

**Reconsidering the Mingei Undo as a Colonial Discourse: The Politics of Visualizing Asian "Popular Art"**

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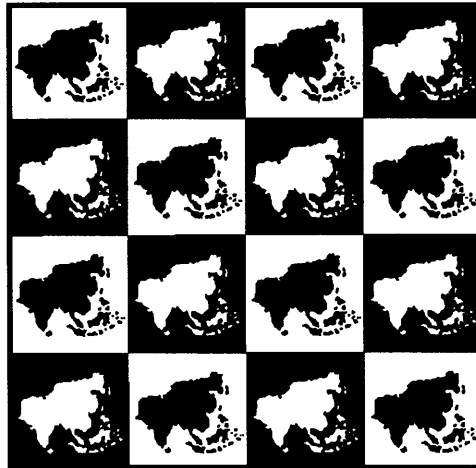
Yanagi Soetsu (1889–1961), founder of the Mingei Undo or Popular Art Movement in Japan, owes his discovery of the "immaculate beauty of everyday ware made by unknown craftsmen" to Korea under Japanese occupation. Yanagi attempted to preserve and promote this Korean Popular Art by organizing exhibitions, collecting remaining wares and founding the Korean Popular Art Museum in Seoul. Through these efforts, Yanagi succeeded in literally "visualizing" the "popular art" which had remained invisible and unrecognized as such until then. Further, Yanagi applied this strategy not only to Korean but also to other Asian cultures, including Japan. His politics of visualization of Popular Art contributed to rehabilitate the repressed Asiatic cultural identity under the overwhelming impact of Western imperialism and Western culture.

Still, the fact remains that such a rehabilitation was not possible without Japan's colonization of the Korean Peninsula. Just as the Europeans recommended to the Japanese to preserve their traditional art, Yanagi encouraged the Korean people to liberate themselves from Japanese "modern" art education. In this double concentric structure of subordination lies an interiorized "orientalist gaze" unconsciously imbedded in Yanagi's Mingei ideology.

As a manifestation of East Asian Modernity, the Popular Art Movement, as a discourse, visualized its anti-modernist undercurrent. The invention of tradition, it implies, must be reexamined by analyzing the tactics of "visualization" the Mingei Undo enacted through its development as a private institution under the Japanese colonial Empire.

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