Japanese Export Porcelain for the Chinese and Korean Market in the Meiji Period

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Both Japanese and Western scholarships on Japanese ceramics in the Meiji period have emphasised the role of European tastes and discussed it by dichotomising the ceramic production into that for the domestic and export markets, as well as that in traditional and modern styles. Even if that was the case generally, this scholarly view has inevitably resulted in camouflaging or missing some rather fundamental issues, one of which is what was happening at the same time in the ceramic market inside Japan and in Asia.

This paper focuses on Japanese ceramic trade to China and to Korea. It has been suggested that Yokohama was the main base for Japanese export ceramics, while the role of Kobe, the second largest port of Japan opened in 1868, has been relatively overlooked. Apparently the growth of the Japanese ceramic industry was supported by the services of these two ports specialised for different markets: after the mid-Meiji era, Yokohama shipped ceramic wares exclusively to the United States whereas Kobe mainly shipped them to Asian destinations. By exploring actual Japanese cultural interactions with Chinese and Korean during the Meiji period, this paper examines the production of Japanese porcelain for the two major Asian markets and the role of Kobe Port within this historical context.