

Creating a Digital Database of Japanese Ceramics in Western Collections

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Abstract

Ceramic ware has been one of the most collected Japanese art objects in the West. The enthusiastic reception of Japanese ceramics has always been acknowledged as one of the major factors in Japonisme in Europe and the United States from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Reflecting such interests, many major museums in the West hold sizable collections today.

These collections are not exceptions from digital archiving projects, which have been underway in a number of research institutions all over the world. For example, the British Museum opened its internal collection database, which includes all the entries of its Japanese collection, to the public. Similarly, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston has recently been increasing the number of object-records available online.

Still, academic researchers who want to study ceramics often find information in these web-databases insufficient for their use. This insufficiency derives from the fact that, for example, many entries only provide descriptions of objects, not their images. When they are available by chance, their quality is too low to observe details. Moreover, only one or two images are provided for each object despite the fact that at least six shots from different directions are necessary in order to get an idea about how a ceramic object looks like. Additional information is also very limited. Box inscriptions, for example, sometimes give researchers valuable information, but such information is seldom included in records.

Since 2008, the author has been conducting a research project to create a web-searchable digital database of Japanese ceramics in the Western collections, containing information sufficient for academic research. This paper will report an update of this project and explain how this database might change the field of Asian ceramic studies.

Keywords: Japanese ceramics, online database, museum, collection

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西方典藏之日本陶器數位資料庫建置

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摘要

陶器為西方世界收藏最多的日本藝品，而自 19 世紀末到 20 世紀初，日本陶器在歐美受到的熱烈歡迎，亦是當時所流行日本風的重要表徵之一。也因此，當今西方很多重要博物館都擁有相當可觀的日本陶器藏量。

這些藏品的數位化在世界各地許多研究單位已經展開，大英博物館、波士頓美術館等也分別將相關館藏內部資料庫公開或是增加線上藏品資料。然而線上網路資料庫的相關資訊仍有所不足，往往只有提供藏品描述而無圖片，或圖片品質差、視角受限，而其他相關資訊也相當有限。

自 2008 年起，筆者主持一個可供網路搜尋由西方典藏之日本陶器線上資料庫研究計畫，以期為學術研究提供充足的資訊。此論文將對這項計畫的進度做報告，並解釋此資料庫可能如何改變亞洲陶器研究領域。

關鍵字：日本陶器、線上資料庫、博物館、收藏

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