

# Reframing Orientalism: Reinterpretation of Asian Ceramic Heritage Displays and Visual Culture in Contemporary Western Museums

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## Abstract

This conceptual paper investigates how leading Western museums—including the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Art Institute of Chicago—reinterpret and display Asian ceramic heritage in the context of postcolonial critique. Framed by Edward Said's Orientalism, visual culture theory, and postcolonial museology, the study examines the visual and narrative strategies employed by these institutions to construct meanings around Asian ceramic objects. It identifies three key constructs—museum display strategy, Orientalist narrative legacy, and postcolonial curatorial approach—as independent variables influencing how Asian ceramic visual culture is reframed in contemporary exhibitions. A conceptual framework is developed to critically analyze the visual politics of these displays and their implications for heritage interpretation, decolonial practice, and cultural representation. By drawing on illustrative mini-case analyses, the paper demonstrates how curatorial choices can either reinforce or resist historical power imbalances embedded in museological traditions. The study contributes to the advancement of theoretical discourse in critical heritage studies and offers actionable insights for curators seeking to challenge inherited colonial display paradigms.

**Keywords:** Asian ceramics; Orientalism; visual culture; postcolonial museology

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Background

Asian pots are among some of the most elegant and symbol-laden forms of creativity in the world. Enter the imperial porcelains of the Ming and Qing dynasties, along with Japanese tea ware and Korean celadon. These are objects of legitimate culture; they embody values, philosophies and aesthetics. These ceramics were exported over centuries into western collections via trade, diplomacy, missionary work and colonial annexation (Teece, 2024). A succession of major European and North American museums—including the British Museum, the Albert Museum (V&A), the Art Institute of Chicago, among a number of others—have formed first-rank collections of Asian ceramics that they continue to display as part of their permanent installations (Chopard, 2020).

Although these are educational performances, for an international audience to learn and appreciate each other's culture, they also carry the burden of historical power play. How Asian ceramics have been analyzed, categorized, and displayed is often guided by curatorial values steeped in Western modes of collecting and display (Kersel, 2022). More often than not, this has led to idealized images which focus on a particular beauty without including its cultural, religious and social context. Asian ceramics have often been presented as the decorative, the exotic, the timeless—echoing larger trends in cultural representation shaped through colonial and imperial moments (Michelson-Ambelang, 2022).

There has been a growing effort in recent years within museums to critically engage in these legacies. The ethics of display, provenance and narrative framing are rising agendas for curators and institutions (Kersel, 2022). Decolonization, reframing, and inclusive curation are just a few terms that have appeared in professional conversations, eliciting appropriations to re-interpret non-Western collection in more sensitive and in depth ways (Bilbao, 2021; Michelson-Ambelang, 2022). But the visual tactics employed to highlight Asian ceramics – and the implications of those tactics – are inconsistent and understudied. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that, even while institutions incorporate new interpretive frameworks, aesthetic presentation remains a site of the prioritization of form and beauty rather than historical or cultural context (Austin 2022). This paper explores how Western museums are currently navigating the balance between aesthetic appreciation and critical reinterpretation, particularly in the presentation of Asian ceramic heritage.

### **Problem Statement**

Although this turn has produced valuable criticisms of collection histories and exhibition strategies, it has also created silences with respect to the use of these frameworks to analyze Asian ceramic heritage. Existing work to date has addressed either repatriation debates, ethnographic collections or the curation of African and Indigenous artifacts (Bilbao, 2021). Asian ceramics, particularly in art rather than anthropological museums, have tended to be treated as purely aesthetic artefacts, severed from socio-political histories (Glaister, 2021).

This lack of scrutiny is dangerous, because the way Asian culture is presented through the lens of the museum still influences the way the public thinks about the continent – even when curators are attempting to present it in a neutral or balanced way. For example, curatorial decisions about how to isolate ceramics in glass cases, or how to place the focus on technical mastery rather than culturally meaningful usage, or how to present ceramics with little context, might reinforce Orientalist notions of an immutable or decorative or spiritually exotic Asia (Kersel, 2022). These nuances are often blind spots for the average tourist, but they might perpetuate colonial gazes (Fallows et al., 2022).

#### *Research Question 1: How do contemporary Western museums curate and display Asian ceramic heritage?*

Although institutions like the British Museum and V&A have revised their exhibition strategies to include more contextual information, curatorial analyses often reveal continued reliance on aesthetic framing and Eurocentric design logics (Brown, 2023); (Glaister, 2021). There is limited qualitative research that critically evaluates these strategies in relation to Asian ceramics, especially in art museums where ceramics are typically framed as refined decorative objects rather than socio-political artifacts (Teece, 2024).

#### *Research Question 2: To what extent do Orientalist narrative legacies influence these curatorial practices and interpretations?*

While some museums now engage in postcolonial approaches—such as co-curation, multi-vocal labeling, and provenance transparency—there is a lack of research examining how effectively these practices are implemented in displays of Asian ceramics, and whether they challenge or reinforce existing visual hierarchies (Kersel, 2022; Michelson-Ambelang, 2022).

*Research Question 3: How are postcolonial curatorial strategies being employed to reframe, resist, or complicate the visual representation of Asian ceramic heritage?*

Even in modern exhibitions, the traces of Orientalist discourse persist through visual tropes—such as serene minimalism, spiritual detachment, or hyper-focus on dynastic chronology without critical interrogation of colonial acquisition practices (Wang & Zhu, 2024). These narrative residues shape the ideological framing of Asian heritage, often subtly reinforcing colonial views under the guise of cultural celebration.

In short, there is a conceptual gap in understanding how Asian ceramic displays are being reimagined in the post-Orientalist, postcolonial era, and what visual-cultural work these reimagining's perform.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant on three levels: theoretical, practical, and disciplinary. Conceptually, this paper contributes to postcolonial theory and visual culture studies by applying them to the underexplored field of Asian ceramic heritage. It expands Edward Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism by showing how its visual and epistemic residues continue to influence museum exhibition practices. Moreover, it engages with Nicholas Mirzoeff's (2011) visual culture theory to demonstrate how curatorial decisions are not merely aesthetic choices, but ideological acts that shape how cultural identities are constructed and understood in public space. By theorizing the intersection of museum display strategies, Orientalist narrative legacy, and postcolonial curatorial approaches, this paper proposes an integrated framework for analyzing representational politics in the museum context.

From a curatorial and museological standpoint, the article offers useful information for museum professionals who are looking for ways to critically engage with non-Western collections. It points up the necessity to move beyond mere surface diversity, and beyond even, to the deeper ideological resonance of how objects are framed, voiced, visualized. In the process the paper promotes more reflexive and dialogic models of exhibition – those that listen for provenance, historical trauma and cultural voice. This is especially pertinent in an era where institutions are met with growing public scrutiny around issues such as accountability, inclusivity and ethical means of display.

In the field of museum studies, art history and cultural heritage, with a specific thematic and methodological establishment, ceramic works in Asia, which are sandwiched between work of art, historical artifact and diplomatic gift, have long remained as the absent referent in the postcolonial literature. It repositioned ceramics as more than mere decorations – as locations where meaning had been fought over across histories of empire, trade and transnational cultural traffic. Such focus has the potential to disrupt hegemonic narratives and opportunities to pursue interdisciplinary work that integrates object-based analysis with larger cultural analysis.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Orientalism and the Museum**

The concept of Orientalism, as formulated by Edward Said (1978), refers to the West's systematic production of knowledge about "the East" as exotic, timeless, and inferior. This framework has

profoundly influenced how non-Western cultures have been represented in Western art, literature, and institutions—including museums. Orientalism is not only a discourse but also a visual and material system that manifests through curatorial practices, object categorization, and spatial arrangement. Museums, in particular, have historically functioned as sites of epistemic power, reinforcing colonial narratives under the guise of education and cultural appreciation (Bilbao, 2021; Michelson-Ambelang, 2022). In the context of museum exhibitions, Orientalism operates through various display strategies: the isolation of Asian objects in thematic rooms, the emphasis on aesthetic qualities over cultural function, and the absence of critical contextualization of how artifacts were acquired (Glaister, 2021). For instance, Chinese ceramics in Western museums are often framed as symbols of imperial elegance or technical refinement, detached from the socio-political conditions of their production and circulation (Teece, 2024; Wang & Zhu, 2024). These forms of representation contribute to a selective narrative that privileges beauty while silencing histories of colonial extraction and cultural misinterpretation.

### **Visual Culture and the Politics of Display**

Visual culture theory emphasizes that visual representation is never neutral. Scholars like Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) and Gillian Rose (2016) argue that images and displays are deeply embedded in systems of ideology, authority, and meaning making. Museums, as curated visual spaces, operate not only as preservers of heritage but also as producers of knowledge and cultural identity. Through lighting, labeling, spatial organization, and inter-object relationships, museums communicate values that often remain implicit yet powerful.

In this light, the presentation of Asian ceramics must be understood as part of a broader visual regime that constructs and directs the viewer's gaze. The absence of narrative context, the use of minimalist design, or the romanticization of form and craftsmanship can render these objects as aesthetically desirable but culturally decontextualized. Visual culture theory encourages scholars and curators to interrogate the visual codes that structure these exhibitions—asking not just what is being shown, but how and why it is shown that way.

### **Postcolonial Curatorial Practices**

Postcolonial theory has contributed to an emerging interest in museum studies—sometimes known as critical or decolonial museology. This is a methodology that aims to counteract the institutional legacies of colonialism and in so doing, to foreground 'multiple voices,' often those of historically under-represented communities. Hence curators are increasingly being asked to disclose the history of collection provenance, include source communities in the design of exhibitions, and use interpretive strategies that challenge rather than simplify cultural stories (Menozzi, 2024). In practice, this has translated into various curatorial practices—revised gallery texts and thematic rehangs, to community co-curation and digital storytelling (Karliner, 2022). However, many of these reforms remain inconsistent, symbolic, or constrained by institutional inertia. Critics have suggested that, without actual redistribution of interpretive power, progressive shows may replicate the very structures of cultural power they aim to transcend (Weber-Sinn & Ivanov, 2020). In the case of Asian ceramics, postcolonial curation needs to extend beyond simply providing historical context or provenance of an object—and to think about how display decisions impact interpretation, and whose voices are centered or foregrounded.

### Contemporary Practices in the Display of Asian Ceramics

Although Asian art has long been a staple of Western museum collections, the specific treatment of ceramics remains under-discussed in postcolonial and visual culture literature (Karliner, 2022; Menozzi, 2024). Often categorized as “decorative arts,” ceramics have been historically relegated to peripheral gallery spaces or subsumed within broader “Asian art” narratives. This marginalization reflects broader disciplinary hierarchies that privilege painting, sculpture, and monumental art over craft-based or utilitarian forms (Verbytska, 2024). Nonetheless, some recent exhibitions have attempted to reframe Asian ceramics through innovative curatorial approaches. For example, the British Museum’s Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia incorporates multimedia storytelling and thematic juxtaposition, while the V&A’s Ceramics Galleries provide historical timelines that trace global circulation and cultural exchange (Wang & Zhu, 2024). These efforts signal a growing awareness of the need to contextualize objects more thoughtfully—but they also reveal the challenges of balancing aesthetic appreciation with critical interpretation (Ng, Hudson & Roessel, 2022). As yet, few studies have evaluated whether these changes genuinely shift visitor perceptions or dismantle inherited Orientalist frameworks (Johnstone, Liao & Strani, 2024).

### Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature reviewed highlights several key issues. First, Orientalist representation continues to inform the visual presentation of Asian heritage, particularly through subtle curatorial and spatial cues. Second, visual culture theory provides tools for analyzing how museums mediate meaning through display. Third, while postcolonial curatorial practices offer promising pathways for rethinking representation, their application to Asian ceramics remains limited and uneven. The conceptual gap lies in the intersection of these three areas: how Orientalist legacies, visual culture strategies, and postcolonial intentions together shape the visual representation of Asian ceramic heritage in contemporary Western museums. While there is literature on each of these domains individually, few works offer an integrated conceptual model to analyze this convergence. This paper aims to fill that gap by proposing a theoretical framework that brings together museum display strategies, Orientalist narrative legacy, and postcolonial curatorial approaches as key variables influencing representation.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This conceptual paper is grounded in a critical interpretive framework that draws upon three interrelated theoretical traditions: Orientalism, visual culture theory, and postcolonial museology. These perspectives are used not only to understand how Asian ceramic heritage is currently represented in Western museums, but also to interrogate the ideological forces and historical legacies that shape such representations. By integrating these theories, this paper develops a conceptual foundation for analyzing the intersection of display, power, and cultural meaning.

### Orientalism (Edward Said)

The theory of Orientalism, advanced by Edward Said (1978), gives the seminal critique of how the West has historically produced “the East” as an exoticized, frozen, and violent Other. Orientalism is not just a discursive formation, but also informs visual practices, institutional knowledge and structures of cultural representation (Bilbao, 2021). In the contest of museums, Orientalism is reiterated through

how the Asian object is framed, classified and viewed. This incorporates the hierarchical, romantic and aesthetic isolation of an exhibition's form over its cultural and social meaning (Glaister, 2021; Wang & Zhu, 2024). The application of Orientalism in this research provides a critical reading to show how the colonial visual logics from the colonial period have persisted in shaping the display and representation of Asian ceramic heritage in modern institutions (Brown, 2023). It also sheds light on how, even when sincere and well-meaning, exhibitions can perpetuate misguided or troublesome tropes (e.g., timelessness, spiritual purity, and civilizational hierarchy) by eliding the history, politics, and culture in which the objects were made and/or acquired (Michelson-Ambelang, 2022; Verbytska, 2024).

### **Visual Culture Theory**

A second lens through which this paper can interrogate museum exhibitions as ideological and representational systems is visual culture theory. As Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011), Gillian Rose (2016), and Tony Bennett (1995) have contended, visual experience is never “neutral”; it is always mediated by power, discourse, and institutions. Museums serve as optical regimes that shape how visibility is produced, interpreted and accounted for. Through the spatial design, lighting, captions, and the order in which they appear, a visual and conceptual narrative is created of images as they relate to one another. With Asian ceramics, current paper suggests to investigate how forms are carriers for meaning, rather than just that which is being depicted by the artist (what is referred to as visual culture theory). It demonstrates the way in which aesthetic organization, the presence or lack of cultural references, and the sensorial design of the gallery space converge in how the visitor sees what he sees. By utilizing this theory, museum displays are understood as a location for the making of meaning between historical representation and contemporary interpretation.

### **Postcolonial and Critical Museology**

A third theoretical underpinning is post-imperial museology, a discipline that offers a counter read of the ways in which museums have constructed and endorsed colonial ways of understanding the world. This tradition also extends further postcolonial theory (e.g., Bhabha, Spivak), but is particularly targeted at how institutions may approach decolonial or reflexive curatorial practices. For example, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) and Dudley (2011) argue for curatorial propositions that are participative, polyvocal and site-responsive. Postcolonial museology requires such institutions to re-conceptualize the way in which they present non-Western collections, and not simply its surface display but rather through epistemological, institutional and interpretive processes. Using this perspective in relation to Asian ceramics, the paper investigates whether and how collectors and curators are being initiative-taking in critical re-interpretation of collections, questions over provenance, community engagement, and to confronting historical injustices.

### **Application of Theories to Conceptual Constructs**

Based on these three theoretical lenses, this paper identifies the following conceptual constructs. These constructs will guide the conceptual discussion in the next section, where their interaction will be explored to understand how Western museums frame Asian ceramic heritage in the postcolonial era.

Table 1. Theories Application to Constructs

Construct	Theoretical Basis	Description
Museum Display Strategies	Visual culture theory	Curatorial decisions related to spatial layout, object arrangement, labeling, and narrative sequencing.
Orientalist Narrative Legacy	Orientalism (Said)	The continued influence of colonial discourses that frame Asia as exotic, passive, or culturally static.
Postcolonial Curatorial Approaches	Postcolonial museology	Efforts to decolonize exhibitions through provenance transparency, inclusive narratives, and reflexive curatorship.
Visual Representation of Asian Ceramic Heritage (DV)	All three	The outcome of display and narrative choices—how Asian ceramics are seen, interpreted, and valued by the public.

#### 4. CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION AND ANALYTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This section interprets how the three key constructs—museum display strategies, Orientalist narrative legacy, and postcolonial curatorial approaches—conceptually interact to influence the visual representation of Asian ceramic heritage in Western museums. Drawing on the theoretical framework outlined earlier, this discussion emphasizes the layered and often contradictory ways in which heritage is constructed and communicated within institutional settings.

##### Museum Display Strategies as Visual Language

Museum exhibition tactics represent the most obvious and direct stratum of interpretation. By selecting how objects are oriented with respect to others, in what order they are arranged, how they are lit, what colors surround them, what they are labeled as, how they are accompanied by other media, curators determine how objects are seen and understood. In the nature of Asian ceramics, these decisions typically value aesthetic form — glaze, shape and technical sophistication — at the expense of cultural, ritual or political importance (Fallows, White & Brownsword, 2022). For example, putting a Ming vase in a case under soft light might be the best viewing condition to make it a work of fine art, but this framing might also separate the vase from its unframed historical function as a household object, a diplomatic gift or a ritual object (Wang & Zhu, 2024). Minimalist display environments, common in Western museums, can promote clarity and focus, but they also run the risk of flattening cultural complexity. Unmoored by such contextual anchors these can inadvertently reinscribe Asia as mystical, abstract or aesthetically disassociated – thus echoing Orientalist frames of vision (Johnstone, Liao & Strani, 2024; Kersel, 2022).

##### The Persistent Influence of Orientalist Narratives

While museums seek transformative ways to present their collections, the legacies of Orientalist narratives remain apparent in the manner that collections of Asian ceramics are displayed. These legacies are not necessarily explicit but can survive through more nuanced modes of framing. For instance,

narrative panels might promote dynastic histories and imperial patronage to assert civilizational hierarchies, while excluding historical encounters of foreign experience, cross-cultural negotiation, or colonial intervention (Brown, 2023; Glaister, 2021). In certain displays Asian ceramics are presented within universalist stories of human creativity, although not whitewashing the colonial means by which these objects were often acquired (Michelson-Ambelang, 2022; Verbytska, 2024). These absences are characteristic of a history of institutional selectivity in which Western audiences are invited to gaze on the beauty of “Eastern” objects without reckoning with the asymmetries of cultural power that made those objects visible (Kersel, 2022). This subtle genealogy of Orientalism as framing can help to remind curators that it is not just their shows that need redesigning, but also who has the authority to interpret in the first place (Bilbao, 2021).

### **Postcolonial Curatorial Approaches as Disruptive Potential**

Postcolonial curatorial strategies provide an avenue for destabilizing and reconfiguring these representational dynamics. These counter-narratives can take the form of techniques such as collaborative curation, with diaspora and source communities, the use of multiple interpretive voices, critical tagging linked to provenance and context, and digital interventions that enable layered storytelling (Ellegaard, 2024; Weber-Sinn & Ivanov, 2020). These strategies, when employed mindfully, have the capacity to transform the museum's role from authoritative interpreter into a dialogically facilitative one (Lacedelli et al., 2023). When it comes to Asian ceramics, a postcolonial approach might mean not organizing objects according to dynastic periods, but according to other themes such as migration, material experimentation, or cultural cross-fertilization. They could give precedence to contemporary Asian ceramicists who answer to historical forms, or they could include critical commentary regarding how the objects were collected and why they are on display in the West (Margetts, 2023). Even if these measures are emergent and uneven, they signal a turn toward curatorial accountability and reflexivity. But the embrace of postcolonial ethos faces institutional inertia, resource constraints, and fear of losing the trust or market of traditional populations (DeBoer, 2023). Therefore, the fusion of these methodologies is often nominal or provisional. The difficulty lies in not seeing postcolonial strategies as superficial correctives, but as devices that shape how exhibitions are thought about in the first place.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

### **Theoretical Contributions**

The paper intervenes in ongoing theoretical discussions taking place within postcolonial studies, visual culture and critical museology by charting a more composite approach, one which connects these discourses to the particular context of Asian ceramic heritage display. When it comes to postcolonial critiques of museum studies, attention tends to be paid to ethnographic objects and the politics of human remains, with “decorative arts” like ceramics often left under-theorized. By positioning Asian ceramics at the core of cultural representation, thereby denying disciplinary hierarchies that privilege high art over craft, political history over material aesthetics.

Extending Said's (1978) notion of Orientalism, the paper shows how visual and curatorial interventions are still exercising representational authority, albeit in more ambivalent and subtle forms. The use of



visual culture theory (Mirzoeff, 2011; Rose, 2016) makes a closer reading of how museum spaces operate as ideological spaces – not just presenting heritage but controlling how it is viewed, known and remembered. Further to this, the paper uses postcolonial museology (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Sandell, 2007) to situate curatorial practice as a site of theoretical reflection and engagement, as a space whereby meaning becomes open to negotiation rather than fixed. In this way, using multiple theories creates a more complex analysis of how visual, spatial, and textual regimes intersect in shaping public perception of Asian identity, cultural value and their semiotics.

Theoretically, this article contributes to the field of representation studies by suggesting that museum visual culture should be analyzed not in isolation but alongside institutional heritage, curatorial intervention and historical ideology. With its focus on medium-specific analysis—especially of ceramic traditions, it forges new theoretical ground in its exploration of how an object that is utilitarian or craft-based is implicated in larger cultural stories. The contribution also calls on future theorization to attend more closely to “minor” art forms as operative agents in the formation of meaning and power.

### **Practical Implications for Museum Curation**

Beyond theoretical understanding, this is also a paper of practical relevance for curators across the museum sector who are looking to decolonize their museums and reframe their interpretive practice. The theoretical framework that has been developed here insists curatorial display choices—strategies of lighting, spacing, labeling, and thematic sequencing—are never neutral. Every visual and spatial choice plays into a story about Asia and its inhabitants and legacy. Museums that still place greater value on aesthetic form than cultural context, or technical mastery over historical complexity, risk perpetuating simplified views of Asian culture, in effect reviving Orientalist narratives.

This essay asks curators to critically assess if their modes of presentation perpetuate received hierarchies or in fact create room for multiple interpretations. Postcolonial curatorial strategies, including collaborating with Asian communities and being transparent about provenance, for example, and the addition of narrative layers through digital media, are also important in the design of more ethical and dialogic exhibitions.” These methodologies do not only contribute to cultural respectfulness and accuracy, but they also reframe the museum as a contested space, as opposed to a voice of authority.

The framework presented provides a self-evaluation instrument for institutions. If curators and designers consider the presence (or absence) of these constructs—display strategies, an Orientalist legacy and postcolonial intent—their practices can be evaluated as to whether they really adhere to the rhetoric of inclusivity or simply engage in tokenistic change. And as public demands for cultural accountability enhance, particularly in post-Black Lives Matter and post-pandemic environments, they need to show that their interpretive decisions are not just aesthetically interesting and appealing but politically and ethically driven.

### **Disciplinary Relevance and Research Advancement**

This paper further contributes to museum studies, Asian art history and visual cultures, as due to the lack of research in this field from a thematic and methodological point of view. As a launch into this

frothy, academic, post-colonial, decolonial, critical thinking and ways of doing, a rather vibrant field of critique about decolonial exhibition practice has grown in the last few years, and yet very little has focused on the ceramic arts, and still less on global heritage and the ways in which the visual works through aesthetics and power. Ceramics are a tangent in the canon of Asian art or, as static objects, are seen as having little political charge. This paper re-situates them as performative, ideologically inflected cultural texts that are articulate with key issues of identity, colonial inheritance and intercultural discourse.

It suggests a theoretical framework that can be applied to conceptual as well as empirical studies. This model may be used by researchers as a tool for analyzing particular exhibitions through case studies, interviews or visitor reception analysis. It might also inform important audits of museum policies, and help identify institutional blind spots or imbalances of representation. Moreover, the paper promotes interdisciplinary partnerships between curators, historians and visual culture scholars to co-create more inclusive systems of heritage display.

Finally, it adds to the history of decolonial thought in cultural institutions and contributes to cultural institutions evolving decolonial thought through its provocation around how theoretical critique can support and enhance curatorial practices. Instead of languishing within the walls of academic theorizing, the unfurling of all that has been offered here is meant to be actionable, responsive, and transformational—and for use in the teacher's lounge, the conference room, or the therapy office.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the multifaceted ways in which Asian ceramic heritage is being mediated in the Western museum context today, particularly within institutions like the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago. Through incorporating Orientalism, visual culture theory/cartography of the visual and postcolonial museology, the study has presented a framework that consists of three main elements: museum display solutions, Orientalist narrative inheritance and postcolonial curatorial strategies. These components come together to determine the visual portrayal of Asian ceramics, one that reflects and transcends historical power.

This conversation also pointed out that curating is not a neutral, inert act of conservation but a powerful type of cultural storytelling. The ways in which ceramic objects are exhibited, presented and framed also play a role in the larger edifice of Asia in the public Western imagination. Despite the increasing use of decolonial language in museums, as this study has demonstrated, Orientalist legacies and actors endure, often discreetly, in visual and spatial practice. Meanwhile, decolonial curatorial strategies promise significant possibilities for reshaping such narratives, encouraging ethical interfacing with collections and facilitating inclusive interpretations.

This paper's theoretical extensions are the application of postcolonial critique into the little-studied realms of ceramic heritage, and its visual politics. Yet the framework discussed here is an instrument of diagnosis for museums that wish to evaluate their interpretations against changing ethical and social norms. Disciplinary, the research raises the question of the lack of scholarly attention dedicated to

medium specific and visually explicit analytical approach in the era of global heritage representation.

In the future, the authors suggest that empirical visitor reception studies, curatorial interviews, and exhibition case studies can be performed in order to assess and refine the proposed model. Further comparative studies among institutions, even between cultural collections, would continue uncovering how strategies for representation vary in relation to context, audience, or institutional mission. However, this paper insists on more serious critical engagement with the aesthetics of heritage and the politics of display—serving to remind us that what this paper see in the museum is never merely an object, but a story, a construction of power, identity and cultural memory.

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