



Goryeo Celadon as a Diplomatic Gift in the Late Joseon and Modern Periods

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Abstract

The late 19th century marked a significant period in Korea's history, when it established formal diplomatic relations with the outside world. Goryeo celadon began appearing in the context of diplomatic and other exchanges in the 19th century. These celadon pieces were exquisite and often of the highest quality. There are also cases of foreign diplomats collecting Goryeo celadon. British consul William Carles, French consul Victor Collin de Plancy, and American consul Horace Allen played prominent roles in collecting, selling, and donating Goryeo celadon. In the complex landscape of East Asian diplomacy, ceramics occasionally played a role in exchanges between China, Japan, and Southeast Asian regions. Overall, this phenomenon can be attributed to the changing economic and cultural value of Goryeo celadon, particularly during the late 19th century. However, the inclusion of Goryeo celadon in diplomatic contexts or as prominent diplomatic gifts was also closely related to the changing perception of Goryeo celadon within Korea, as it began to be viewed from a more externalized perspective. Moreover, as foreign interest in Korean (Joseon) culture expanded into a range of ethnographic studies, Goryeo celadon came to be recognized as an artistic product that demonstrated the cultural competence of the nation. Simultaneously, Goryeo celadon took on the role of a diplomatic medium, symbolically representing Korea's heritage on a national level.

Keywords: Goryeo celadon, Joseon dynasty, Korean Empire, diplomatic gifts, diplomatic relations, celadon collecting, resurrection, ethnographic research

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Introduction

The practice of designated individuals travelling to other countries to exchange or present goods with the host nation for diplomatic purposes can be referred to as presenting diplomatic gifts or offerings. As Korea opened its borders and established formal diplomatic relations in the late 19th century, foreign scholars, diplomats, doctors, businessmen, and others began entering the country. These visitors arrived for activities related to travel, academic research, business, and other ventures, and during their sojourns sometimes collected Korean folk materials, such as household items, clothing, everyday goods, and crafts like porcelain and lacquerware. Notably, the collection and exchange of thousand-year-old Goryeo celadon artifacts gained considerable popularity amongst foreign diplomats and other figures residing in Korea during this period. Celadon came to be considered a valuable item for collecting, alongside Chinese and Japanese ceramics. In this paper, the author intends to explore how Goryeo celadon began to be included in diplomatic gifts, both formal and informal, presented by the Joseon dynasty during this time. Furthermore, Goryeo celadon began to be selected and included as a representative craft item for display at modern world exhibitions and museums in Europe and America, a tendency that stemmed from the royal practice of presenting Goryeo celadon as diplomatic gifts to foreign nations.

The use of Goryeo celadon as diplomatic gifts dates back to the Goryeo period itself. Goryeo celadon gained renown over the course of the Chinese Song and Yuan dynasties and Chinese literary works and collection guidelines made note of celadon as a ceramic of outstanding quality and a valuable collection item. As Goryeo's relationship with the Yuan became closer following the Mongol invasions in the 13th century, Goryeo celadon became a tributary gift to the Yuan emperor. One of the most famous instances of this is the story of the overglazed gold-painted celadon of the Yuan dynasty, introduced in the *Goryeosa* (History of Goryeo).¹ Jo In-gyu

1. "Jo In-gyu jeon" 趙仁規傳 (Biography of Jo In-gyu), "Yeoljeon" (Biographies), in *Goryeosa* (History of Goryeo), *gwon* 105. For more on the ceramic exchanges between Goryeo and the Yuan during the era of Kublai Khan, see Jang (2019).

was a royal translator fluent in Mongolian, and thus was dispatched as an envoy to the Yuan over 30 times. Eventually, King Chungnyeol of Goryeo requested Jo be appointed as an official translator for the Yuan, and fortuitously, Jo had concurrently gained the trust of Chungnyeol's queen, who was the daughter of Kublai Khan and a princess of the Yuan dynasty (Jang 2009c). Thus, he successfully became a Yuan official and was able to rise to the highest court rank and marry his daughter into the Goryeo royal family. During his rise to fortune, Jo presented a piece of overglazed gold-painted celadon, renowned as the most splendid and valuable type of Goryeo celadon, as a gift of gratitude to the Yuan, and ultimately succeeded in fulfilling his greatest ambitions. Due to the fragile nature of celadon pieces and the expense of the gold used in their decoration, Kublai Khan told Jo that there was no need to gift him with any more golden-threaded celadon. However, in the 23rd year of King Chungnyeol's reign (1297), Goryeo envoys attended the Yuan emperor's New Year celebration and once again presented him with golden-threaded celadon for the occasion.² This was likely because the Yuan royal family's appreciation for golden-threaded celadon was still apparent.

After the late 15th century, the ceramic items used by the royal family of the Joseon dynasty shifted primarily to white porcelain, replacing Goryeo celadon. In 1428 and 1430, the Ming Emperor Xuande 宣德帝 (r. 1425–1435) sent pure white porcelain and blue-and-white porcelain pieces as gifts to King Sejong 世宗 (r. 1418–1450) of Joseon.³ There is also a record of Ming envoys to Joseon requesting dozens of pieces of white porcelain.⁴ In the context of Sino-Korean relations, ceramics were mostly included as tribute items (*sayeopum* 賜與品), meaning they were included in gifts that China sent to the king of Joseon through envoys or ambassadors (Seo 2019, 181–231).

Meanwhile, diplomatic relations with Japan from the early to late

2. “Chungnyeol 4” (King Chungnyeol 4 [1297]), in *Goryeosa*, *gwon* 31.

3. *Sejong sillok*, (Veritable Records of King Sejong), *gwon* 10, 19th day of the 7th lunar month 10, 1428; *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 12, 17th day of the 7th lunar month, 1430.

4. *Sejong sillok*, *gwon* 7, 15th day of the 2nd lunar month, 1425.

Joseon period consistently involved the presentation of gifts to Japan through communication missions (*tongsinsa* 通信使). These included various silk textiles, incense, ginseng, honey, fur, scriptures, books, musical instruments, paper, fans, and craftworks, among other items. As these gifts were given often and in substantial quantity, they are noted as having contributed to enhancing the culture and benefitting the economy of Japan (D. Kim, et al. 2007). However, Goryeo celadon was included in the presentation of diplomatic gifts by the Joseon royal family only after the 19th century.

How then did Goryeo celadon come to play such a significant role in Joseon's diplomatic gift exchange from the late 19th century? Against the background of the traditional East Asian world order and in the face of new interactions with the West, the inclusion of Goryeo celadon as a device of diplomacy can be seen as a reflection of celadon's reformed reputation within Joseon itself. In other word, this change signifies a shift in cultural and economic values. In this context, this article aims to examine cases where Goryeo celadon was utilized as diplomatic gifts in Korea's relations with Europe, the United States, and Japan after the late 19th century, exploring the reasons behind this shift in perception and examining how Joseon intellectuals and bureaucrats began conceptualizing Goryeo and Goryeo celadon from the 18th century, in relation to the changing dynamics of the Joseon dynasty.

Case Studies of Goryeo Celadon as Diplomatic Gifts

The root cause behind this use of celadon was Joseon's need and desire to build amicable relations between it and other countries. After such relations were established, they were maintained through various diplomatic events and exchanges, and records indicate that Goryeo celadon was gifted particularly often in relations with Japan, the United States, and European states. During this time, the Goryeo celadon used as gifts was primarily the especially fine type of celadon known as *bisaek* 翡色 celadon. Such *bisaek* celadon was produced at the peak of Goryeo's prosperity. These pieces were

characterized by the exceptional quality of their craftwork, featuring exquisite shapes, glazes, and intricate embossing and inscriptions, and were believed to have been produced in locales like Gangjin and Buan during the 12th and 13th centuries.

Goryeo celadon was mainly given as a gift from the Joseon royal family in relations with Western countries, which established new diplomatic relations with Joseon from the late 19th century. There are cases, as in that of France, where Goryeo celadon is included in the official gift exchange list between the two countries, but in most cases it was gifted by the Joseon royal family to individual diplomatic representatives.

Gift of the Japanese Envoy in 1882

In the 6th month of the 19th year of King Gojong's reign (1882), the Imo Rebellion (Imo gullan 壬午軍亂) was instigated by soldiers of the Hwangyeong (Training Bureau) in protest against unfair policies regarding the provision of supplies to their stations. During this rebellion, the Japanese legation was attacked, and a Japanese official was killed. This incident incited the return to power of the king's father, the Heungseon Daewongun 興宣大院君 (1821–1898), who had been sidelined since King Gojong's ascension, and Japan subsequently demanded restitution from Korea. However, the Daewongun had been sapped of much of his political influence during King Gojong's rule and stepped down after only 33 days, allowing King Gojong to regain power. As a result of these events, Korea and Japan signed the Chemulpo Treaty on July 17th of the same year. Under this treaty, Korea agreed to pay reparations to the Japanese government, station guards at the Japanese legation, and send an embassy to Japan to formally apologize. Therefore, the diplomatic mission of 1882 was ostensibly conducted with the purpose of reaffirming trust and strengthening the existing amicable relations between the two nations. Internally, it involved sending a delegation of reformists such as Kim Ok-gyun 金玉均 (1851–1894) as envoys to deliver and execute the king's more subtle agendas.

The details of the diplomatic mission are recorded in the diary *Sahwa-giryak* 使和記略 of Bak Yeong-hyo 朴泳孝 (1861–1939), a special envoy

vested with the authority to represent the Korean mission. The diplomatic mission was carried out over four months, during which the Korean envoys had multiple meetings with foreign diplomats representing other countries in Japan. On such occasions, the Korean envoys would present various gifts to the participants. The gifts sent to accompany Korea's royal letter to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs included a traditional woven decorative mat, ceremonial silver platterware, a book of history titled *Yeosa jegang* 麗史提綱, which documented the history of the Goryeo era, and notably, one piece of Goryeo celadon.⁵

The primary purpose of the Korean envoy on this mission was to negotiate the indemnity payment to Japan for the Imo Rebellion while delivering the king's royal letter. Therefore, it was a singular occasion that required both an apology and a bargain. In this light, the fact that the Korean envoy presented Goryeo celadon and a book of Goryeo history to the Japanese king is noteworthy. Given that this occurred immediately after a sensitive incident had strained relations between the two countries, the choice of gifts would have been given especially careful consideration. As mentioned earlier, the exchanges between envoys with Japan during the Joseon period mainly included items that could contribute culturally and economically to Japan. Therefore, if Goryeo celadon was included in diplomatic gifts with Japan after the 19th century, it may have been to satisfy the tastes of the Japanese royal family or upper class, or because the Joseon royal family recognized Goryeo celadon as a worthy diplomatic gift.

To understand this particular choice, it is important to focus on the figure of Yi Yu-won 李裕元 (1814–1888), who served as the head envoy for Korea during the mission for negotiating the Chemulpo Treaty in 1882. Apart from his political career, Yi Yu-won's literary works are noteworthy in their own right as they make apparent that he was an enthusiast and collector of celadon. In his writings, he provides detailed explanations of the techniques and patterns of Goryeo celadon, such as engraved and inlaid celadon, and he discusses the colors and forms of celadon pieces that he observed from others' collections. Moreover, he details his knowledge of

5. Bak Yeong-hyo, *Sahwagiryak*, September 7, 1882.

circumstances wherein Goryeo celadon excavated from royal tombs was being purchased at high prices by Japanese collectors during the early 19th century (Jang 2021). Considering this background, it is more than likely that Yi Yu-won advised the inclusion of Goryeo celadon among the diplomatic gifts presented by the Korean envoy. In other words, it is reasonable to assume that he suggested this inclusion based on his knowledge of the social and cultural landscape of late-19th century Japan and an understanding of their hosts' preferences and perceptions regarding Goryeo ceramics, and this influenced views on the purpose and value of Goryeo celadon held by the upper echelons of Joseon society.

Gifts to Japan for the Purpose of Commerce

Kim Yun-sik 金允植 (1835–1922) was a notable pro-enlightenment reformist bureaucrat during the era of the Korean Empire (1897–1910). Kim held various diplomatic positions and engaged in negotiations and diplomacy with China, the United States, Japan, and other countries from the time of his appointment at age 46 as a diplomatic envoy in the *yeongseonsa* 領選使—a delegation dispatched to the Qing in 1881 during the reign of King Gojong. The anthology of his works, titled *Unyang jip* 雲養集 and published in 1914, includes letters he sent while fulfilling diplomatic duties in China and Japan, among other items. Although the exact date of these letters is difficult to confirm, one is titled, “A Response to the Japanese,” and within this letter there is mention of the gifting of Goryeo celadon to Japan.

Within the context of the letter, it is not entirely clear who the Japanese person mentioned in this correspondence was. However, the communication appears to involve the Korean Empire-era entrepreneur Bak Gi-jong 朴琪淙 (1839–1907), who sought to establish a railway company with Korean capital and was in the process of attempting to obtain a railway concession. It is apparent that Bak Gi-jong visited Japan at some point and received a telephone as a gift from Japan to convey to the Korean emperor. The letter explains that the Japanese figure appears to have connected Bak Gi-jong with a telephone office in order for him to learn how to use the device, which pleased the Korean king. Around this time, Kim Yun-sik

received a painting as a gift from Japan and in return, Kim Yun-sik sent a gift of Goryeo celadon along with the letter in question.

However, it is worth noting that Bak Gi-jong faced numerous obstacles to obtaining railway concession rights, and that Japan was interfering to prevent Korean capital from gaining control of the railways. In the closing lines of the letter, Kim Yun-sik described the gifted Goryeo celadon as follows: “This Goryeo ceramic may not be a beautiful treasure, but it is an ancient pottery made a thousand years ago in our country. Please accept it as a small token of our sincerity, and I hope that you will cherish it with joy for a long time.”⁶ The description of the ceramic as not a “beautiful treasure” was most likely a customary expression of humility, and although the exact type of celadon is unknown, Kim Yun-sik emphasized its historical value to indicate that it was a rare and valuable piece of craftwork with a history of a thousand years, perhaps to encourage the willingness of the recipient to accept. Aside from the formal expressions of respect and gratitude, considering Bak Gi-jong’s circumstances and the uncomfortable relations between the two nations, the presentation of this gift was most likely intended as an attempt to facilitate good will in a fraught diplomatic situation.

Conclusion of the Korea-Japan Trade Treaty and Gift of Goryeo celadon

In 1876, Joseon and Japan signed a trade treaty (also known as the Ganghwado Treaty). For these negotiations, Shin Heon 申櫪 (1810–1884) had been appointed Minister of Plenipotentiary of Joseon. The work titled *Simhaeng ilgi* 沁行日記 is an unofficial record describing the process through which the Ganghwado Treaty was negotiated and concluded. The record includes the negotiation process and contents, and also summarizes conversations between Korean and Japanese diplomats. To the end of the record is attached a list of gifts sent to Japan, including two pieces of Goryeo celadon, and it is also recorded that they are presumed to have been sent at

6. Kim Yun-sik, *Unyang jip* 雲養集, *gwon* 11, “Dap ilbonin seo” 答日本人書 (Reply Letter to the Japanese People).

the request of Japan.⁷ This is further evidence that there was a preference for Goryeo celadon among the Japanese upper class of the late 19th century.

Goryeo Celadon Gifted to the Russian Ambassador

Emperor Gojong and his consort Empress Myeongseong (1851–1895) served as the resident ambassadors to Russia from 1885 to 1897, and they were known to have had an especially close relationship with Karl Ivanovich Weber (1841–1910, also known by the Korean name Wi Pae 韋貝), who was the Russian consul in Korea during this period. It is reported that the emperor and empress presented Weber with many gifts, including a papercraft box adorned with floral patterns and silver candle holders.⁸ Weber was both an advisor and confidant to Emperor Gojong, with whom he discussed both domestic and foreign issues. As a result, he naturally would have gained insights into Korea's internal affairs and helped steer issues in directions favorable to Russia. In 1886, Weber was key in facilitating secret negotiations between Korea and Russia to counter China's influence and affirm Russia's support of Korean independence.⁹ Over the course of Weber's 12 years as consul, and much to Weber's efforts, the reputation of Russia improving significantly within Joseon, and Gojong also held out much hope and expectations for the country's relationship with Russia. This dynamic played a key role in the later events known as the *agwan pacheon* 俄館播遷 incident—King Gojong's flight to and internal exile in the Russian legation at Seoul during the period 1896–1897—which can be interpreted as an extension of Joseon's diplomatic relationship with Russia. The gifts of the emperor and empress are currently held by the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) in St. Petersburg. The gifted celadon is a fragrant incense burner decorated with engraved lotus leaf patterns on its exterior (Fig. 1).

7. This book is owned by the National Library of Korea and was rediscovered by Cha Mi-ae, a former researcher at the Overseas Cultural Heritage Foundation.

8. For detailed descriptions of the celadon and the donated relics, see National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (2004).

9. This is referred to as the Jono miryak 朝路密約 (Joseon-Russia Secret Agreement).



Figure 1. Celadon incense burner (11th century) and decorated paper box (19th century). Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, St. Petersburg, Russia

Goryeo Celadon Gifted to the Royal Physician

A blue and white celadon pitcher with a lotus pattern held in the Brooklyn Museum in New York is also known to have been gifted by the Korean royal family. This particular piece was presented to Lillias Horton Underwood (1851–1921), who served as the royal physician (*eoui* 御醫) to Empress Myeongseong after arriving in Korea in 1888. The pitcher was passed down to Mrs. Darwin R. James III, a relative of Underwood, and later donated to the museum in 1956 (National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage 2006). In 1889, Lillias married Horace Grant Underwood (1859–1916) and the two established Gwanghyewon 廣惠院, the first Western-style hospital in Korea, where Mrs. Underwood worked as the head of gynecology. It is said that the royal family sent a considerable amount of gifts to the Underwoods at the time of their marriage. Mrs. Underwood ultimately dedicated nearly thirty years to religious, medicinal, and educational work in Korea (Underwood 2008). While it is unclear if the piece in question was one of her wedding gifts, given her role as the personal physician to the empress, it is highly likely that she received the valuable Goryeo celadon as a gift directly from



Figure 2. Ewer with cover (first half 12th century), stoneware with underglaze slip decoration and celadon glaze, 25.1×24.1×14 cm. Brooklyn Museum, New York, gift of Mrs. Darwin R. James III

the royal family. The exquisite design, intricate decorations, and the multicolored aspects of this celadon make it exceptionally fine and a rarity amongst extant Goryeo celadon (Fig. 2).

Goryeo Celadon Gifted to American Diplomatic Personnel

During the late 19th century, after the signing of the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation between the United States and Korea in 1882, several Americans came to Korea for various purposes. Among these, one notable figure was Percival Lawrence Lowell (1855–1916), who served as interpreter and played a significant role in facilitating the United States-Korea diplomatic mission in 1883. In recognition of his efforts, Emperor Gojong of Korea treated him as an honored guest of the state. According to the diary of Yun Chi-ho 尹致昊 (1865–1945), the emperor presented Lowell with a royal gift on February 20, 1884, a celadon bowl with inlaid

chrysanthemum design. This bowl was later donated to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1901 (Lowell 2022).

Horace N. Allen (1858–1932), a physician, missionary, and later the US minister to Korea, arrived in Korea in 1884 and soon witnessed the unfolding of the Gapsin Coup, during which he saved the life of Min Yeong-ik 閔泳翊 (1860–1914). In gratitude, Emperor Gojong presented Allen with a mother-of-pearl inlaid folding screen and a piece of Goryeo celadon. In his diary from 1884, Allen described the celadon he received as “a piece of the ancient Korean pottery very perfect...six or seven hundred years old” (Allen 2008, 419). In a later entry from 1901, Allen makes mention of “a little green-gray bowl carefully packed in a lacquer box,” providing insight into the size, color, and packaging of the celadon. At the time, Allen was unaware of the value of Goryeo celadon and therefore reportedly took it as a joke when he was told that the US legation considered the piece to be priceless (Y. Kim 2016, 393–394). Yet by that point Allen had previously shown interest in and understanding of Chinese, European, and other ceramics, thus his interest in Goryeo celadon was perhaps unsurprising. Allen continued to purchase celadon ceramics excavated from tombs in Gaeseong until 1898. Upon completing his mission and returning to the United States in 1907, he sold more than 80 pieces of ceramics from his collection to the Freer Gallery of Art. Documents of Allen’s time in Korea from 1884 to 1905 are on record at the New York Public Library and these papers make evident that King Gojong’s gift served as a catalyst for Allen to add Korean ceramics to his collection, and that he made consistent efforts towards their sale¹⁰ (Figs. 3 and 4).

Meanwhile, John B. Bernadou (1858–1908), a naval officer and research fellow of the Smithsonian Institution, arrived in Korea in 1884 to investigate the nation’s economic and political potential. During his time with the US legation, Bernadou traveled to such locations such as Gaeseong and

10. See Academy of Korean Studies, accessed April 29, 2024, “Geundae jeonhwangi Allen munseo jeongni” (Allen Documents in the Modern Transition Period), https://waks.aks.ac.kr/rsh/dir/rdirItem.aspx?rptID=AKS-2016-KFR-1230009_DES&rshID=AKS-2016-KFR-1230009&dirRsh=.



Figure 3. *The Bernadou, Allen, and Jouy Korean Collection in the U.S. National Museum, plate XII, caption beneath reads, “Given by the King of Korea to Dr. Allen”*

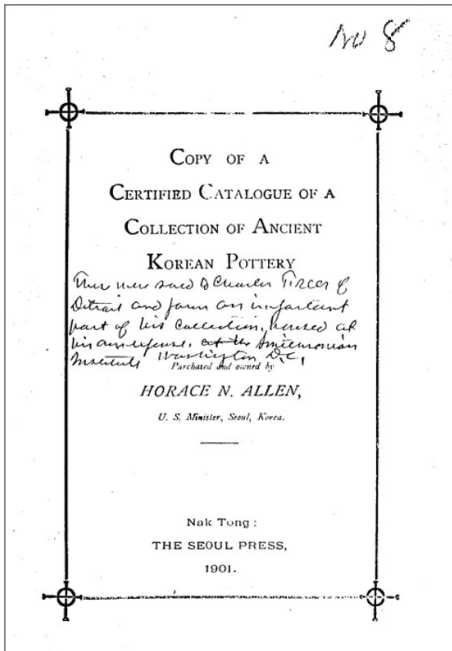


Figure 4. *Title page of Copy of a Certified Catalogue of a Collection of Ancient Korean Pottery Purchased and Owned by Horace N. Allen, U.S. Minister, Seoul, Korea (Nak Tong: The Seoul Press, 1901), New York Public Library*

Pyongyang, and collected high-end ceramics in Seoul (Neff 2023). Bernadou studied Korean with Yun Chi-ho, and in Yun's diary there is an entry mentioning how Bernadou received a piece of Goryeo celadon as a gift from the queen.¹¹

Gifts to Commemorate the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with France

In 1887, the 23rd year of Gojong's rule, Korea and France initiated official diplomatic relations with the signing of the France-Korea Treaty. In 1887, Victor Collin de Plancy (1863–1924) was dispatched as the inaugural French envoy to Korea, facilitating an exchange of ceramicware gifts between King Gojong of Korea and President Sadi Carnot of France to commemorate the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations. France sent two Clodion ceramics made at the National Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory and one Sèvres Salamine vase to Korea, while Korea sent two Goryeo celadon bowls to France. One of these bowls had an engraved parrot design on the inner surface, while the other had an embossed peony vine motif (Fig. 5).

Collin de Plancy, who served in Korea for two terms over thirteen years, was passionate about East Asian studies and ceramics. Though a diplomat, Collin de Plancy was also an avid collector of Korean ceramics and bridged his role as a diplomat with his enthusiasm for Korean ceramics. The Goryeo celadon ceramics that Collin de Plancy donated later became key collections at the Guimet Museum and the Sèvres Museum (Eom 2023). Further, the pieces he donated later became the inspiration for some of the new products and designs attempted by the Sèvres Manufactory (Eom 2013).

Collin de Plancy's passion for ceramics and Korea's desire to connect with the outside world came to mutual fruition during the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle (World's Fair). Aside from the Korean government's

11. Yun Chi-ho, *Yun Chi-ho ilgi* (Diary of Yun Chi-ho), vol. 1, 21st year of King Gojong (1884), July 21.

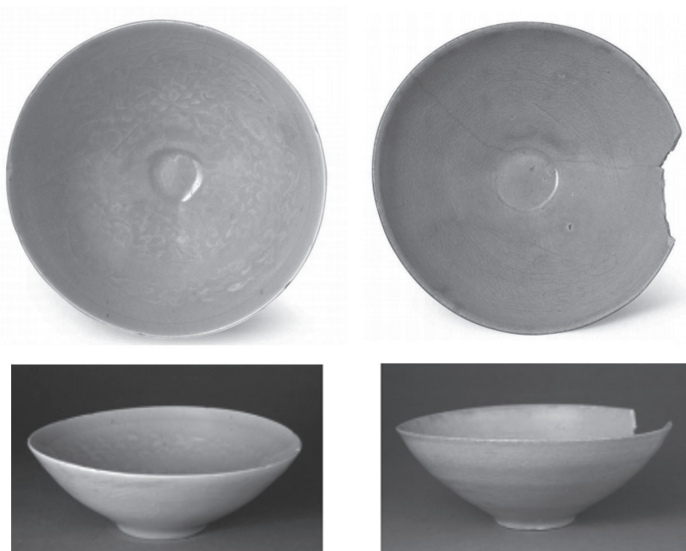


Figure 5. (left) Celadon bowl with peony design in relief (late 12th century), H 7.0 cm, D 19.3 cm. Sèvres National Ceramics Museum; (right) celadon bowl with parrot engraving (late 12th century), H 8.5 cm, D 18 cm. Sèvres National Ceramics Museum

preparation for the fair's planning committee, in 1898, Collin de Plancy made an independent request to the French government for the installation of a Korean pavilion at the fair. He also collaborated with his friend, sinologist Maurice Courant, and Charles Roulina, the consul general of Korea in Paris and the chairman of the Korean Pavilion Committee, in several proactive diplomatic efforts (Eom 2019, 167–200). Maurice Courant, in his retrospective essay discussing the 1900 Paris Exposition, titled “Le Pavillon coréen au Champ-de-Mars,” noted that while he considered modern ceramics to be somewhat crude, he was of the opinion that ceramics from the late Goryeo period were ideal for promoting the merits of Korean ceramics unknown to the French (Jang 2021). Ultimately, the gifts of Goryeo celadon exchanged during the establishment of diplomatic relations led to the opportunity for its presentation at a World's Fair. This, in turn, provided the opportunity to introduce Goryeo celadon to a broader audience and

enhance its reputation. In short, the case of France demonstrated how diplomatic gifts sent through diplomatic channels could evolve into more universalized cultural assets.

Gifts from the Korean Royal Family to British Military Personnel

Among the Korean artifacts held by the British Museum are ceramic pieces donated by William George Kynaston Barnes (1859–?), a surgeon and lieutenant in the British Royal Navy. Barnes collected these pieces in Korea and donated them to the museum on three occasions—in 1891, 1895, and 1899. According to archival records and documentation, two of these items, donated in 1891, were described as being given to Barnes by “Prince Min of Corea” and they were said to be around 600 years old. These items are a celadon dish and a white porcelain bottle (Y. Kim 2019b, 104–123). The “Prince Min of Corea” mentioned here is Min Yeong-ik 閔泳翊 (1860–1914), a relative of Empress Myeongseong (Queen Min) and therefore a member of the royal family.

The exact circumstances of how and when Barnes and Min Yeong-ik met are unknown. The white porcelain bottle appears to be a fairly common-use vessel from the era that Barnes was in Korea but the celadon is a relatively rare piece featuring an embossed design on its inner surface. Barnes was primarily stationed in China, and the pieces were donated in 1891, heightening the probability that Min Yeong-ik presented these items to Barnes sometime between 1886, when the former fled to British Hong Kong, and 1891, when the items were donated to the museum. Barnes subsequently made several trips to Korea, acquiring porcelain from the Bunwon region (where the Joseon royal ceramics factory was located) and other Korean folk items, which he then donated to the British Museum, implying that the Goryeo celadon gifts he received could have been the catalyst for his growing interest in Korea.

Why was Goryeo Celadon Chosen as a Diplomatic Gift?

The simple fact of diplomatic relations being established or treaties being signed does not in and of itself imbue Goryeo celadon with representative symbolism or meaning. Yet if Goryeo celadon was chosen as a diplomatic gift, formally or informally, by the royal family or the upper classes, this implies that there must have been some collectively high regard or valuation of Goryeo celadon. In this section, I aim to examine the changing perceptions of Goryeo celadon in pre-19th century Joseon and the background of how Goryeo celadon was understood and perceived in Japan and the Western world.

Changing Perceptions Regarding Goryeo Celadon in Joseon

One of the prominent features of cultural change during the mid- and late Joseon periods was the widespread reevaluation of Korea's traditional culture. In particular, there was considerable attention and effort paid towards reappraising and rediscovering Korea's history, with a particular interest in the Goryeo period and contemporary Joseon history. As a result, many historical works, such as *Yeosa jegang* 麗史提綱 (Revised Outlines of Korean History) by the 17th-century scholar Yu Gye 兪槩 (1607–1664), were published. Generally speaking, classic historical books in the format of *gangmokche* 綱目體 (a compilation system that records history by class and subject according to year, month, and day) were structured to systematically compile the history of the nation to establish the legitimacy and continuity of the ruling dynasty. During this period, “Goryeo” came to be viewed not as a separate dynasty that needed to be overthrown, but rather as a chapter of domestic history. In fact, the Confucian academy of Sungyang Seowon 崧陽書院 was established in the former Goryeo capital of Gaeseong in commemoration of prominent Goryeo vassal Jeong Mong-ju 鄭夢周 (1337–1392) and visiting Gaeseong became increasingly popular amongst the people of Joseon. Thus, the reevaluation of Goryeo through a more objective perspective lead to a re-appreciation of the historical significance and cultural heritage of the old capital (Jang 2021, 12–40).

The interest in Goryeo history during the late Joseon period was closely tied to the compilation of historical books and a growing appreciation for the records of the *Gaoli tujing* 高麗圖經 (*Goryeo dogyeong* in Korean; Illustrated Account of Goryeo), a classic text on the Goryeo dynasty. Although the *Gaoli tujing* consisted primarily of records from Chinese envoys, it provided detailed accounts of various aspects of Goryeo in the early 12th century, including politics, culture, and customs. And it was included among the must-read books of the intellectual class in the late Joseon period (S. Y. Lee 2005). There were instances where the contents of the Northern Song's *Gaoli tujing* were mixed up or misquoted with those of the Southern Song's *Xiu zhong jin* 袖中錦, but overall the popularization of the text led to reinforcement of the perception that Goryeo celadon was of quality and value that was unique and unparalleled anywhere in the world (Jang 2009a). In short, even before the late 19th-century when modern Japan and Western powers began recognizing Goryeo celadon as a point of anthropological, cultural-historical interest and a valuable collectible, Joseon society had undergone this process from the 18th century onward and had come to conceptualize and name the art form of "Goryeo celadon" as a symbol of not only Goryeo but as a material emblem that encapsulated Korea's rich history, heritage, and culture.

Rather serendipitously, Chinese books related to Korean ceramics began to be translated and publicized during the latter half of the 19th century. The *Gaoli tujing* was likewise translated into English and the recognition of its documentary value led to its inclusion in the field of East Asian ceramic studies (Y. Kim 2019a). And at the intersection of Korea's encounter with the West, the Goryeo celadon presented as official or personal gifts from the upper class remained tangible examples of the material's existence beyond written records. Thus, the Goryeo celadon mentioned in translated texts became materially comparable to Chinese ceramics, allowing for the identification of key similarities and differences and thus enabling the classification of Goryeo celadon's stylistic characteristics.

In the late 19th century, the royal workshops known as *bunwon* 分院 (Joseon royal kiln) began to decline in the face of financial difficulties and

were restructured in 1910 into the Bunwon Ceramic Company. An editorial published in *Hwangseong sinmun* at the time expressed hope for the success of the organization, stating that it would “produce resources that contribute to the abundance of the nation and the people and to the development of civilized industry, and return to the honor it knew as the creator of the Goryeo ceramics of antiquity.”¹² In other words, a national publication created for the intent of informing the nation utilized the symbolism of Goryeo celadon as a reflection of the hope of recovering past fortune and glory.

Goryeo Celadon Becomes an Object of Collectors

Another reason Goryeo celadon came to be used as a diplomatic gift by the royal family and the upper classes during the late Joseon period is that Goryeo celadon was already considered then to be a collectible and was an object of appreciation by the people of Joseon. The interest in Goryeo history among scholars and literary figures resulted in increasingly frequent mention of Goryeo celadon in writings and historical records, especially in writings that described the circumstances of collecting and appreciating Goryeo celadon, most often depicting Goryeo celadon as an item of high quality and class (Jang 2009b).

During the Joseon dynasty, literary collectors gathered books, drawings, and various precious items such as bronzeware, calligraphy, and copies of inscriptions in spaces such as a *jangseoru* 藏書樓, a pavilion for keeping documents and books. This phenomenon began to appear from the 17th century, and the collections of various literary figures and royal families are well known. Among these, Yi Ha-gon's Mangwollu 萬卷樓 in particular was famed as one of the “four great libraries of Joseon,” and King Heonjong's Seunghwaru 承華樓 housed about 600 pieces of paintings to enrich the artistic tastes and hobbies of the king (Hwang 2022, 5–35). Records from the 18th and 19th centuries and literary works by scholars such as Seong Hae-eung 成海應 (1760–1839), Shim Sang-gyu 沈象奎 (1766–1838), Shin Wi 申

12. *Hwangseong sinmun*, August 9, 1906.

緯 (1769–1845), and Yi Yu-won 李裕元 (1814–1888) provide insights and assessments of the forms, colors, and patterns of the Goryeo celadon that these individuals collected, as well as descriptions of how these artifacts were displayed alongside other artifacts, giving us glimpses into the ownership and appreciation of Goryeo celadon. While specific cases of Goryeo celadon ownership during the late Joseon period are scarce, it is clear that Goryeo celadon, alongside Chinese ceramics and bronzes, was a sought-after and prized collection item. There are even accounts of individuals owning Goryeo celadon without the confirmed use of a space like a *jangseoru* (Jang 2009b).

One prominent example of such is a poem found in volume 4 of Yi Ik's 李穡 (1681–1763) *Seongho seonsaeng jeonjip* 星湖先生全集 written in praise of celadon wine cups with mother-of-pearl inlay. The poem describes receiving a gift of celadon wine vessels and cups decorated with the shape of grape clusters and singing for joy. It mentions that although the iridescence of Goryeo celadon was well-known to the world, these particular celadon pieces had a unique shape as if they were made in the style of the Yuezhou kiln (越州窯).¹³ In another instance, Seong Hae-eung writes how Shim Sang-gyu had acquired a ritual celadon pot excavated from the former residence of Ahn Hyang 安珦 (1243–1306) in Gaeseong and cherished it greatly. The piece in question came into further literary notoriety when the renowned scholar and painter Shin Wi famously borrowed it and did not return it for several years.¹⁴

Additional records of Goryeo celadon collections can also be found in the writings of Yi Yu-won. Yi displayed various cultural artifacts such as incense burners, literary and artistic objects, paintings, ceramics, and more in his pavilion, named Sasi Hyanggan 四時香館. Among his collection was said to be a pair of iridescent Goryeo celadon. The description of a pair suggests that they were two pieces of identical shape likely displayed side by side or symmetrically, alongside white porcelain, inksticks, and other literary

13. Yi Ik, *Seongho seonsaeng jeonjip* 4, “Sa namseongsi, ha haeng, hye bisaek horo janban” 謝南聖時 夏行 惠秘色胡盧盞盤 (Looking at the Celadon Teacup Holder).

14. Seong Hae-eung, *Yeongyeongjae jeonjip*, gi 9, mun 1.

items.¹⁵ Yi Yu-won's friend and contemporary Kim Heung-geun 金興根 (1796–1870) owned his own pavilion named Hyeondaeru 玄對樓 and was noted for one day showing his piece of Goryeo celadon to Yi Yu-won. In recording his impression of that moment, Yi Yu-won exalted the celadon's pattern as so vivid and colorful that it dazzled the eyes, and noted its size as about one *ja* (approximately 30 cm). Yi also commented that it seemed like it had just been made and was astonished by its beauty. Considering that this piece was believed to have been found while excavating a Confucian shrine in Pyongyang for repairs, it was most likely a large-sized vase or jar. Yi Yu-won also remarked that such outstanding celadon was from antiquity and could not be reproduced in his own day.¹⁶

If renowned individuals who took care to assemble and house such extensive libraries and collections were thus committed to collecting and commemorating Goryeo celadon, then it stands to reason that Goryeo celadon had already been established as an item of prestige by the late 18th century. While white porcelain served for everyday items of the time, Goryeo celadon was already being regarded as a valuable collectible on par with China's ancient bronzes and renowned ceramics. This is further evinced by the care these writers took to mention the provenance of the Goryeo celadon pieces they owned or admired. They emphasized the value of owning beautiful Goryeo celadon brought from places with a clear and memorable historical origin, and celadon of confirmed origin and meaningful history was emphasized as being worthy of collecting and treasures that anyone would desire to view.

The collecting of Goryeo celadon expanded beyond Korea to Japan. This phenomenon is believed to have become an important reason Goryeo celadon was presented as an official gift during diplomatic relations with Japan in the late 19th century. The previous section discussed how, by the 1880s, Goryeo celadon had begun to appear as diplomatic gifts, and the number of diplomats, soldiers, and others purchasing Goryeo celadon

15. Yi Yu-won, "Sasi hyanggan sojeo gogi" 四時香館所貯古器 (Old Utensils from Sasi Hyanggan), "Hwadong ogsambyeon" 華東玉糝編, *Imha pilgi* 34.

16. Yi Yu-won, "Jagi goje" 瓷器古製 (Old Pottery), *Chunmyeong ilsa* 春明逸史, *Imha pilgi* 29.

increased as Joseon established official diplomatic relations with other countries. These processes most likely involved designated distribution channels, albeit ones that were underdeveloped.

One account of this comes from the early 19th-century work, *Imha pilgi* 林下筆記, from Yi Yu-won's literary collection. This includes a passage titled "Byeongnyeo sinji" 薛荔新志 (Yi Yu-won's thoughts containing extensive information on the cultural system, customs, and culture and arts in the late Joseon Dynasty) that describes how enthusiastic Japanese collectors of Goryeo ceramics spared no expense in acquiring them. In one particular instance, someone had raided a Goryeo royal tomb in Gaeseong and excavated a king's belt made of jade and a set of ceremonial ceramic dishware inscribed with Confucian verses. The price of these ceramics was reported to be 700金. Based on the publication date of the book where this account is recorded, this incident is estimated to have occurred around 1824. By the early 19th century, Japanese buyers were already purchasing Goryeo celadon excavated from Goryeo tombs.

Furthermore, it can be seen that the Japanese intellectual class of the late 19th century recognized Goryeo celadon in the context of East Asian celadon. Evidence of this is the *Seijiron* 青瓷說 (1876), by Mori Tatsuyuki 森立之 (1807–1885), a physician and bibliographer who lived from the Edo into the Meiji period. The contents introduce various types of ceramics from China and Japan, providing explanations and references to relevant documents (Mori 1876). This book itself does not contain specific information about Goryeo celadon, but in 1899 Japan hosted the first-ever dedicated exhibit of Goryeo celadon and a corresponding book was published in 1900 (Katayama 2016).¹⁷ Therefore, we can conclude that Japan had long demonstrated intellectual interest in East Asian ceramics, which quickly grew to include Korean ceramics, and Goryeo celadon in particular. Therefore, if the Joseon royal family or diplomats were aware of such circumstances, it would have been a natural result for Goryeo celadon to be

17. The person who led Japan's first Goryeo celadon exhibition and catalog publication was Yamayoshi Moriyoshi 山吉盛義 (1859–1912), a secretary at the Japanese embassy during the period of Ito Hirobumi's Resident-Generalship.

given as diplomatic gifts, either voluntarily or at the request of Japan.

We also discussed earlier how the 1900s is recognized as the period when high-quality Goryeo celadon began to be exported to the United States and Europe, leading to the concentrated development of collections. In pragmatic terms, the presentation of Goryeo celadon as formal gifts or other acquisition by diplomats began in the 1880s, when treaties for diplomatic relations and commerce were first signed between Korea and various countries (Y. Kim 2016). While the most prominent cases involved Goryeo celadon being gifted to Western individuals who made diplomatic and political contributions in Korea, over time, interest in East Asia from an ethnographic perspective grew and Goryeo celadon was increasingly acquired through commercial intermediaries to become part of public or private collections.

What's more, the Eulsa Treaty of 1905, by which Korea became a protectorate of Japan, served as further catalyst for the acquisition of Korean antiques and artwork by Japanese collectors. After the Eulsa Treaty was signed in November 1905 under Japanese military pressure, Ito Hirobumi 伊藤博文 was appointed as the first Resident-General to oversee a system of so-called protective governance. In 1906, Miyake Chosaku 三宅長策 (1868–1969) was appointed as judge in the Legal Affairs Bureau under the Resident-General's Office in Seoul, and during his time in Seoul he built a collection of Goryeo celadon. According to Miyake's records, Ito acquired thousands of pieces of Goryeo celadon from Japanese sellers who had excavated them in Gaeseong, intending to present them as gifts to the Japanese emperor and other nobility. At that time, few Japanese individuals collected Goryeo celadon for artistic appreciation; rather, they often acquired it along with Gaeseong ginseng as gifts to be sent to Japan. Ito Hirobumi's primary purpose was likewise to collect Goryeo celadon for use as gifts. At one point, he possessed over a thousand pieces of celadon and it is well-known that all those pieces were purchased at the same shop, owned by a dealer named Kondo Sagoro 近藤佐五郎. This fervor resulted in a shortage of Goryeo celadon in Seoul's markets at one point, spurred by the convention that Japanese royal and aristocratic circles considered Goryeo celadon a gift of the highest quality. Ito presented 103 pieces of the finest

ceramics to the emperor, which were later displayed at the Tokyo Museum, and continued to collect Goryeo celadon through another dealer named Nita 新田 to gift to members of the Japanese nobility and royalty (G. Lee 1996, 205). Nita went to dealers in Gaeseong, Ganghwa, Jangdan, and other regions to purchase dozens of pieces at a time. The dealer who led these efforts was Kondo Sagoro. It was Kondo who later became the larger contributor of artifacts for the establishment of the Imperial Household Museum. As a result, in the early to mid-1910s, Goryeo celadon came to be regarded as such a luxury collectible amongst the Japanese upper classes that it became all but impossible to find in the markets of Seoul (G. Lee 1996, 64–66).

Increasing Western Interest in Goryeo Celadon

By the 1880s, Goryeo celadon began to be a part of diplomatic gift-giving. The question then arises: where did these celadon pieces come from? Clues may be found in the records of William Gowland, a British metallurgist and amateur archaeologist working in Japan during the 1880s. Gowland visited Korea in 1884 and according to his records of his experiences with Korean art, it was then that he first encountered ancient Korean jars in Seoul and purchased a gleaming cream-colored piece that had been excavated from a tomb in Gaeseong (modern-day Songdo). During a journey to Busan, he met Pierre Louis Jouy (1856–1894), a collector from the Smithsonian Institution, and obtained several more celadon pieces. This suggests that collecting Goryeo celadon had become an emerging trend among Westerners who visited Korea during the early days of its opening (Gowland 1895, 322).

We can find a more specific account in a report from the early 1880s. Commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution, “The Bernadou, Allen and Jouy Corean Collections in the United States National Museum,” was based on the collections of John Bernadou (1859–1908), a US naval officer, ornithologist Pierre Louis Jouy (1856–1894), and medical missionary Horace Allen (1858–1932), who served at the US Legation in Seoul at the time, and catalogued and analyzed cultural artifacts and artwork collected

by these figures in Korea. This report served as the basis for further research and analysis conducted by Smithsonian ethnologist Walter Hough (1859–1935), who eventually published a book based on this research (Hough 1893). Bernadou, Jouy, and Allen conducted their research between 1883 and 1885, following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Korea in 1882. As was common for Western ethnographic museums encountering new cultures, there was a need to fill the dearth of information about this *unknown country* of Korea, and diplomats, missionaries, doctors, and other Westerners working in Korea were often asked to collect objects on behalf of museums and collectors. As part of such requests, guidelines for specific collection items were often established (Sohn 2016). After the 18th century, Western powers' increasing imperialistic interest in the Far East finally landed upon Korea. This curiosity, combined with the burgeoning culture of collecting among Westerners, may have drawn additional attention to excavated and privately owned Goryeo celadon pieces, perhaps serving to draw them further into commercial markets. It was at this point that the opening of diplomatic relations between Western countries and Korea also led to Korean royalty and nobility disseminating Goryeo celadon around the world as gifts.

The British diplomat William Richard Carles (1848–1929) is a notable example of a diplomatic figure who did not receive Goryeo celadon in a formal capacity but nonetheless collected pieces during his travels in Korea. Carles occupied the post of British consul in Korea between 1884 and 1885 and spent 18 months traveling and documenting his experiences in the country. His records were later published in 1888 as *Life in Corea* (Carles 1888).

During the early years of Korea's opening to the world, a wave of stores dealing in antiques and art cropped up in the newly established port cities. Incheon opened as a port in 1883, somewhat later than Busan (1876) and Wonsan (1880), but Japanese sellers soon commanded the market there. A decade later, in 1893, Incheon's Japanese-owned businesses included two antique dealers and one art-framing shop. The term antiques (*gomul* 古物) used in this context sometimes referred to items like Goryeo celadon excavated from ancient tombs. Thus, it is clear that antique and art

businesses were already operating during that time. The existence of a framing shop suggests a high demand for painted artwork among the city's Western residents (Son 2019).

The records of Emile Martel (1874–1949), a French language instructor at the Hanyang (Seoul) French School (Hanyang beopeo hakgyo 漢城法語學), provide another well-known example. After the opening of Korea to foreign residents in the post-treaty period, it was relatively easy for Westerners residing or temporarily staying in the country as diplomats, doctors, soldiers, journalists, or geographers, to obtain Korean antiques, including Goryeo celadon. But when Martel first arrived in Korea towards the end of the 19th century, antiques like Goryeo celadon were not easily available. Martel first encountered Goryeo ceramics at the French legation under Consul Collin de Plancy and at the American legation under Consul Horace Allen and took a liking to them. He initially sought ceramics like celadon jars, dishes, and bowls, but found it difficult to locate such items in the markets and shops of Seoul. But Korean merchants soon began offering more and more Goryeo ceramics for purchase, which spurred Martel to form his own collection. Martel's records shed light on the nature of Goryeo celadon transactions among Westerners, particularly missionaries, diplomats, teachers, and intellectuals, during the late 19th century in Korea (G. Lee 1996, 205).

Conclusion

This article has explored the process and context of how Goryeo celadon emerged as a symbolic gift of the Joseon royal family and upper classes in the late 19th century as Korea opened its doors to the world and formed official relations with foreign nations. Following Korea's establishment of formal diplomatic relations, individuals such as archaeologists, diplomats, doctors, businessmen, religious figures, and soldiers began entering Korea, and through travels, exhibitions, and auctions, they encountered and collected folk objects like furniture and clothing, as well as crafts like white porcelain and mother-of-pearl.

But after a certain point, ceramics produced in Goryeo a thousand years ago began appearing in the East Asian ceramic collections of foreign visitors and residents, and the prices for such pieces increased. The author noticed a connection between this process and the fact that Goryeo celadon was included in diplomatic gifts given by the Joseon royal court. In other words, just as ancient artifacts and relics have been perceived as repositories of symbolism (Fujitani 2003, 59–132), celadon produced during the Goryeo era could be co-opted as diplomatic gifts because they had come to be perceived as symbols representing the authority, tradition, and trust of the royal court.

There are records dating to the 19th century of Goryeo celadon being given as gifts by the Joseon government during official diplomatic visits and exchanges with Japan. Additionally, the Sèvres ceramics and Goryeo celadon bowls exchanged between the French emperor and King Gojong, as well as the celadon jars that Empress Myeongseong gifted to the royal physician and the celadon teapots and pieces presented by the Korean royal court to the Russian envoy, all stand as evidence of the growing role of these pieces in diplomatic relations. Most of these celadon pieces were created at the height of Goryeo, produced in kilns in Gangjin and Buan, were adorned with intricate engravings or inlay decorations, and considered to be goods of the highest quality, often featuring a distinctive iridescent blue-green color. They were valued higher than Joseon white porcelain, and it is believed that the Joseon royal court made efforts to obtain top-quality Goryeo celadon from any sources available.

The fundamental reason Goryeo celadon could become a diplomatic gift was because interest in Goryeo celadon expanded within Joseon after the 18th century and the collection and appreciation of celadon increased in the 19th century. In the history of Joseon, ceramics came to be viewed as possessing economic and cultural value, but at this time in the late Joseon, the object of interest was Goryeo celadon, not white porcelain. And this trend was clearly revealed in Korea's contact with the outside world, such as with Japan and the West.

The establishment of diplomatic relations led to the expansion of ethnographic interest in Joseon, the other country, and at this time, white

porcelain and Buncheong porcelain from the Joseon dynasty also became part of foreign collections. However, Goryeo celadon was generally chosen for official diplomatic exchanges or gifts. This is also related to the process by which an object called Goryeo celadon, produced hundreds of years ago, was from the late 19th century to early 20th centuries recognized as a work of art with formative and material collectible value. And this was possible because of the perception that celadon had cultural symbolism representing Korea.

Furthermore, there are several notable cases where diplomats, despite not necessarily receiving Goryeo celadon as gifts, actively engaged in its collection. British Consul William Carles, French Consul Collin de Plancy, and US Consul Horace Allen were pioneers in the collection and selling of Goryeo celadon, as well as in the donating of it to their home countries. These two contexts, the diplomatic gifting and the foreign dignitaries' active efforts in collecting, Goryeo celadon, are understood to have played similar roles in the growing international interest in and collection of Korean ceramics in the 20th century. In the early 20th century, Resident-General Ito Hirobumi collected a significant amount of Goryeo celadon and presented it to high-ranking Japanese officials, serving as a mediator spreading Goryeo celadon to Japan and modern Korea.

In the complex terrain of East Asian diplomacy, ceramics sometimes played a role in exchanges between China, Japan, and the Southeast Asian region, but Goryeo celadon was chosen as a gift for sensitive diplomatic events, or as a gift symbolic of the Korean nation, and was furthermore a gift conveying utmost gratitude. This was possible because Goryeo history and Goryeo's cultural heritage came to be assessed more objectively during this period.

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