

Ceramics for the Imperial table: crafting objects and identities in Meiji period Japan

JSPS Short-Term Postdoctoral Fellowship, January – July 2013

Research Institution: Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies, Kyushu University

Host Researcher: Professor Mizoguchi Koji

I was delighted to be awarded a Short-Term Postdoctoral Fellowship by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, which enabled me to spend six months undertaking research at Kyushu University, Japan. During my Fellowship, I was based in the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies at Kyushu University's Ito Campus, where I worked with my host researcher, Professor Mizoguchi Koji.

The title of the research project was 'Ceramics for the Imperial table: crafting objects and identities in Meiji period Japan'. In my doctoral studies I have been examining the tableware of the Japanese Imperial court in the late nineteenth century, and exploring the ways in which these objects and the banquets that employed them were utilised in the construction of the role and identity of the Meiji Emperor (1868-1912). The key aim of the Fellowship was to gather primary and secondary resources on Edo-period and Meiji-era Imperial tableware.

Detailed surveys of ceramic tableware were carried out at the former Imperial convent of Reikanji in Kyoto and at three companies in Arita that served as *kunaishō goyōtashi* (*Purveyors to the Imperial Household*) in the Meiji Era: Tsuji, Koransha and Fukagawa Seiji. Related archival documents were also researched in Arita and at the Archives of the Imperial Household in Tokyo. Careful examination of these objects, designs and records in a comparative framework has already begun to yield insights into the range of design sources utilised in the Meiji Era, and, I would suggest, the messages these objects communicated about the Emperor's identity and role.

The Fellowship not only made it possible for me to undertake this research, but also to experience academic life within a Japanese university and build connections with researchers in my field. I was warmly welcomed into the research office of my host department, where I worked alongside postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers from the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies. The critical feedback and fresh perspectives I received from Professor Mizoguchi and other members of the Faculty strengthened the research project and are also benefiting my wider research, especially for the practical solutions they suggested for the entangled histories that my research addresses.

Kyushu University also provided an excellent base in practical terms. The new Ito Campus is on the outskirts of the city of Fukuoka, but has on-site accommodation specifically for visiting researchers. Fukuoka itself is well connected with an airport for domestic and international flights: the recent expansion of low cost airlines in Japan making domestic air travel increasingly reasonable. During the Fellowship, I travelled to Tokyo, Kyoto and Arita for research and conferences, which helped me to build strong research networks as well as nurturing a broader perspective on ceramics in Japan than might otherwise have been possible.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for this unique opportunity to develop my research within Japan. Thanks to the generosity of my host researcher Professor Mizoguchi and all in the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies at Kyushu University, the project was successful in its aims and I am tremendously grateful to those involved for this invaluable experience.

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Some of the staff and researchers of my host department at Kyushu University during the ceremonies marking the beginning of the academic year in April, 2013.