Karamono for Sencha: Appropriating elite culture for the masses.

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Summary: Both the chanoyu and sencha tea ceremonies were occasions for the display and appreciation of karamono. Chanoyu participants associated karamono with Zen and also considered it a symbol of their sophistication and elite status. In contrast, sencha followers enjoyed karamono because their heroes, the ancient Chinese bunjin, also appreciated it. By the early 19th century, sencha had become popular among commoners, who aspired to social parity with elite classes. Influenced by sencha, and not chanoyu, karamono became widely studied and collected in Japan, first as symbols of good taste and education. While chanoyu and sencha followers appreciated some similar types of karamono, especially baskets and ceramics made for export to Japan, karamono favored in sencha circles encompassed a broader range of Ming and Qing dynasty Chinese arts than those appreciated by chanoyu followers. Karamono for sencha included various art forms especially associated with the Chinese bunjin, such as bunjin painting, Yixing ware ceramics, and ancient Chinese bronzes.

Key words: karamono, sencha, Yixing ware, furyū, bunjin

Introduction: This talk is not about tea drinking directly but about the material culture associated with tea drinking and the ways these materials became more widely appreciated in Japan. My focus is on karamono, the Japanese term for Chinese arts and crafts that were exported to Japan in pre-modern times. Many of these things were also imported or later appropriated for use as accoutrements in secular rituals for the service of green tea or as
decorations for environments in which the tea was served. Ownership of karamono served as a signifier of elite status in pre-modern Japan. Not only did such objects proclaim their owners' wealth, they helped to differentiate elites from the masses because only elites possessed specialized knowledge about China. The intent of this talk is to articulate more clearly the sencha taste for karamono, and to show how some modern collections of Chinese art emerged from within the circles of sencha enthusiasts.

Karamono and Chanoyu Aesthetics: One influential form of chanoyu developed during the 15th century. It featured the use of Chinese tea accoutrements and the display of Chinese objects of art. Tea was served in formal rooms called shoin, that were decorated with Chinese arts and crafts. "Shoin chanoyu" was gradually overshadowed by a new taste for accoutrements of Japanese manufacture (wamono). Still, old Chinese pieces would be featured because they imparted a "touch of luxuriousness" to the atmosphere of the tea room. In the 17th century, Karamono again returned to prominence in some tea circles, one of which was led by Kobori Enshū. He liked 17th century Chinese ceramics and bamboo flower baskets. His interest was facilitated by increases in official trade with China after a lull during the previous century. The new Tokugawa shoguns, also encouraged this interest through their promotion of Confucianism. Confucian values were imparted through immersion into morally-uplifting avocations: the practical study of various literati arts such as painting, calligraphy, poetry, collecting Chinese antiquities and accoutrements for the scholar's study, and participating chanoyu, now a form of mandated etiquette for the samurai class. When Enshū died in 1647, the canon of taste for karamono for chanoyu had become so thoroughly fixed that it has influenced the perceptions about karamono by all subsequent chanoyu tea practitioners up to the present.

Karamono and Sencha Aesthetics: Appreciation for karamono among sencha participants developed gradually. Over the course of about one hundred and fifty years, the types of karamono associated with sencha expanded and eventually became codified
along with its ritual preparation, as had occurred within chanoyu circles. Changes in taste for karamono by sencha participants over time mirror both the changing demographics of its participants and changes in the availability of Chinese products in Japan. For organizational purposes, these developments can roughly be divided into three overlapping and approximately-dated phases: One, the second half of the 17th through the first half of the 18th century; two, 1800 to 1860; three, 1860 to 1900.

The first phase for karamono for sencha begins with the Obaku Patriarch Ingen Zenshi. We know he used Yixing ware ceramics and liked Chinese literati paintings. Then in the 18th century, under the influence of the Obaku monk, Baisaō Kō Yūgai, the drinking of sencha grew more popular. So revered did Baisaō become that soon after his death, his admirers began treasuring his meager possessions. They even produced a handscroll of these, later copied and distributed in printed book form, and made replicas of his favorite Chinese tea wares. Baisaō had described as his "teachers." These included an unglazed, side-handled tea pot he used both as a hot water kettle and for brewing the tea, and underglaze blue tea cups.

The second phase for karamono appreciation in sencha took place in the early 19th century under the leadership of Sinophile scholars and artists. Sencha then began to be served in a Chinese atmosphere, with all the room decorations and utensils designed in Chinese taste, with some utensils authentic Chinese and others made by Japanese artists. The potter Aoki Mokubei was responsible for adapting to sencha use many types of Chinese porcelains that had first gained popularity in 17th century chanoyu circles, including kinrande and kōchi wares. One person whose personal collection exemplified the taste for karamono among the Japanese literati of this period is the painter, Yamamoto Baiitsu. He collected Chinese art, such as Ming and Qing literati paintings and also Yixing ceramics and other wares for sencha. Several pieces from his collection are still known today. He also painted pictures of flowers in Chinese baskets like those displayed at sencha gatherings.

The third and final stage in the development of sencha taste for karamono lasted from about 1860 to 1900. Throughout this
period, *sencha* gatherings continued to be forums for displays of Chinese arts, but instead of the tea serving as the primary purpose of these occasions, the exhibited objects became the main focus of attention. During this period greater quantities of *karamono* entered Japan, due to increased interest on the part of collectors, aided by deteriorating economic and political conditions in China. Because of increased accessibility to materials, Japanese scholars and collectors were able to undertake more detailed connoisseurship studies of Chinese arts. Collectors' interests also fueled the production of close copies of these Chinese crafts, especially ceramics, bronzes, and flower baskets, by skilled Japanese artisans. Thus, on the one hand, this period marked the first appearance of collections of *karamono* in *sencha* taste by members of the new elite—wealthy merchants, and on the other hand it signified a transformation of this taste to the masses through fine Japanese copies of arts and crafts in Chinese styles.

The new era's most influential political leaders were partly responsible for turning private *sencha* gatherings, with their obligatory displays of Chinese paintings and antiquities, into public art exhibitions. They encouraged *sencha* gatherings to serve as a way to get the public to appreciate Chinese literati culture. They wanted to instill values of civilization and enlightenment. One of these public exhibitions was hosted by the literati painter Tanomura Chokunyū in 1874. It took place in Toyokuni in southern Japan. Over 800 people viewed Chinese *sencha* utensil and *karamono* displays there. Although politicians promoted these events, they left connoisseurship to scholars and dealers. These connoisseurship studies on Chinese arts were a recent phenomenon in Japan at that time and seem to have been initiated under the auspices of *sencha* gatherings. Perhaps the earliest study of a particular type of Chinese art was Tomioka Tessai's 1867 publication on Yixing wares, *Tetsusō chafu*. In 1876, another book on Yixing ceramics, *Meiko zurokū*, was published in Tokyo, and authored by one of the new art collectors there, the merchant and politician Oku Randen. He bequeathed his collection of Chinese art, including Yixing wares, ancient Chinese bronzes, and Chinese Ming and Qing paintings, to the shipping magnate Iwasaki Yanosuke. It is now in the *Seikadō Bunkō* in Tokyo.