

Japonisme in the 19th Century and Western Tableware Made in Japan

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Japonisme occurred with the international exhibitions in the Western countries in the latter half of the 19th century, influencing many aspects of the Western culture, such as paintings, artifacts, and interior decoration. Japanese ceramic ware was especially praised as much of its design was applied to their own ceramic products manufactured in the West, and collections of museums and individuals were formed. For example, in the international exhibitions held in Paris, Vienna, and Philadelphia, a number of Japanese ceramics were exhibited and sold. Also, there were enthusiastic Western collectors of Japanese ceramics like Edward S. Morse. This paper considers how Japan got involved in Japonisme, as opposed to how the West appreciated Japanese ceramics. The Meiji government, for example, made efforts to expand the export of ceramics by holding the domestic exhibitions for promoting industry (*Naikoku Kangyou Hakurankai*, 内国勸業博覧会) and *Kyoushinkai* (共進会), under the *Shokusan Kougyo policy* (殖産興業政策); delivering the design plans to domestic potters; and shipping the samples of ware to foreign countries. Ceramics were also one of the important export goods next to silk and tea for Japan in those days. In addition to the Western merchants who visited *Yokohama* (横浜) and *Kobe* (神戸) as buyers, Japanese trading companies such as *Morimura Group* (森村組) started to sell the artifacts, including ceramic ware as decorative arts for display in Western houses, since the early times.

However, the potters, who continued conventional way of individual handcrafting since the pre-modern period, could not meet the rapidly increased demands from the West, hence the decline in quality, the criticism for it, and recession of export amount were gradually exposed from around 1880s. As a result, these problems required Japan to construct modern system of the ceramic industry, or more specifically, it needed to introduce the Western trend instantly and change the design of ware into suitable forms for daily use in the West, which also required the

manufacture of stronger ware. In addition, in terms of the Japanese industrial system, they set guilds, and paved the way for patent law and institutional trademarks.

Considerable numbers of report from around 1900 claimed particularly the importance of export of ceramics for daily use, rather than decorative ware. Such reports were found in the consular reports and the journals of ceramic industry. “Ceramics for daily use” actually means “Western tableware”(洋食器), which should possess both aesthetic value and practical function for use, and this is a necessary factor to welcome and serve visitors in the Western culture. In the West, the style of tableware had evolved through the development of eating habits and food culture from the 18th to 19th centuries. Therefore, Japanese ceramic industry, which had been trying to export larger amount of ceramic ware, launched into a new genre: tableware. It is important to note that according to the statistics, the market was shifted from Europe to America at this moment. The first company in Japan to succeed in the mass production and distribution was *Nihon Touki Goumei Gaisha* (日本陶器合名会社, the present *Noritake Co. Ltd.*), which was developed from *Morimura Group*, and they completed the first dinner set “SEDAN” in 1914.

This paper recognises the period of exported tableware from the 1910s by *Nihon Touki Goumei Gaisha* as a result of Japonisme in the latter half of the 19th century, by tracing the rise and fall of the export amount of Japanese ceramics. When the prosperity in export was changed to the recession, what kind of problems Japanese ceramic industry faced, and how they solved the problems. This trial and error period is analysed mainly through Japanese historical resources.

Although Japonisme has been discussed frequently in terms of its impact on the West, this paper offers the possibility of a new understanding of Japonisme, by considering not only the West, but also Japan’s positive reaction to Japonisme.

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