

Art: for the people by  
the people



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Arts, craft and architecture are a reflection of society's zeitgeist. A conflict in the spirit or belief is what spurs a movement of response. The artists in west followed William Morris to respond to the rapid industrialization of crafts and manufacturing in the Arts and Crafts movement of the 1800's. Japan felt a similar need with Muneyoshi Yanagi leading the mingei movement in the early 1900's. The Japanese movement starts with questions as explained by Toki (2016),

“ What is art? Is it something created only by artists? Or is it something average people have routinely created throughout humanity's existence?”

The founder and leader Muneyoshi Yanagi coined the term mingei as the art of common people, in response to the commercialization and industrialization in his lifetime. The Japanese philosophy always had a common ground for arts and crafts, this changed with western influence and the conceptual segregation in arts and crafts. The Mingei had parallel but slightly different ideologies in comparison to arts and crafts movement, with its philosophical pillar as ' hand crafted art of common people'. Products that are handcrafted in large numbers and are used in the everyday life, crafts that narrate a story of their origin and cultural heritage were qualified as Mingei. These were products for the masses, for the low wage earners. Designs that were refined over generations by the users experience made appealing with a splash of cultural art.

An example of the philosophy of Mingei is Boro fashion. The term boro means worn down or ragged. In contrast to the preferred fine silk for the upper class, boro had the beauty of cotton and hemp worn by peasants and

farmers. Cotton was inexpensive and easy to work, with Japan's rich textile history in the 17th century. They had an extensive variety of dyes available, but boro would usually be dyed indigo as it was easiest to dye and was readily extracted from the leaves of indigo plant. Their workmanship over that ordinary piece of clothing was as sincere as on silk. As pointed in the blog post, Toki (2016) " Seamstresses in northern Japan invented a sewing technique, called sashiko, where a simple running stitch is sewn in repeating or interlocking patterns, often through several layers of fabric. This allowed them to sew hemp fabric and cotton scraps together in a way that provided more effective and longer lasting protection from the cold. Furthermore, it also gave people an opportunity to make interesting and unique patterns in the fabric, adding an element of creativity that could distinguish one household's cloth items from another's. The same clothing might be used for as many as three or four generations."

This was the fabric of cultural heritage, and one of most iconic garment that turned out of boro was the Yogi, Japanese sleeping garment.

A Yogi was essentially a very large kimono that provided warmth so that a married couple would snugly fit within it in cold winter nights. As explained by Austin, A (nd) elaborately decorated Yogi was a traditional gift to a bride by her parents. A process in itself, started with buying homespun, handwoven cotton fabrics and then consult a Tsutsugaki craftsman to decorate the fabrics with motifs for happy married life to the couple. The final stitches were done by the mother of the bride, giving a very organic feel to it. One of the identifications of a true yogi of the era would be narrow fabric strips sewn together lengthwise due to the limitation of narrow loom

widths. Each yogi would be a different piece of art which would be continuously used and repaired to the point it being ragged in the liners and turned into boro textiles, perfectly justifying the philosophy of Mingei.