

The Relationship Between Beauty and Mysticism in the Theory of YANAGI Muneyoshi: The Notion of One in Mingei Theory and Buddhist Aesthetics *

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Abstract: This paper seeks to clarify the relationship between beauty and mysticism in the thought of YANAGI Muneyoshi (1889–1961) based on the notion of “One” originating from Plotinus’ “the One” (*to hen*).

Before starting the Mingei movement, Yanagi studied the philosophy of religion, especially mysticism. It was while studying the work of William Blake (1757–1827) that his interest in mysticism was first aroused, and he noted the importance of Plotinus as an originator of mysticism and the concept of “One.” These ideas affected Yanagi profoundly and contributed to his formulation of Buddhist aesthetics later in life.

Previous studies tend to hold that Yanagi’s research into mysticism has no evident connection to his Mingei movement and its aesthetics. However, Yanagi emphasized that all his practical activities connected with beauty were consistently part of his study of the philosophy of religion and, thus, far from irrelevant. Indeed, from his early essays all the way through to his later philosophy, Yanagi sought to display and describe the mutual connection between beauty and the ideas of mysticism; his Mingei theory is no exception in that regard. Using the concepts of “to see,” “to produce,” and “One,” he constructed his aesthetics in which beauty and mysticism were merged.

Keywords: YANAGI Muneyoshi (Soetsu), Mingei, Plotinus, mysticism, beauty, One

Introduction

This paper discusses the relationship between beauty and mysticism in the thought of Muneyoshi Yanagi (1889–1961), especially with regard to the notion of “One” as it relates to Plotinus’ “the One” (*to hen*). Before the Mingei movement¹, Yanagi devoted himself to the study of the philosophy of religion, especially mysticism. In this paper, it is argued that his study of mysticism had an influence on his Mingei theory and “Buddhist aesthetics”².

Although a number of studies of Yanagi’s philosophy of religion and aesthetics (especially regarding Mingei theory)³ have been published, none provides the logical structure for

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¹ Here, “before the Mingei movement” means the period before 1925, when the word Mingei was created.

² Buddhist aesthetics started from a lecture in which Yanagi discussed the religious aspect of Mingei; he sought to deal theoretically with the beauty of Mingei in his Buddhist aesthetics.

³ Ama (1987) mainly discussed the religious thought of Yanagi, while Tsuruoka (1985, 2012) deals with Yanagi’s mysticism.

combining both. Several scholars (Ogyu 2005, Nakami 2003, Osawa 2018, etc) have, however, presented pantheism as a consistent feature of the thought of Yanagi. Nakami (2010) pointed out the notion of “nature” (自然) as the monistic principle in his thought (also, “the law” 理法 in Osawa 2018)⁴. Adding to these studies, this paper proposes the notion of “One” (一) as the more central principle in the whole of his thought.

In section 1, the significance of “One” in Yanagi’s study of mysticism is discussed. In section 2, it is suggested that the notion of “One” plays an important role in Mingei theory, especially from the perspective of “to produce” (作ること) and “to see” (見ること). In section 3, we see that the notion of “One” is derived from Plotinus and that Yanagi’s thought has a worldview in common with Neoplatonic philosophy. Finally, it is argued that “One” is concerned with a problem of the mind, and Yanagi’s thought on “One” is verified.

1. One and Beauty before Mingei theory

In the 1910s, Yanagi diffused knowledge of Western fine art, particularly Impressionism, through the magazine *Shirakaba* (white birch). He subsequently finished his first research book, *William Blake*, in 1914. From his interest in the English poet William Blake (1757–1827), Yanagi promoted his study of mysticism and worked on the philosophy of religion, mainly Western mysticism. In his treatise titled *Comprehension of Religion* (宗教の理解, 1922), the following passage appears:

T1 Following the beautiful thinker, Plotinus, here I will call the absolute one “the One.” So, I will learn about what is religiously showed through the simple notion “Oneness.” What does the absolute “One” mean? The notion firstly designates “not being two.” However, it does not mean only this. If that were the case, it would be a mere denial of two, and thus would still be one against two. This would imply relativeness and still be a kind of two. Next, its meaning is found in the passage that it is not one against two.

[III, 149]⁵ *Comprehension of Religion* (1922)

In the process of studying William Blake, Yanagi came to consider Plotinus as the founder of mysticism (IV, 362, *William Blake*, 1914). Based on this belief, he gradually developed an interest in Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita (5c–6c), Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c.1328) and other Western mystical thinkers. As can be seen in the above quotation, Yanagi deepened his thoughts on mysticism through the notion of “One.”⁶ In his studies, he also referred to the discourse of

⁴ Nakami (2010) maintains that “Nature” as “the will of God” led the thought and actions of Yanagi (p. 447). In Osawa (2018), “the law” (理法) is suggested as the monistic cause of truth, good and beauty, and indicates “providence” (p.144).

⁵ In my translations of Yanagi’s works, roman numerals designate the volume and arabic numerals indicate the pages in *Yanagi Muneyoshi Zenshu (Collected Works of Muneyoshi Yanagi)* published by Chikuma-shobo.

⁶ The first appearance of the word “One” in the works of Yanagi was in *About Chū* (中に就いて) in 1918. Yanagi mentioned the origin of “One” in *The Problem of God* (神の問題) (1922): “here, we call the absolute as ‘One’ by borrowing the word of Plotinus” [III, 62]. In addition, Sonokawa (1926) shows that Yanagi had many rare books about Plotinus.

Western theology or ontology. Furthermore, referencing many mystical thinkers⁷, he sought to understand the notion of “One” linguistically, then came to think of “One” as “the ultimate,” “non-relative” or “the absolute.” At the same time, he understood “One” as “transcending thought” or “not being known” [III, 65]. Finally, he concluded that “the wisdom of God is the wisdom before thought; that is, understanding without any conceptions, thus the tasted consent without knowing” [III, 158].

As above, Yanagi grasped “One” as non-linguistic and non-conceptual. He referred to it as an aesthetic experience:

T2 We, however, shouldn't think this “non-considering” world as, somehow, a far away thing from us. Being pure in our mind, we always interact with “One” in human feelings and nature. You readers are sometimes absorbed in seeing the flowers blooming in fields and the sun set in the evening. When you are beaten by these beauties, how is the state of our mind? ...there is not any kind of division even between me and a flower. All things flow into “One.” ... beauty is beauty not because of many adjectives, but the prohibition to put out even a word. Beauty is in the world before language and transcending knowledge. We come to know that “One,” “beauty” and “love” are not in the world of judgement.

[II, 153–4] *Comprehension of Religion* (1922)

Yanagi described the understanding of “One” as an aesthetic experience⁸. This aesthetic experience has several features. Firstly, it is a kind of sensory experience. In T2, Yanagi described the experience of “One” as a visual experience, like being “absorbed in seeing” flowers or the setting sun. As background for this mention, we can refer to his understanding of the aesthetic experience in his work *Religion and the Truth* (宗教とその真理, 1919). In this work, he stated that with the same “keenness as a poet,” people can perceive the world of “One,” which goes beyond thinking, in “a grain of sand and also wildflowers,” and grasp “One” “inside everything” [II, 177]. Here, he also affirmed that an individual can perceive “One” from aesthetic experiences of familiar things. In this regard, sensory operations for particular things such as “grains of sand” or “a flower” are a beginning.

Secondly, these aesthetic experiences are not transcendental but inherent. Yanagi did not intend to understand “the world beyond knowledge,” which we perceive through the aesthetic experience of natural things, as a kind of mystical realm that goes beyond the intellectual realm. This is supported by his statement that “I cannot bear the immaturity of thought that let God be placed far from this world,” and his quotation of the words “heaven is in this world” from

⁷ For example, Scotus Eriugena (c.800–c.877), Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226), Johannes Tauler (c.1300–1361), Henry Suso (1295–1366), Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) etc. Yanagi quoted many words from these mystics in his works. Tsuruoka (1985) indicates the feature of “modern mysticism” that finds correspondence among every mystic in Yanagi’s works. Additionally, many books of modern mystics such as W. R. Inge, R. Jones and E. Underhill were collected by Yanagi (cf. Nakami 2003).

⁸ Tsuruoka (2012) suggests that Yanagi came to know the limit of understanding mysticism with words or logic, and thus he emphasized the aesthetic.

James Thomson (1700–1748). Thus, the aesthetic experience which Yanagi showed does not necessarily enforce the tendency of a transcendental character. Certainly, in the context of mysticism, transcendental concepts (e.g., “One”) are understood as those which transcend our aesthetic ability or our intellect as in Christian mysticism. Yanagi, however, thought that “One,” and thus “the non-considerable world,” was bound strongly to the aesthetic experience on earth, and that it has rather an inherent character.

In this way, although the aesthetic experience of “One” has this inherent feature, this does not imply its unclearness. In this regard, Yanagi notes that “the mystical is clearer than the knowledge that seems to be clear” [III,159]. According to Yanagi, “the mystic” is “unknowable due to have non-limited brightness,” so “[the mystical] must be tasted as it is” [III, 161]. He maintains the necessity of experiencing “the mystical” not through one’s intellect, then showed “the way of symbol” as the way to “taste [the mystical] as it is” [III, 210–11]. He stated that “with symbol, one can taste the God without dividing into this and that.” This “symbol” doesn’t mean the abstract level, but rather the concrete experience of things. Furthermore, it is “the visible of the invisible” [III, 211] and is intended for “everything in this world” [III, 212].

The experience of symbols as “the way of symbol” is experience which recognizes what transcends the concret experience through it. T2 then shows that aesthetic experiences through natural things or phenomena can be applied to “the way of symbol.” As Yanagi mentioned, “the brighter” is perceived through the aesthetic experiences of things, and “the brightness” which surpasses the intellect expresses the certainty based on those experiences. The words “taste” or “see” which Yanagi repeatedly used for indicating aesthetic experiences are not mere metaphors. These words appropriately signify a “brighter” perceiving of “One.” In Yanagi’s thought, aesthetic experiences that start from sense perception play an important role in understanding “One.”

Furthermore, Yanagi reached to find the aesthetic experience of “One” in the man-made porcelain in his work *The Beauty of Porcelain* (陶磁器の美, 1921).

T3 I think it is because the beauty [of porcelain] shows the world as “One.” “One” is an aspect of beauty as Plotinus, a warm thinker, appreciated. I do not see the dual opposition in the ceramics of the Song dynasty.

[XII, 17] *The Beauty of Porcelain* (1921)

Until T3, Yanagi mainly referred to the aesthetic experience of natural things, as in T2. Additionally, in his early works such as those in the 1910s or *White Birch* (白樺) in which he evaluated Western painters and fine arts, Yanagi does not directly mention the works in themselves in relation to “One.” In *The Beauty of Porcelain*, Yanagi firstly connected the concept of “One” to the beauty of things (もの), and thus the beauty of things as artifacts reflects “One.” Before 1921, when Yanagi showed both the concepts of “One” and beauty, he often mentioned fine arts such as paintings, sculptures or music, but hardly porcelains, which were closer to our daily life. Furthermore, he did not indicate the relationship between “One” and porcelains. In T3, Yanagi found beauty in one’s experience of “One” and the reflection of “One” in things; thus, “One” and beauty have a close connection through things. From this time, Yanagi increasingly

came to regard the experience of beauty as important. Indeed, this attitude brought the beginning of Mingei movement.

What does it mean that the close connection between “One” and beauty is found in things? Is there some inherent logic in this? To answer such questions, we will examine how the relationship between “One” and beauty affected the Mingei movement and “Buddhist aesthetics.”

2. “to produce,” “to see” and “One”

We focus on the period after the beginning of the Mingei movement which developed in the latter half of the 1920s, and consider the connection between “One,” beauty and Mingei things. For this purpose, we deal with the two topics, “to produce”⁹ and “to see.” The former is concerned with the work of craftsmen, the latter is an important subject in “Buddhist aesthetics.” Before we discuss each of the Mingei, it is necessary to confirm Yanagi’s understanding of Mingei, as he considered things (the Mingei) mainly from the two points, “to produce” and “to see.”

The important thing about the former, “to produce,” is, for example, the “ordinariness” (尋常) that craftsmen aim for when they make Mingei things.

T4 Ordinarity belongs to nature, and extraordinariness belongs to artificiality. The former is, so to speak, one beyond two, but the latter is two which cannot reach to one. The extraordinary is far from an ideal. There is no ideal which is beyond ordinariness. The ordinary mind means the absolute state. The ideal of beauty is neither beyond nor out of ordinariness. We must say the beauty of ordinariness, or the beauty of quietness is surely the very beauty of the beauty.

[IX, 458–9] *the Crafts Culture* (工藝文化) (1942)

Here, “Ordinariness” means “One,” and “the ordinary mind” indicates “the absolute state,” thus “One”¹⁰. Moreover, “ordinariness” is paraphrased as “quietness,” so “One,” “beauty” and “ordinariness” are substantially connected each other. The “ordinariness” which craftsmen must aim at means “beauty,” which is a synonym for “One.” Moreover, his words “one beyond two” signify that the Mingei movement has the same problem of the monistic and the dualistic as his study of the philosophy of religion¹¹. “Nature” also means “one beyond two,” and this “nature” and “the beauty of ordinariness” is referred to here as “the very beauty of the beauty.” The “beauty” connected with “One” is the purpose of Mingei.

Yanagi needed craftsmen to achieve this “beauty” connected to “One” through their “unintentional” production with “the ordinary mind.” Before his study of the philosophy of religion, which we saw in the previous section, Yanagi described the mystical or aesthetic

⁹ Yanagi preferred the expression “produce” (製作) rather than “create” (制作), which indicated the concept of modern art. In addition, Yanagi thought three things to be important for practicing Mingei theory: “to see,” “to think” and “to produce” [X, 454].

¹⁰ Also, in T1, the absolute is related as “One.”

¹¹ When Yanagi began the Mingei movement, he was criticized for his detachment from philosophy; however, as he mentions in the head of *The Beauty of Porcelain*, his theme remained consistently in the religious [VIII, 1].

experience using the word “intuition,” which consists of “unification between subject and object.” Here, however, he states that one could acquire “beauty” through “production,” which is unified with “nature,” namely a synonym for “One.” The connection between “beauty” and “One,” which we discussed in the previous section, involves the craftsmen’s attitudes towards production. In this point, Yanagi’s theory of “One” affects the Mingei movement.

On the other hand, how does “to see” connect with the concept of “One”?

T5 It seems common sense that there is something beautiful, and then the way we see it as beautiful emerges. But it is rather truth that there is the way of seeing, then the beautiful emerges. So, if the way of seeing is bad, beautiful things will disappear. We can say beautiful things exist because the way we see creates it. The deep way of seeing causes deep beauty. If the way we see is shallow, we cannot see more than shallow things. In this way, the problem of beauty is a problem of the way of seeing.

[XVIII, 449] *Before Beauty and Ugliness* (美醜以前) (1951/2)

Yanagi clearly shows his perspective on beauty, maintaining that “the way of seeing” produces “beauty.” In T2, he explains aesthetic experiences by the state of our mind; therefore, he seems to insist that beauty is composed of the subjective. When he expanded the Mingei movement, he stated that intuition must be based on “things,” and it is necessary that one progress forward to the abstract level as “matter” (こと) from the concrete “things” (もの) [IX, 213] (*To See and To Know* (見ることと知ること, 1940). However, he demands “the way of seeing” before the existence of “things.” In this view, the necessity of “things” can be denied; furthermore, that “things” need to be Mingei seems to be denied¹².

Is the cause of “beauty” which is related to “producing” reduced to the state of mind of the producer, and is it not considered as the property of things? In order to make clear whether Yanagi approves of subjectivism or objectivism regarding beauty, we need to examine the meaning of “the way of seeing” in detail.

T6 Anyway, both parents of a thing, the producer and the viewer, must be gathered. Even if anyone produce things rightly, without the viewer, it will not work. In this case, intuition performs one creation. There is no distinction between subject and object. Therefore, we can see directly. Intuition means perceiving as it is.

[VIII, 547] *My Dearest Wish* (私の念願) (1942)

Here, Yanagi uses the word “creation,” but this does not mean that beauty is relative based on the cognition of the subject. “Creation” by subject seems to indicate the active; in fact, however, “creation” indicates a passive attitude, like directly seeing or “perceiving as it is.” When we

¹² There is another reference: “In a sense, there is beauty in everything. To be more precise, a certain way of seeing and treating can make anything beautiful. There is the way to change into beautiful even what people think irrelevant to beauty” [IX, 457]. Additionally, Yanagi valued nature rather than art. In this point, he did not believe that the beautiful must be man-made things or, of course, Mingei.

accomplish this passive way of seeing, in other words, when “the way of seeing” in this fashion is practiced, “the beautiful” comes to be possible. In this understanding, the notion of “beauty” which Yanagi mentions is not necessarily what the subject merely composes. In the same way, as long as “rightly” “producers” of things are needed, beauty is also inherent in things. Yanagi does not deny the existence of things and recognized “the way of seeing” as “intuition,” namely “perceiving as it is.” That suggests that there is the necessity of *something* to be perceived. In Yanagi’s thought, there is no distinction between subject and object; rather, both the properties of things and “the way of seeing” as a subjective condition mutually compose “beauty.” Thus, any subjective formation of beauty is avoided. Furthermore, in his essay *What is The Pattern* (模様とは何か, 1942), Yanagi states that “the way of seeing” is “what you will see in the given things,” and “what is directly perceived” [XIII, 550]. These remarks show “the way of seeing,” and “beauty” as composed by the mutual work of the subjective and the objective.

How does “the way of seeing”¹³, which has a relation to Mingei as things, connect to the problem of “One”?

T7 *Seeing* (観) is non-dualistic (不二).

[XVIII, 547] *What is Beauty* (美とは何か) (1960)

T8 As “nondualism” (不二) literally shows, it is not two, and this is called “The One” in Christian philosophy.

[XIX, 756] *Religion and life* (宗教と生活) (1951/2)

“Nondualism” (不二) is a word that Yanagi frequently used in his works, especially in Buddhist aesthetics. It means both “not two” and “not relative,” and thus is a paraphrase of “One.” This is shown in T8, where “nondualistic” is paraphrased as “One”¹⁴. Thus, it is shown that “seeing” is monistic. From the period before the Mingei movement, Yanagi considered “seeing” as “intuition” to be like the “unification of subject and object,” thus maintaining the same thought. We can also see that the monistic way of seeing is “perceiving as it is.”

In section 1, it was shown that “One” is “the absolute” and that aesthetic experiences can contact “One.” Here, the content of the aesthetic experience is argued; thus, the passive attitude like perceiving as it is without the distinction of subject and object produces beauty. “The way of seeing” discussed in T5 and T6 coincides with this. The problem between “to see” and “One” concludes as above, and we can see that “to produce” and “to see” are, importantly, connected to the problem of “One.” In the next section, we return to the problem of “One” and “beauty.”

¹³ Before Mingei, Yanagi did not mention “perceiving as it is” as “to see.” In this point, we find the influence of Mahayana Buddhism and, especially, the thought of Other-Power.

¹⁴ This tendency of Yanagi in which he sees the similarity between Buddhism and Neoplatonism is one of the features of modern mysticism (cf. Tsuruoka 1985, 2012).

3. The Influence of Plotinus and Yanagi's Theory of One

In T1, Yanagi showed that his concept of “One” is connected to Plotinus’ concept of “the One.” For Yanagi, Plotinus’ concept of “the One” relates to his logic connecting “One” to “beauty.”

T9 Religion is that which connects our daily lives to the One. Christianity calls the One as God through personification. ...The reason most religions advocate the existence of God is, we can say, the emergence of the human mind which incessantly demands the absolute.

[XIX, 745] *Religion and life* (1951/2)

“Religion” is, for Yanagi, represented by mysticism. Here, “the One” is explained as the absolute, which he connects to “our daily lives.” As such, the meaning of the relationship between “beauty” and “One” is important.

In his work *William Blake*, in which Yanagi considers Plotinus to be the originator of mysticism, he speaks of the importance of “the salvation of emanation” [IV, 325]. According to Plotinus’ world view, there is an ontological order in which the One is placed at the top, followed by the intellectual world and the sensible world. Descending from the One, ontological value lessens just as light decreases with distance from the illuminant. In this structure of emanation, Yanagi wanted to salvage the lower sensible world in which we live. For example, in his mention of John Ruskin (1819–1900), who influenced the Arts and Crafts movement, Yanagi stated, “[Ruskin] found beauty in the world far away from actuality. ...he didn’t try to seek heaven on the earth” [VIII, 200]. Yanagi described the difference between his Mingei theory and the thought of Ruskin and emphasized the importance of beauty, as it offers an opportunity to affirm the earthly world in which we lead our daily lives. Yanagi valued “to see” as a sensory experience, which Plotinus placed below the intellect, and emphasized the “things” that constitute the sensible world as our reality. By doing so, Yanagi attempted to find Oneness in the sensible world.

We can see his affirmation of the sensible world at the end of the emanation in the problem of “to produce” and “to see.” To consider this problem, we compare the thought of Yanagi with that of Plotinus, as Plotinus also discussed “making” and “contemplation,” which correspond to “to produce” and “to see” in the thought of Yanagi. Through this comparison, the feature of Yanagi’s thought will be clear. We refer to the concept of “making,” “action” and “contemplation” in Plotinus¹⁵:

T10 everywhere we shall find that making and action are either a weakening or a consequence of contemplation.

[En. III. 8. 4, 40–41]¹⁶

¹⁵ In this paper, I do not strictly distinguish “action” from “making,” since I treat Plotinus’ treatise, which discusses both “action” and “making” in the same way. Both are seen by Plotinus as inferior to “contemplation.”

¹⁶ The text from Plotinus is cited from Loeb; here, [En. III. 8. 4, 40–41] indicates “3rd Ennead, 8th treatise, chapter 4, lines 40–41.”

T11 who are incapable of learning and contemplative studies and turn to crafts and manual work.

[En. III. 8. 4, 46–48]

For Plotinus, “making” and “action” are procedures to ascend to “the One” as an alternative to following the intellectual procedure of “contemplation”; both are chosen by those who have weaker power to contemplate, such as children. Yanagi also found craftsmen “ignorant” or “uneducated” (e.g., “intellectually uneducated craftsmen” [XIV, 23]). In this point, Plotinus and Yanagi showed a similar condition for those engaged in “making.”

Yanagi, however, did not believe “making” (“to produce”) to be inferior to “contemplation” (“to see”) for the purpose of ascending to the “One.” Plotinus, on the one hand, stated that “action, then, is for the sake of contemplation and vision, so that for men of action, too, contemplation is the goal” [En. III. 8. 6, 1–2], believing that “action” is a procedure for reaching intellectual “contemplation.” On the other hand, Yanagi did not believe that “making” needed to be based on “contemplation,” and regarded “making” as a procedure to reach “One” in and of itself. He held that craftsmen can touch “One” through conforming to “nature,” as they are ignorant. Furthermore, Plotinus judged “making” to be less valued than “contemplation” as it stands away from the intellect. Yanagi, however, considered “to produce” as the creation of the “things” that composed the sensible world, and valued it as much as “to see,” as in T6.

With the word “seeing,” the difference between Yanagi and Plotinus is apparent:

T12 leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before. When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image.

[En. I. 6. 8, 5–9]

As in the quotation above, Plotinus, who is negative towards “beauty in bodies,” states in his treatises *On Beauty* [I. 6] and *On Intellectual Beauty* [V. 8] that we must reach not to sensible beauty, but to the “contemplation” of intellectual beauty. Therefore, he urges the development of “inner sight” with which we can see intellectual beauty, and to progress to the intellectual phase of “seeing.” In contrast, Yanagi understands “seeing” not on the intellectual level, but on the sensible level, and affirms the possibility of reaching “One” through this sensible “seeing.” As he notes that “seeing relates to the real world” [IX, 212], for Yanagi, “seeing” is the experience formed through the relation with things. Such an experience generates the aesthetic experience leading to “One.”

In Mingei theory, these thoughts of Yanagi are revealed, and the experience of “One” is not an experience through “another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use” [En. I. 6. 8, 26–28], as Plotinus believed. According to Yanagi, we can experience “One” with the naked eye in the sensible world in which we live¹⁷. Yanagi is positive about the sensible world and believes

¹⁷ Yanagi, however, did not deny the necessity of progressing to “to know” from “to see” [IX-212]; thus, further discussion is warranted.

that we can reach “beauty” as “One” without ascending to the intellectual world¹⁸. For Yanagi, the actions “to produce” and “to see” against “One” are accepted as the experience of beauty, and, because of this, “the salvation of emanation” is accomplished.

Where does this theory of “One,” which contains “to produce” and “to see,” lead?

T13 Similarly, in the case of seeing beauty, we need to see without a discriminative mind (分別未生の心). Namely, there is no way but accepting beauty with the mind “as it is.”
[XVIII, 547] *What is Beauty* (1960)

T14 Beauty, after thinking about it, is a figure of the “free mind” (自在心). According to my experience, which I saw and intuited for a long time, beauty emerges while conforming to your own (自在). Therefore, beauty is impossible without the free mind.
[XVIII, 545] *What is Beauty* (1960)

T15 I believe that I can say that the free mind is not possible until human lives are released from their insistence. ...The feature of insistence can be said to be constantly in the dualistic world.

[XVIII, 547] *What is Beauty* (1960)

In the above quotations, Yanagi seems to repeat what was said in T6, but here he covers the problem of the “mind.” “To see without a discriminative mind” indicates the state in which there is no distinction between subject and object, which is the same as he described in his Buddhism aesthetics. In addition, this can be considered as a paraphrase of “intuition,” which corresponds to “perceiving as it is.” Furthermore, Yanagi applied non-dualism between subject and object not only to “the way of seeing” or “intuition,” but also to the state of mind in T15. “Free mind” is paraphrased as “non-dualistic mind” (不二心), which is the origin of beauty [XVIII, 546]. According to Yanagi’s theory of “One,” beauty is a problem of one’s state of mind.

In Plotinus’ theory on ascending to “the One,” the soul requires a mystical unification beyond logic or intellect in order to approach “the One” [En. I. 3.]. On the other hand, Yanagi believed that unification of subject and object occurred not in the intellectual world, but in each one’s actual mind. By doing so, Yanagi grasped the transcendental concept of “One” in the inherent realm, thus the sensible world. It is the theory of “One” and “beauty” that Yanagi designed for our approach to the absolute “One” in this world, finally showing the problem of “intuition” and the mind. In this theory of “One,” “to produce” as an emanation of “One” and “to see” as approaching “One” are realized in our world.

¹⁸ Yanagi believed that everyone can reach the aesthetic experience which he supposed, as “Beauty-Buddha-nature (美仏性) is originally endowed with all human, and it works without being injured.” [XVIII, 152]

Conclusion

From his study of the philosophy of religion to Mingei theory and Buddhist aesthetics, Yanagi connected the concept of “One,” which originated from Plotinus, with the concept of beauty. In this paper, we also focused on Yanagi’s differences from Plotinus and sought to clarify Yanagi’s logic of combining “One” with beauty. In section 1, we saw Yanagi’s understanding of “One” in his philosophical study and the feature of aesthetic experience in his theory. In section 2, the relationship between “One,” “beauty” and “things” is discussed, as well as the problem of “to produce” and “to see,” which interacts with the concept of “One.” Due to this, it is argued that Mingei theory and Buddhist aesthetics have a connection with “One” through beauty. Finally, in section 3, we referred to the thought of Plotinus and compared it with that of Yanagi. We further clarified that the Neoplatonistic view of the world had an influence on Yanagi’s thought. In discussing the differences between Yanagi and Plotinus, we saw that Yanagi valued beauty in the sensible world, whereas Plotinus positively valued that in the intelligible world. In Yanagi’s thought affirming sensible beauty, we can find Plotinus’ original theory of “the One.” Tsuruoka (1985, 2012) understands that the aesthetics of Yanagi’s mysticism has a similarity to the Other-Power (他力) thought in Mahayana Buddhism. He also believes this orienting to the aesthetic is one of the features of Japanese thought. The connection, however, between mysticism and beauty in Yanagi’s thought aimed at an affirmation of the earth, thus our world, showed the logic connecting “One” and beauty.

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