



Special Feature

Ceramic Culture of Goryeo

Volume 24 Number 1

June 2021

The Review of Korean Studies

www.kci.go.kr



doi: 10.25024/review.2021.24.1.6

Editor's Note

LEE Kang Hahn

In early 2020, the *Review of Korean Studies* invited four specialists from the area of Korean art to contribute a review on recent studies and activities of the past two decades on Korean art. These four reviews were published in a Special Review section for the Summer 2020 issue. The aim was to cover a number of key areas representative of the exquisite nature of Korean art. Thanks to the efforts of the four reviewers, the readers were treated to four exemplary reviews on Korean painting, Buddhist painting, Buddhist sculpture, and traditional handicraft.

Having done that, we came to feel the need to cover more areas, as there were still quite a few areas in Korean art, of which recent accomplishments required immediate attention. Also, in order to provide our foreign readers with the opportunity to truly experience the beauty of Korean art, arranging a collection of works to be published in the form of a Special Feature seemed like a good idea. So we decided to invite a number of scholars who have been engaged in the study of Korean ceramic culture, and ask them to contribute their own professional studies for the occasion.

Excellent scholars and promising researchers who excel in the area of Goryeo dynasty ceramic—including the magnificent celadon culture as well as general pottery—have been invited, and all graciously agreed to join the project. Dealing with diverse themes including patterns, meanings, and perceptions, the following five articles will be most effective in relaying the Korean ceramic culture of the Goryeo period (918-1392) in all its beauty and magnificence.

Professor Jang Namwon of Ewha Womans University, who also serves as the director of the University Museum, provided us with an overview of the Joseon people's perception of Goryeo ceramic, which is one of the most distinguished elements of Korean cultural legacy. In her article entitled "Perception of Goryeo Celadon in the Late Joseon Period," she examines how the legacy of Goryeo—which lasted till the 14th century—only resurfaced in

the people's minds a few centuries later, and how the people of Joseon came to learn about the Goryeo celadon culture—a cultural phenomenon of a long gone dynasty—through several certain mediums. By examining how the Joseon people viewed and came to appreciate this culture, Prof. Jang effectively documents how Goryeo celadon gained the social awareness it enjoys today. And based on the fact that this legacy was far earlier developed and established by the Joseon intellectuals, she also points out the erroneous nature of a prior belief that the symbolic stature of Goryeo celadon was only developed during the Japanese occupation of Korea.

Researcher Lee Jun-kwang from the Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art dedicated an article about the "plantain" designs that we can find on Goryeo celadon. Plantain, which is also referred to as the Banana plant, is described on Chinese ceramics and Goryeo celadon. In his article entitled "Plantain Designs on Goryeo Celadon, how they developed, and what they meant," he first examines the symbolism this plant had in China, and searches for the types of people who were associated with it through texts and other materials. According to his observation, in China the plantain symbolized first Buddhist impermanence and later also the Confucian literati's noble mind, while in Goryeo it was prominently affiliated with the Confucian scholars, but also sometimes with Buddhist/Daoist connotations and even with other artistic sentiments. He meticulously documents how the plantain design on Goryeo celadon changed over the years, and in conclusion also points out that Goryeo celadon's description of plantain was rather unique and original.

Professor Kim Yunjeong of Korea university contributed an article on the "auspicious animals" portrayed on Goryeo celadon. According to her article entitled "The Emergence and Iconography of *Seosu* (Auspicious Beasts) in the Twelfth-century Goryeo Celadon," celadon began to be used by the royal court and the nobility in the 12th century, and as a result of the heightened reputation of Goryeo celadon that ensued, a wide variety of auspicious animals began to decorate particular types of vessels. There are many animals, either real or mythical, that have been traditionally categorized as "auspicious" animals or animals with mystical abilities that could either protect people's welfare or manipulate their fate. Prof. Kim observes that the appearance of these animals was perceived as a sign of good omen from heaven, and proof of a peaceful and prosperous time. She also theorized that iconographic expression of these animals on Goryeo celadon can be interpreted as a display of the authority of

the king.

Researcher Cho Eun Jung from Goryeo Celadon Museum provided us with a study on the celadon “roof tiles” of Goryeo, as well as the meaning of their appearances on Goryeo celadon roof tiles. According to her article entitled “The Origin and Symbolic Meanings: Designs on the 12th century Goryeo Celadon Roof Tiles,” celadon roof tiles was a distinct cultural characteristic of the Goryeo celadon culture. She focuses on certain patterns and designs, and tries to determine the symbolism behind them such as rebirth by transformation in pure land or in paradise. Dr. Cho also turns her observation to the 12th century, and especially the roof tiles used in palaces during the reign of King Uijong (r. 1146-1170). After conducting a meticulous examination of the origin, nature and various permutations of designs that appear on Goryeo celadon roof tiles, and taking into account where they were actually used, she deduces that wishes for the king’s health, longevity, and rebirth in paradise may have been behind the usage of celadon roof tiles in Goryeo royal buildings.

Finally, Prof. Han HyeSun at Korea Culture Research Institute of Ewha Womans University contributed an article concentrating on a theme a little different from the Goryeo celadon examined by the other four studies. In her article entitled “Utilization of Earthenware Pottery for Food Storage in the Goryeo Period,” she examines diverse examples of Goryeo pottery, excavated from various vestiges and sites not only on land but from sea as well. While providing us with several noteworthy relics, Prof. Han also determines the primary function of these potteries which was no other than to contain food and drinking water, but she also points out another noticeable utilities, one of which was to serve as unofficial but practical measuring devices. As they were easy to manufacture, and food and water in pottery jars would remain fresh and edible for quite some time, Prof. Han affirms that pottery established itself as a solid part of the Goryeo culture, and were widely used in the everyday life of the Goryeo people.

Raising global awareness of Korean history and culture is an ongoing task that has been undertaken, joined and aided by so many people for so many years. As a journal published by the Academy of Korean Studies, the *Review of Korean Studies* has been trying to perform its role to the best of its abilities, and arranging this Special studies on Goryeo ceramic is its most recent effort. But the first and foremost praise should go to all the scholars and researchers who generously agreed to contribute their works to this occasion. We salute them,

and are thrilled to introduce the world of Goryeo celadon and pottery to readers all around the world. By reading these fascinating articles, we at the *Review of Korean Studies* are sure that foreign readers will be able to obtain enhanced knowledge and understanding of the exquisite Korean cultural phenomenon that was Goryeo Ceramic.

