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Dissertation

**THE TRAJECTORY OF MODERN CERAMIC SCHOLARSHIP:
OKUDA SEIICHI'S CERAMIC APPRECIATION
IN THE TAISHŌ PERIOD, 1912 – 1926**

by

SEUNG YEON SANG

B.A., Korea University, 2003
M.A., Florida State University, 2006

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Major Professor: Alice Y. Tseng, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History of Art & Architecture

ABSTRACT

My dissertation investigates the connection between hobby (*shumi*), aesthetic appreciation (*kanshō*), and the imagining of Japan-centered “oriental ceramics” (*tōyō tōji*) in Okuda Seiichi’s (1883–1955) thought during the period of rapid modernization and aesthetic nationalism that accompanied Japanese imperialist expansion. The main task of this study is to highlight and analyze the role of Okuda Seiichi in presiding over modern ceramic scholarship. It seeks to understand the peculiarities of Taishō-period society (1912 – 1926) that catalyzed the emergence of ceramic hobby and appreciation, especially among a circle of Japanese business, intellectual, and cultural leaders. This cultural climate encouraged the gradual formation of the study of ceramic history as an academic discipline and ceramic hobby began to reconfigure and merge with scholarly activities through groups such as Tōjiki kenkyūkai (Ceramic Studies Society, founded 1914), the Saikokai (Colored Jar Society, 1916), and Tōyō tōji kenkyūjo (The Institute of Oriental Ceramics, 1924). Okuda played an instrumental role in the establishment of professionalism in ceramic study and cultivated the notion of ceramic appreciation by claiming superiority for Japanese aesthetic discrimination. My dissertation illuminates

the ways in which the notions advanced by Okuda to define ceramic hobby and appreciation indicate Japan's acceptance of Western "fine arts" and aesthetic canons, which privileged painting and sculpture. While the complexity of Okuda's ideas can be understood as part of the broader intellectual concern of Japan's art history, his most significant efforts can be found in highlighting not only artistic qualities but also the conceptual and technical supremacy of ceramics. The dissertation also investigates how Okuda established an historical narrative for Asian ceramics in which Japan could compare its tradition with the West and assert its unique role in a unitary Asian civilization. In rivalry with the West's advancement of Asian ceramic studies, Okuda stressed his unique, historically conditioned role as a leader in the field, while involving his works in a dialogue with Western scholars. By contextualizing Okuda's evolving thoughts within the intellectual currents of his time, this dissertation sheds new light on the origin of the study of ceramic history in the Taishō period, when the idea of ceramic appreciation underwent a pivotal redefinition.