreciated as a unique collection that summarizes the aesthetics and spiritual world of Yanagi Muneyoshi.

In addition to the aforementioned jars representing the collection, the tea



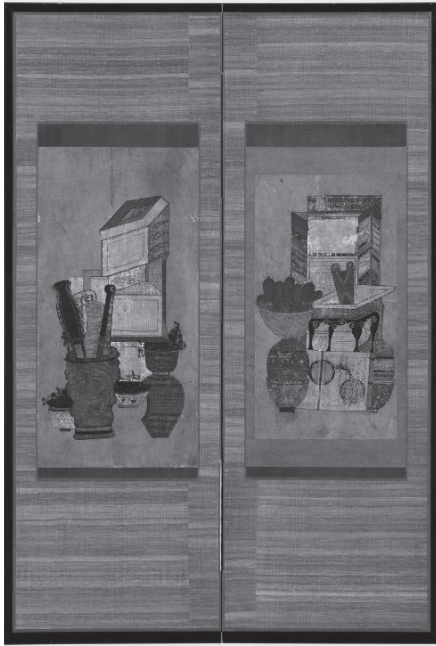
**Figure 13.** Large Ido Tea Bowl Titled "Yamabushi" 山伏, Joseon dynasty, 16<sup>th</sup> century, 10.3 cm x 16.1 cm

bowls, particularly those used during tea ceremonies, are worth noting here. Yanagi was interested in the world of tea ceremony and devoted his efforts to collecting tea utensils that expressed its spirit. The original significance of the tea ceremony was about appreciating beauty during everyday life, which Yanagi saw as fitting to the ideology of the folk craft movement he advocated, namely, to link beauty with everyday life. Later in life, Yanagi acquired an excellent Ido tea bowl that had been highly praised by the early masters of the tea ceremony and enjoyed its beauty with his own hands (Figure 13).

#### *Paintings*

The museum is home to around 200 Korean paintings. These mainly consist of folk paintings that were used in everyday life, such as pictorial ideographs, *chaekgeori*, which are still-life paintings featuring books or bookshelves, also known as books and scholars' possessions or scholars' accoutrement, and paintings of birds and flowers, all by unknown artists during the late Joseon period. The museum, however, also houses many wonderful court paintings by court painters or literati painters dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries including paintings of scholar-officials' gatherings, paintings of tethered hawks, and paintings of bamboo in ink.

Yanagi focused on what he called folk paintings from early on. As a group of paintings of everyday life, they are characterized by the strong and bold



**Figure 14.** *Scholar's Accoutrements* 文房図, author unknown, Joseon period, 19<sup>th</sup> century, two-fold screen, color on paper, 128.4 cm x 86.6 cm



**Figure 15.** *Birds and Flowers* 花鳥図, author unknown, Joseon period, 19<sup>th</sup> century, color on paper, 101.0 cm x 57.5 cm

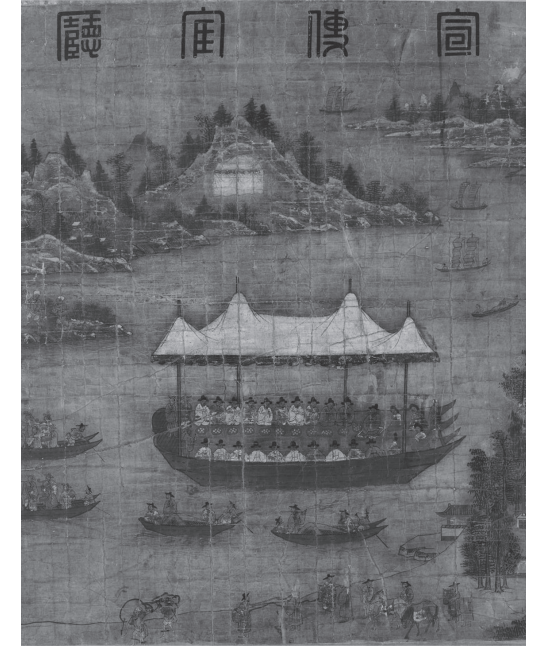
brush strokes and have a charm distinct from court paintings. Classic examples include *Scholar's Accoutrement* (Figure 14), which harbor an inexplicable and mysterious beauty, and *Birds and Flowers* (Figure 15), which depicts ducks and their ducklings leisurely floating nearby the waterside adorned with blossoming lotus flowers and peonies.

The court paintings, meanwhile, include representative pieces such as *Dogs under Flowers* (Figure 16) and *Banquet on a Ship* (Figure 17). *Dogs under Flowers*, by Yi Am 李巖 (1507–1566), a painter and member of the royal family, creates a lyrical atmosphere through its depiction of three puppies beneath a cherry blossom, two sleeping and one looking into the distance. Two seals are stamped on the upper left-hand side of the painting. The one on the top is in the form of a three-legged cauldron, while the one on the bottom says Jeongjung 靜仲, the penname of Yi Am. The composition of the painting resembles that of *Flowers, Birds, and Puppies* owned by the Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, which is also stamped by the same seal.

*Banquet on a Ship* depicts a gathering of royal messengers, who were in



**Figure 16.** *Dogs under Flowers* 花下狗子図, Yi Am, Joseon period, early 16<sup>th</sup> century, ink and light color on silk, 106.3 cm x 48.4 cm



**Figure 17.** *Banquet on a Ship* 宣伝官庁契会図, author unknown, Joseon dynasty, late 18<sup>th</sup> century, color on paper, 84 cm x 69.4 cm

charge of delivering the king's orders. Although the section listing the order of seats and the cause of the banquet has been cut off, the heading, "Office of Royal Messengers," is written across the top, and the banquet is portrayed in the middle section of the painting. The tent where the king temporarily stays during the event can be seen across the river. Around the ship are musicians and boats carrying participants enjoying the banquet. The research by the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation conducted from 2014 into the following year revealed that this painting was one of the seven paintings of the gathering of royal messengers created between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that currently exist in the world.

### *Furniture and Wooden Lacquerware*

Approximately 400 pieces of furniture and wooden lacquerware are housed in the museum and take an important position among the museum's collection.

The beauty in the form of these works is quite impressive, which Yanagi (1981d, 296) has highly praised through his words, “If asked what kind of woodwork I prefer, my answer would be that I favor works from England among Western woodwork and works from Joseon among Eastern woodwork.”

The specific items in this category include furnishings such as small tray tables and cabinets, small household items such as brush holders, letter racks, and water containers, boxes with ox-horn or mother-of-pearl inlay design, rulers, and hand-mirrors. Most of them were created during the late Joseon period. However, some date from the mid-Joseon period, such as the *Cinnabar Lacquer Wickerwork Three-story Cabinet* (Figure 18), the *Tray Table* (Figure 19), and the



**Figure 18.** *Cinnabar Lacquer Wickerwork Three-story Cabinet* 網代朱漆塗三層箆筒, Joseon period, late 17<sup>th</sup> century to early 18<sup>th</sup> century, 146.5 cm x 91.0 cm x 48.6 cm



**Figure 19.** *Tray Table* 羅州盤, Joseon period, late 18<sup>th</sup> century to early 18<sup>th</sup> century, 29.7 cm x 49.3 cm



**Figure 20.** *Black Lacquer Box with Mother-of-pearl Inlay Design of Peonies and Scrolls* 黒漆塗螺鈿牡丹唐草文函, Joseon period, 17<sup>th</sup> century, 11.7 cm x 29.0 cm x 18.5 cm



**Figure 21.** *Black Lacquer Woven-bamboo Box with Gold Paint Design* 草織金泥裝飾黒漆塗函, Goryeo period, 13<sup>th</sup> century, 8.5 cm x 35.5 cm x 18.0 cm

*Black Lacquer Box with Mother-of-pearl Inlay Design of Peonies and Scrolls* (Figure 20). The *Black Lacquer Woven-bamboo Box with Gold Paint Design* (Figure 21) has been found by the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation to have been created during the Goryeo period.

### Other

The stone crafts owned by the museum include Buddhist statues, braziers, incense burners, pots, pans, brush holders, and ink stones, amounting to approximately 200 items of everyday tools dating from the late Joseon period. Not only does the stone material imbue the items with strong forms, but the careful and delicate craftsmanship of the stone carvings and designs are remarkable. The Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation has also confirmed that the collection includes a stone Buddhist statue dating from the late Goryeo period.

Finally, the museum is home to approximately 100 everyday items of metalwork such as large iron pots, brass vessels and locks, iron brush holders and tobacco cases with silver- or lead-inlaid designs that date from the late Joseon period to the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, around 1100 everyday tools used among the ordinary people that Yanagi Muneyoshi, the Asakawa brothers, and the potters Kawai Kanjirō 河井寛次郎 and Hamada Shōji 濱田庄司 collected between the 1920s and 1930s as they traveled around the peninsula including South Jeolla Province. These include woven crafts such as baskets, boxes, and brooms made from straw, bamboo, and grass as well as paper crafts such as fans.

### Conclusion

Over the 90-something years since it first opened, the Japan Folk Crafts Museum has introduced Korean crafts in permanent exhibitions as well as during the special exhibitions it has held from time to time. These include the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special Exhibition, *The Beauty of Korean Crafts Among the Japan Folk Crafts Museum Collection*, which was held from April 2 to June 12 in 2016, and the exhibition, *Yanagi Muneyoshi and the Crafts of Korea: Led by the Beauty of Ceramics*, which was held from September 1 to November 23

in 2022. In addition, for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Joseon and its Art*, the Gallery MI at the Korean Cultural Center of the Embassy of South Korea in Tokyo held the exhibition, The Mind and Gaze of Yanagi Muneyoshi: Material Related to Korea Owned by the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, from September 14 to October 1 in 2022 and held a related symposium as well.

Exhibitions aiming to introduce the thought and achievements of Yanagi Muneyoshi such as these have also been held in South Korea as well. In 2006, the Ilmin Museum of Art held the exhibition, Cultural Memory: The Joseon and Japan of Yanagi Muneyoshi, and in 2013, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Korea, held the exhibition, Yanagi Muneyoshi, at MMCA Deoksugung. By lending the Korean crafts it owns to Korean museums of art in this way, the Japan Folk Crafts Museum has been continuing to introduce its Korean collection.

Cultural properties, including crafts, are a mirror that reflects the culture of a country and its people as well as the most effective way to convey the true value of culture. In this light, the museum plays a vital role in preserving, transmitting, and utilizing cultural property. It is the critical role of those who work at museums to continue to pursue cultural exchange and mutual understanding through activities such as scholarly exchange and exhibitions. Here are the words of Yanagi Muneyoshi by way of conclusion.

Countries must respect what is unique of one another. It is deeply intriguing how what is truly native and specific to the people of each country may be different in form but come together on the inside. In this sense, what is genuinely national of each country could be described as being close brothers to one another. It is from the things that are unique that we learn how the world is connected as one. (Yanagi 1981g, 178)

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