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SANUI, Misaki. Reception of Kōetsu Tea Bowls in the Mid-Edo Period: Modes of Value Establishment through the Senke School Network

Hon'ami Kōetsu (1558–1637) was a Kyoto-based figure known for his multifaceted career during a transitional period in Japan. Although born into a family of sword polishers and connoisseurs, he pursued diverse artistic activities in the latter half of his life through collaborations with fellow artisans. In particular, he engaged in pottery with the assistance of professional Raku ware potters and created ceramic tea bowls for chanoyu. Today, numerous tea bowls are attributed to Kōetsu, including one designated National Treasure and five Important Cultural Properties.

While previous scholarship on Kōetsu tea bowls, led primarily by Hayashiya Seizō, pivoted on the artist's biography as well as stylistic analyses of his works, the socio-historical value of the tea bowls has been taken for granted without serious inquiries into its source. However, in recent years Kumakura Isao and Oka Yoshiko have each examined how the value of Kōetsu tea bowls was established, and revealed that their initial reception had begun in the early Edo period by Kyoto-based chanoyu practitioners associated with the Sen lineage. Based upon their findings, my current research project investigates the reception history of Kōetsu tea bowls with a diachronic approach. As a part of the project, this article focuses on the mid-Edo period (late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century), from which ample documents have survived, to examine the development of this reception by way of reconstructing the audience network as well as exploring the modes of reproduction of the Kōetsu style.

As demonstrated in previous scholarship, the initial reception of Kōetsu tea bowls began in the early Edo period within the Sen community. Subsequently, in the mid-Edo period, the Senke school gained a larger following backed by a flourishing urban culture, which thus promoted the widespread appreciation for his tea bowls. In particular, the network of Kakukakusai Sōsa (1678–1730), the sixth-generation head of the Omotesenke lineage, was composed of rising merchants who were enthusiastically engaged in collecting and using Kōetsu tea bowls. Through the mutual exchange between cultural figures who were capable of transcending social class division, the admiration for his tea bowls was transmitted from Kyoto citizens to an increasingly diverse audience based in Edo, Osaka, and Itami. Furthermore, it is of particular importance that the reception process of Kōetsu tea bowls was in fact in parallel with that of his calligraphy and lacquerware. Moreover, as each generation of the Sen lineage gained greater authority as tea masters, their authentication enhanced the value of Kōetsu tea bowls to the extent that certain works started being regarded as *meibutsu*. Consequently, the reproduction of the Kōetsu style began at contemporary Raku ware kilns, and the existence of such copies testifies to the fact that the originals were deemed canonical as much as to the heightened recognition for his style itself.

This article, which conducts a comprehensive study on the mode of Kōetsu tea bowl reception, stands out with its extensive use of documentation in diverse formats including box inscriptions, records of tea gatherings, lists of meibutsu, and auction records. Furthermore, it casts new light on the individual reproductions of Kōetsu tea bowls which have hitherto been overlooked, and reveals that their production as well as circulation were closely related to the value establishment of the original works.