Special Feature

Perception of Goryeo Celadon in the Context of the Late Joseon Period

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Issues

This study will look at the following questions: how did Goryeo celadon, which flourished during the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392) and was known to contemporary China and Japan, suddenly drew interest from Korean and Japanese scholars in the modern period (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) when it started to be collected and reproduced, and even exhibited around the world; and how was it perceived during the Joseon dynasty (1392-1919).

Starting from the twentieth century, Korean scholars such as Go Yuseop 高裕燮 (1905-1944) as well as Japanese scholars, took an interest in studying Goryeo celadon. This interest grew after large Goryeo kiln sites were discovered in Daegu-myeon, Gangjin in 1913 and the Japanese Governor General office of Korea led a ground survey and conducted site mapping. Goryeo celadon gained fame with the establishment of the Yi Royal Family Museum, and the activities carried out by the Yi Royal Family Art Manufactory (Jang 2005; Bak 2004) (Figure 1).

Although Goryeo had a long history of porcelain production and made a variety of green and white ceramics, modern circumstances do not explain how Goryeo became synonymous with "bisaek cheongja" (jade-green color celadon). This leads to another question about what circumstances in Joseon society triggered modern scholars' interest in Goryeo celadon specifically, how did contemporaries perceive it and what was the collective memory of Goryeo celadon accumulated over generations during the Joseon period.

The examination of different documents, including historical records and collections of literary works regarding Goryeo, finds that the Joseon period is significant in constructing a memory of Goryeo celadon. Starting from the late eighteenth century, Goryeo celadon was collected and appreciated. In particular, the writings of literati and historians show that they understood Goryeo celadon as "bisaek" celadons. This almost coincides with the time when Goryeo's history was being reconsidered and written during the late Joseon period. Around this time a great number of woodblock-printed books from China poured into Joseon and were frequently reproduced by block printing or hand copying. In the process, texts on Goryeo were circulated. This means that the accumulation of information and the formation of understanding Goryeo were already in progress through texts and physical artifacts in the Joseon period.

This study aims to introduce and make an in-depth analysis of the accounts of Goryeo celadon found in the documents produced during the Joseon period. It intends to find the relationships between these texts and to explore their implications in the study of ceramic history. Also, it will revisit important documents which associated Goryeo celadon with the concept of "bisaek" from Goryeo times until the modern period.

Descriptions of Goryeo Celadon in Historical Records of the Late Joseon Period

During the Song and Yuan periods (from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries), Goryeo celadons were recognized as celebrated artworks or mentioned as commodities that were collected and valued in China and Japan. Glosses such as "the mise (greenish color) celadon of Goryeo" (Gaoli mise, 高麗秘色), "Goryeo kiln" (Gaoliyao 高麗窯), "greenish vessels" (qingqi 青器), and "greenish celadon" (lüci 綠瓷) as well as object names such as incense burner (xianglu 香爐), ceramic incense burner (taolu 陶爐), and wine jar (zun 樽) demonstrate that Goryeo celadon was establishing itself as a distinctive art (Jang 2016). An account given by Xu Jing (1091-1153), a Song dynasty envoy, testifies to this. In his account of the diplomatic mission titled Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing (Illustrated Account of the Xuanhe Embassy to Goryeo, hereafter Gaoli tujing), he wrote, “Goryeo people..."
call the color of greenish porcelain *feise* (K. *bisaek* 碧色). However, these terms, “*bisaek* celadon” and “*bisaek,*” have not been found in the contemporary Goryeo documents.

Goryeosa (History of Goryeo 高麗史), the official history of Goryeo, was compiled during the Joseon dynasty from relevant contemporary texts. It mentions celadon only once and this is in relation to roof tiles. The account of the eleventh year of King Uijong’s reign partly reads:

A detached palace was built east of the palace. It was called Sudeok Palace. The main hall was named Cheonnyeongong...The homes of more than fifty people were demolished to build Taepyongong Pavilion. [The King] commanded the crown prince to write the sign boards...To the south they dug a pond and built a pavilion called Gwallan Pavilion. To the north they built Yangi Pavilion and roofed it with celadon tiles (*cheongja* 碧瓦).

The compilation of Goryeosa was initiated with the intention to denigrate Goryeo and to legitimize the Joseon dynasty. As this undertaking accompanied debates and reconciliations between different opinions over a long period of time, the history was not published until 1454, more than sixty years after the founding of the new dynasty. Even then, it could not be circulated immediately. Only in the sixteenth century and afterwards did it begin to be accepted and circulated among scholar officials as the official history of Goryeo, nearly a century after the dynastic change (Shin 2008). In this regard, it is highly likely that if the term “celadon” (*cheongja*) had been used in the Goryeo dynasty, it would have resurfaced in the historical record after a long hiatus. However, it is difficult to find the term used anywhere except by Yi Gyubo 李奎報 (1168-1241). Yi, a renowned literatus of the middle Goryeo period, wrote a poem in which he described a celadon inkstone in the shape of a child as a “greenish ceramic” (*nokja* 綠瓷); and in an essay referred to a celadon pillow as a “greenish ceramic pillow” (*nokjachim* 綠枕). He also mentioned a celadon cup, calling it a “greenish ceramic cup” (*nokjabae* 綠瓷盃) or a “greenish ceramic” (*nokja*) because of its green hue. These expressions may be Yi’s personal choices. However, the fact that he does not use “*bisaek*” 碧色 as described in Gaoli tujing 高麗圖經 or “*bisaek*” (C. *miose* 碧色), mentioned in the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) book Xiu zhongjin (Brocade in the Sleeve 袖中錦), greatly suggests the possibility that a generic term referring to celadon was not fixed during the Goryeo dynasty.

Indeed, except in geological treatises or books such as Dongguk yeoji seungnam 東國輿地勝覽 (Geographical Survey of the Territory of the Eastern Kingdom 東國輿地勝覽), it is very difficult to find Goryeo-related accounts in literary collections and other documents produced in the early part of the Joseon dynasty. The notion of celadon written as “*cheongja*” or “*cheongsa*” 靑瓷, distinguished from pottery, “*wagi*” 瓦器, is found in Goryeosa. However, it is uncertain whether these terms were coined in the Joseon period or had been passed down from the Goryeo. For this reason, it is assumed that these expressions are used on a case-by-case basis to explain a particular fact, rather than a generic term of Goryeo celadon carrying a symbolic meaning.

In fact, it seems that Goryeo was only accepted as a distinct historical period in the late Joseon. Han Chiyun 韓致奫 (1765-1814) and his nephew Han Jinseo 韓鎭書 (b. 1777) compiled Haedong yeoksa 历史的宇宙 (History of Korea 海東繹史) in the form of annals and biographies. It is believed that after visiting Beijing as part of delegation of envoys, Han Chiyun thought that the existing historical records were not objective and decided to improve them. The history he and his nephew produced had a total of eighty-five chapters (seventy in the original and fifteen in its sequel) and was published in 1823 (the twenty-third year of King Sunjong’s reign). Albeit in the annal and biography form, it contains a wide spectrum of information including local products, arts, and literature which were not usually dealt with in the existing histories. In particular, the part in this book that dealt with Goryeo is based on such historical texts published in...
in the Song dynasty as Cefu yangui (Outstanding Models from the Storehouse of Literature) and Jilin zhi (Monograph on Jilin) by Choe In (fl. 1488) also contain many quotations from the Guoli tujing. Additionally, Liudai nianbiao (Chronology of the Liao Dynasty) compiled by Huang Renheng (1876-1953) of Qing China also provides accounts of the Song and Goryeosa dynasties. In particular, the part regarding the Goryeo dynasty requotes Guoli tujing. In conclusion, while the records produced by the Goryeo dynasty rarely mention “bisaek” celadon, the Guoli tujing served as the source text for this term and was repeatedly quoted during the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods. In the process, its account of “bisaek” celadon was reproduced as a keyword regarding Goryeo celadon.

Perception of Goryeo Celadon and “Bisaek” in Literary Works

Bisaek Celadon

The collections of literary works compiled during the Joseon period, unlike the literary works written in the Goryeo dynasty, have no small number of accounts of Goryeo celadons, in particular, bisaek celadons. In the entry “Bisaek jagi” (Bisaek Porcelains) of the section “Manmul” (Various Objects) in chapter four of Seongho seonsaeng jeonjip (Complete Collection of Yi Ik’s Writings) written by the Song dynasty writer Taiping Laoren 太平老ener and an account in

Goryeosa during King Chungnyeol’s reign (1274-1308). He says:

The bisaek celadons of Goryeo are the best in the world. We are good at making fine, white bodied [vessels] but not good at incising decorations. The white porcelains produced in Joseon are clean, and white. Now, the porcelains offered to the court by the Royal Cuisine Office (Saengwon si 食院) are also exquisite, so the Qing envoy lauded these porcelains when he visited our country last year. But in the fifteenth year of King Chungnyeol’s reign, the Imperial Secretariat (Zhongshu sheng 中書省) of the Yuan court sent a diplomatic note to Goryeo [asking] to obtain large and small celadon jars and bottles. Does this mean that there used to be skilled potters at that time [the Goryeo dynasty] and we no longer have such artisans? Or is this because of the trade with Japan? I do not understand.

Yi notes that Goryeo celadon was prized by Song China and was requested by the Yuan imperial court. He compares this with the present situation of Joseon ceramic craftsmanship. Also, He composed a poem on a celadon cup and saucer set produced in the Goryeo period; presumably, he understood the origins and meanings of bisaek celadon of Goryeo and of China.

Celadon Jar

Seong Haeeung 崔海應 (1760-1839) wrote an essay on a celadon jar with a capacity of one mal (approximately eighteen liters), which is included in the Yeongyeongjae jeonjip (Collected Literary Works of Seong Haeeung 頤慶齋全集). He obtained the jar in Gaeseong at the former site of the house of Ahn Hyang 安珦 (1243-1306). Describing the use and size of the jar, he states that the vessel fits the definition of a ritual vessel and thus the use of this jar for performing a rite accords with principle and protocols. The jar mentioned above refers to a wine jar, which was presumably a vessel such as a maebuyeong (a tall vase with rounded shoulders, a short neck, and a rolled lip). The mention of its usage as a

9. Yi Ik, Seongho seonsaeng jeonjip, Chapter 4, Poems, “Sanam seongsi hahaeng hyeobisaek horo janban” 星湖先生全集, 李瀷 (1681-1763) refers to an account in Xiu zhongjin 奢軒 (1775-1818) and Yi Ik (1775-1818) and Jilin zhi (Monograph on Jilin) of the section “Manmul” (Various Objects) written by the song envoy Dong Yue 董越 (1243-1306). Describing the use and size of the jar, he states that the vessel fits the definition of a ritual vessel and thus the use of this jar for performing a rite accords with principle and protocols. The jar mentioned above refers to a wine jar, which was presumably a vessel such as a maebuyeong (a tall vase with rounded shoulders, a short neck, and a rolled lip). The mention of its usage as a
is highly likely that his understanding of that term was based on texts.

**Mise Celadon from the Song Dynasty**

Bak Jiwon 李徳懋 (1737-1805) wrote a travelogue titled Yeolha ilgi (Travel Essay to Qing 熱河日記) based on his visit to China. In the book, he describes his encounter with a merchant named Tian Shike 田仕可 in Shenyang. Bak asks the merchant how to obtain rare antiques and "four treasures of the scholar's studio (paper, brush, ink, and ink stone)." The merchant answers by saying that one could find mise (mise) celadon and old bronze vessels in Liulichang in Beijing but not in Shenyang. Here, "mise celadon" could refer to the old mise celadon of China, rather than those pieces made in Goryeo. However, considering the conversation that follows in which there are no further questions, Bak seems to have an overall knowledge of mise celadon made in China. Given the fact that Bak planned on purchasing antiques or stationery items while accompanying a delegation of envoys, it is highly likely that he had a taste for antiques based on experiences with real objects and assorted knowledge.

**The Old Method of Manufacturing Porcelain**

Nineteenth century literatus and politician, Yi Yuwon 李裕元 (1814-1888) wrote several accounts of Goryeo celadons. In the section "Jagi goje" (Old Method of Manufacturing Porcelain 瓷器古製) in Chunmyeong ilja 春明逸史 in the twenty-ninth chapter of his anthology Imha pilgi (Jottings in Retirement 林下筆記), he states, "The porcelains produced during the Goryeo period was renowned even in China. When food is stored inside them, it never decays; this is the so-called "mise" 色色. The best artifacts in the world include… silk produced in Shu (Sichuan 端溪), inkstones from Duanxi 端溪, and Goryeo celadon" Also, he stated, "Previsously, Kim Heunggeo showed me an old vessel with a cloudy and lightning design that looked as if it was made recently with a mesmerizing color. It was about one ja in height. This must have been made in antiquity; it could not be created these days. It was unearthed when the
groundwork was undertaken during the repair of a local Confucian school in Pyeongyang.”

When he mentions the renown of Goryeo celadon in China and that it was the best in the world and called *bisaek*, it is certain that he is borrowing from Taiping Laoren’s previously mentioned comment. But the line “when food is stored inside, it will not decay” is taken from *Gaoli tujing* which explains the characteristics of pottery, not celadon. This means that the information on Goryeo ceramics is taken from different sources and is jumbled. Thus, the line that food will not decay when stored inside the vessel is not relevant to celadon. This is probably attributable to the lack of texts on Goryeo celadon that he could access.

**Goryeo Vessels: Cloud and Crane Designs, Greyish-green Color (*buncheong*粉靑)**

According to his own accounts, Yi Yuwon had experience not only with texts but also with real objects, both his and the collections of other people. He states:

Shim Sanggyu 沈象奎 (1766-1838) keeps a *bisaek* celadon jar made during the Goryeo period. It deserves to be cherished as a treasure because it was discovered at the site of Ahn Hyang’s house. Shin Wi borrowed and used the celadon for eight years before he returned it to Shim. Master Ahn Hyang worshipped Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) for a long time by hanging his portrait on the wall. His penname was Hoeheon 晦軒 (made by borrowing the character *hoe*晦 from Zhu Xi’s penname)... This piece of Goryeo celadon is just an old object of Master Ahn’s. It is patterned with six flying cranes and eighteen swirling clouds, all of which are colored in greyish green (*buncheong*粉靑). The color of my porcelain is also greyish green with a lightning pattern. This demonstrates that people of Goryeo made greyish green colored porcelains.

This account is connected with the aforementioned record in *Yeongyeongjae jomnip*. The celadon jar discovered at the site of Ahn Hyang’s house at the end of the Goryeo period was later kept by Shim Sanggyu. Shin Wi borrowed and used it for eight years before returning it, which Yi Yuwon happened to see. Presumably, it was a *maebyeong* with a cloud and crane design on the basis that it was decorated with a pattern of six cranes and eighteen clouds. He also emphases that the same technique was employed on that jar as the one used for his celadon with a lightning pattern. Among extant artifacts, the work most similar to the celadon described in this account would be the ones with the same description “Celadon Vase, *maebyeong* decorated with cranes and clouds” at Ewha Womans University Museum (Figure 2), the Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka, and the National Museum of Korea (Figure 3). All of these vases feature the *sanggam* (inlay) technique. Since most large *maebyeong*-type vases are inlaid with cloud and crane patterns, the celadon in the above records is likely to have been decorated with inlaid crane and clouds.

![Figure 2. “Celadon Vase, Maebyeong Decorated with Cranes and Clouds,” Goryeo Dynasty, 12th-13th centuries, H 37.2cm, Ewha Womans University Museum](image1)

![Figure 3. “Celadon Vase, Maebyeong Decorated with Cranes and Clouds,” Goryeo Dynasty, 12th-13th centuries, H 39.0cm, National Museum of Korea](image2)
Greyish Green Color (buncheong 粉青)

Shin Wi also describes the jar mentioned in Yi Yuwon’s account above. “Earlier I had a Goryeo bisaeck jar…each flower revealed itself in a greyish-green color [the phrase buncheong hwadu occurs in old documents]. A flying bird amid clouds looks like an immortal…” The possibility of this jar being a vessel inlaid with clouds and cranes was explained in the preceding paragraph. Here, what is notable is that Shin Wi also uses the expression “greyish green” (buncheong) and gives an in-sentence note stating that the expression occurs in old writings. One well-known example of the term “greyish-green” used to describe Goryeo celadon is found in Gi-gu yaolun (Essential Criteria of Antiquities 格古要論) published in 1388 by Cao Zhao 曹昭 (n.d.) during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). In the entry “Gaoliyao” (Goryeo Kilns 高麗窯) in the section “Guyao qilun” (Discourse on Ancient Kilns and Vessels 古窯器論), it says, “The color of Goryeo celadon is greyish green. It is similar to Longquan porcelains. The value of the one decorated with a white flower design cannot be appraised. [Alternatively, it can be interpreted as meaning ‘they are less valued than celebrated Chinese porcelains’].”

Following this example, this notion recurs in Jingdezhen taolu (Record of Jingdezhen Pottery 景德鎮陶錄) written by Lan Pu 藍浦 (fl. 1815) and published during the Qing period.

Greyish-green porcelains are similar to Longquan vessels. Those with delicate floral design are as good as Dingyao 定窯 vessels from the Northern Song period. Vessels with white floral design cannot be evaluated in those countries. Overall they are similar to Yueyao 越窯 vessels. But melon-shaped jars (guazun 瓜尊) and lion-shaped incense burners (suannilu 獅猊爐) are quite different [from Chinese porcelains].


17. Cao Zhao, Gi-gu yaolun, “Guyao qilun” (“High-level kilns, high-level ware. 講論, 其論為高級。): “高麗窯, 高麗窯青瓷, 色粉靑, 青瓷與青瓷相類, 有上白花朶者, 不甚直錢. 朱琰卷二, 華東玉, 高麗窯器論, 青瓷與青瓷相類, 有上白花朶者, 不甚直錢.”

18. Lan Pu, Jingdezhen taolu, Entry “Gaoliyao” (高麗窯): “高麗窯, 則高麗窯燒造器, 不知起於何代, 喧禽雲薄, 青色與青瓷器類, 有上粉青, 但龍泉器, 有細膩者. 青瓷與青瓷相類, 若上白花朶者, 細紋不甚清晰, 大約與今高麗器, 粉青花者相類.”

This shows that the term “greyish green” has been repeatedly used as a gloss to describe Goryeo celadon in China for a long period. Based on the quotations above, therefore, “greyish green” which appears in Shin Wi’s and Yi Yuwon’s writings does not refer to a technique but to the color of the celadon. Even today it is used as a term to indicate thick greyish base colors like the glaze color of Longquan celadon of the Song and Yuan periods. Among porcelains with white designs on a greenish base, the description above evokes the image of a sanggam celadon.

Bisaeck Vessels of Goryeo

Yi Yuwon was the first to introduce the Borim Temple tea-brewing method, which he learned from Jeong Yakyong 丁若鏞 (1762-1836), to the world. He visited the Qing court as a document officer of the 1845 winter solstice mission. He served as the chief state counselor when King Gojong (r. 1863-1907) personally administered state affairs after the Grand Prince (Daewongun, Gojong’s father) was deposed. He also visited the Qing court to receive the emperor’s approval of the Crown Prince, who later became King Sunjong (r. 1907-1910). He had quite a wide range of knowledge and experiences about Chinese and Japanese culture and artifacts. When he was forty-six, preparing for his retirement, he built a tea house and a pavilion for archives named “Four-season Fragrance.” Exhibited in the pavilion were a variety of objects of a scholar’s study, paintings, and ceramics along with an incense burner. Yi said, “There is a painting on farming, an ancient ink stick made during Kangxi’s reign. There is also a brush made with authentic lamb fur, which can be employed easily to write characters both large and small…A celadon dish with two ears is for washing brushes. There is a large white porcelain ink jar, a pair of Goryeo bisaeck jars, and others.” Both the celadon dish for washing brushes and the Goryeo bisaeck jars are presumed to be celadon. But the use of expression “Goryeo bisaeck” raises a possibility that the celadon dish for washing brushes could be Chinese or that he intended to emphasize the beauty of bisaeck as seen on the celadon jars. The expression “a pair of bisaeck jars” implies that the vessels were of the same shape and were displayed as a pair. A reference to celadon also
appears in Yi Yuwon’s “Bisaekja Song” (Ode to Bisaek Porcelain) in his other anthology entitled Gao goryak. These accounts are revealing and interesting because until recently little had been known about Joseon literati and their appreciation of Goryeo celadon, its use as gifts, and as inspiration for poems.

Bisaek

The contemporary understanding of bisaek celadon can also be found among the writings of the great painter and literatus Kim Jeonghui 金正喜 (1786-1856). Replying to a poem composed by his close associate Gwon Donin 權敦仁 (1783-1859). Kim compared the vigor, shine, and authority of Gwon’s writing to bisaek celadon. At another time, while looking at a painting of flowers in a celadon vase, Kim composed a poem entitled “Flower in a Vase,” (Byeonghwa 瓶花) which says that the flower was able to last so long without losing its fragrance and shine because it was in a five-hundred-year old biseak celadon vase and so even a storm could not damage the flower.

Ancient Vessels from Goryeo

In fact, Kim Jeonghui owned and appreciated Goryeo celadon himself. The anthology of Jeong Yakyong 丁若鏞 (1762-1836) includes an account which says, “Kim Jeonghui sent me a potted daffodil on a late autumn day; the pot was an ancient vessel from Goryeo.” Kim Jeonghui had sent Jeong, whom he admired, a potted daffodil that his father Kim Yugyeong, then governor of Pyeongan province, had received from an envoy returning from China. At that time, Jeong was living in Songpa after returning from his eighteen-year exile in Gangjin. Kim Jeonghui planted the daffodil in a Goryeo vessel (presumably Goryeo celadon) and sent it to Jeong. As mentioned earlier, Kim had a deep appreciation for the true value and refinement of celadon, so it would be natural for him to have potted the daffodil in a celadon vessel before giving it to Jeong whom he admired (Figure 4).

Dissemination of Texts on Goryeo and How They Were Interpreted

It is true that in the modern period, archeological discoveries and the collecting processes of museums have played a large role in officially defining the aesthetic value of Goryeo celadon and firmly establishing it as “fine art” in the Korean “tradition” (Bak 2004). But as shown in the preceding section, the experience of physical objects and the affection for Goryeo celadon that have passed down from the Joseon period also contributed to the creation of such a tradition. The dissemination of various texts seems to have played a major role by drawing the Joseon people’s attention to the Goryeo period. A prime example is Gaoli tujing, among others, which had been distributed widely during the late Joseon period as a text for understanding Goryeo society.

Scholar officials frequently traveled to many sites in Gaegyeong during the early Joseon period. However, they visited the city in an official capacity out...
of pride and for pleasure and were critical of Goryeo culture. They maintained their critical view of Goryeo culture as they visited Gaegyeong. But as Neo-Confucianism penetrated the minds of Joseon officials, the city was gradually recognized as a place sacred to Confucianism. This perceptual change became palpable when Joseon literati began to write travelogues or record conversations about Seonjuk Bridge and other tourist sites where traces of Jeong Mongiu’s Jeong Mong Ju (1337-1392) and Seo Gyeongdeok 徐敬德 (1489-1546) could be seen. Since 1573, when the Sungyang Confucian Academy was founded in Gaegyeong to enshrine the tablet of Jeong Mongiu, visits to the city increased (Jeon 2008). Well into the late Joseon period, this trend could have motivated the literati to take an interest in the natural environment as well as historical sites in Gaegyeong and contributed to their coming to perceive Goryeo as a legitimate dynasty. This explains the increase in the interest expressed and the mentions about Goryeo in anthologies, letters, and historical records of the time. In particular, instances where Gaoli tujing is mentioned in these writings are worth noting as the work contains more information on celadons than any of the other texts. The following is a list of some of those instances (Jang 2009a).

Yi Deokmu (1741-1793) wrote about Xu Jing and the background to the publication of Gaoli tujing. He noted that the book had yet to be published in Joseon. However, the fact that Nam Geukgwan 南克寬 (1689-c. 1714) quotes Gaoli tujing leads us to assume that the book was circulating in Joseon between the end of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, at least. Starting from the second half of the eighteenth century, mention of Gaoli tujing increased. Gang Pilhyo 姜必孝 (1764-1848) wrote a review of Gaoli tujing: the table of contents for Shin Wi’s Gyeongsadang jeongo includes an entry titled “Je Xu Jing’s Gaoli tujing” 頭徐兢高麗圖經. An anthology written by Yu Su 鄭夢周 (1779-1821), Baegyeongdang Shimungeo 拜經堂詩文稿, also raises the possibility that Yu possessed Gaoli tujing. Also, Hong Seokju 洪奭周 (1774-1842), whose family reading tradition was famous during the late Joseon period, included Gaoli tujing on the list of recommended books in his Hongsi doksorok (Hong

24. Yi Deokmu, Cheongjanggwan jeonseo 靑莊館全書, Gwon 散 58, “Ang’yeopgi” 5 益齋經(五), Entry “Gaoli tujing” 高麗圖經.
reviews, lists of books in libraries, and the transcription and dissemination of manuscripts could have offered a window into Goryeo for the Joseon people. In this process, Goryeo celadon or bisaek celadon was naturally perceived as a tangible symbol of Goryeo.

Foreigners’ Interest in Goryeo Celadon and Their Collections

There is a dearth of studies on how Koreans perceived Goryeo celadon between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. With the establishment of the Gyeongseong Art Club, an art auction company in 1922, Goryeo celadon became an important artifact for trade. Still, it is unknown how contemporary Koreans saw them. As the collecting and trading of Korean antiques rose in popularity under Japanese colonial rule, the antique community in the 1910s began to indulge in celadon. Antiques had grown so popular that some people turned their hands to robbing tombs. Cemeteries were poorly guarded and as the antiques trade boomed so did grave robbery (Kim 2006; Bak 2006). The interest in Goryeo celadon also created an industry making replicas of Goryeo celadon and souvenirs. Modern factories such as Samhwa Goryeoson三和高麗燒 founded in Jinnampo, Pyeongan province with Japanese capital launched the production of Goryeo celadon replicas in earnest. In modern Japan, because antique connoisseurship as a hobby expanded into the cultural community, more people began to indulge in reproduction and collection of antiques (Eom 2004). People engaged in these activities played a central role in collecting and exporting artifacts of the Goryeo dynasty and deciding upon the design of replicas. Goryeo celadon started to be established as a signifier of Korean objects.

Therefore, information on celadon written by foreigners is rather extensive and can be found in documents produced around the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. The writings reveal their interest in Goryeo celadon by collecting and purchasing Goryeo relics. In particular, the Japanese displayed a great zeal in purchasing and collecting archeological items looted from graves. Starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, Westerners documented their travels in Korea, China, and other countries between the time of the Sino-Japanese war and the Russo-Japanese war. These documents show that starting from 1900, they also collected Goryeo celadons robbed from ancient burial mounds. Western collecting activities increased beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, while Japanese interest and purchasing of celadons can be traced back even further to the first half of the century.

Nineteenth-century Japan and Goryeo Celadon

Yi Yuwon in “Byeongnyeo sinji”薛荔新志, a section in his Imha pilgi, gives the following interesting account:

Japanese people love Goryeo celadon and do not mind paying exorbitant prices [for it]. In the gapsin year, a man from Gaeseong dug up an ancient royal tomb. He found a jade waist band along with a set of porcelain dishware with a cloud and crane pattern, the price of which was as high as seven hundred geum (gold 金). The craftsmanship of these artifacts was different because they were made when there were exchanges with Yuan dynasty artisans. Collectors loved to keep these robbed objects around them, unaware that these items were contaminated by the filthy energy in the tombs. Many accounts in existing Chinese records criticized this...
Yi Yuwon finished drafting *Imha pilgi* in 1872, and the “Byeokryeo sinji” section quoted above was a later addition. The final version was published in 1884. Between 1814 when Yi was born and 1884, the *gapsin* year mentioned above should be 1824 (Jang 2009a). That is when Yi was ten years old, so it is likely that what he wrote was heard from others. In the early nineteenth century, Japanese were buying Goryeo celadons excavated from ancient tombs. Yi understood the difference in design between the Goryeo celadons found earlier and the cloud-and-crane pattern dishware attributable to Yuan craftsmen visiting Goryeo. If the cloud-and-crane patterned dishware were Goryeo celadon made in the thirteenth century or later, the pattern would have been inlaid (Jang 2009b). Meanwhile, it is uncertain how much seven hundred *geum* was worth because *geum* was not an official currency unit. However, records show that the price of a Gyeongsugung 聖壽宮 house in Seoul in 1816 was 660 *nyang* of *hwangeun* (subpar silver 黃銀), which can be converted into coin currency worth 1,782 *nyang*. Another source, Bak Jiwon’s “Regarding a Brush Washer” provides anecdotal information that a brush washer was traded for 8,000 pun (80 *nyang*), which would have been worth about sixteen sacks of rice (Bak 2008). We do not know whether the price of that inlaid celadon with cloud-and-pattern was seven hundred *nyang* of coin or seven hundred *nyang* of gold, but it can be surmised that the dishware did not cost a small amount of money.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Japanese came to Korea to purchase inlaid celadons that were robbed from ancient Goryeo tombs at high prices. The amount of items purchased and collected was quite enormous. Recent studies have found that Yamayoshi Moriyoshi 山吉盛義 (1859-1912) first held an exhibition of Goryeo celadon in Japan in 1899. A catalogue of the exhibition was published in 1900 (Figure 8). At the exhibition, Yamayoshi disseminated booklets and catalogues which categorized the works by decorative technique and included chronological information as well (Katayama 2016). This exhibition was made possible due to the steady collecting and trading which had gone on since the first half of the nineteenth century.

Another record evidenced the use of Goryeo celadon as an official gift to a foreign government in the late Joseon period. The Soldiers’ Rebellion of 1882 occurred in June of the nineteenth year of King Gojong’s reign and damaged the Japanese consulate and was responsible for the deaths of Japanese instructors. Japan demanded that the Joseon government pay an indemnity. As a result, Joseon signed the Jemulpo Treaty with Japan at Incheon on July 17, 1882. The treaty required the Joseon court to pay Japan five-hundred thousand won over five years, have guards stationed at the Japanese legation, and dispatch a delegation to Japan to make a formal apology. On August 8th, 1882, Bak Yeonghyo 朴泳孝 (1861-1939), Kim Okgyun 金玉均 (1851-1894), Seo Gwangbeom 徐光範 (1859-1897), Min Yeongik 閔泳翊 (1860-1914), and others were sent to Japan as part of a diplomatic delegation. The diary of Bak Yeonghyo, *Sahwa girjak* 使和記略, describes the situation as follows:

> On the seventh day of September, it rained...a letter was sent in reply to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. An official letter and gifts were delivered to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs...“There were four kinds of gifts: A set of Yeosa jegang (Outline of Goryeo History 麗史提綱) in twenty-three volumes, a piece of Goryeo ceramic, a set of nineteen silver utensils, and ten rush mats with floral patterns...We cordially ask you to accept these humble gifts.”

A Goryeo ceramic was included among the gifts along with an official letter presented by the Joseon delegation to the Japanese authorities. It is intriguing that an article of celadon and a book of Goryeo history were the items presented...
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as an official apology to Japan. Given the uncomfortable situation between the two countries, these items would have been chosen with the taste of the Japanese in mind. In other words, it implies that the Japanese were not only aware of Goryeo ceramics but favored them and thus a Goryeo ceramic was among the formal diplomatic gifts. And if it was a Goryeo ceramic, it was certainly celadon.

Foreigners’ Collections of Goryeo Celadon

Westerners’ interest in Goryeo celadon in the nineteenth century coincides with an increase in their visits to Joseon between 1883, when the first minister of the United States entered Joseon, and 1910. Studies and travelogues written by Western diplomats and missionaries encouraged increased interest in Goryeo celadon. Their understanding of other Asian cultures was defined by their own aesthetic view of Chinese art, including ceramics, which would eventually be reflected in their perception and collection of Korean ceramics. William Richard Carles (1848-1929), who served as British vice-consul to Joseon from 1884 to 1885 and later also served in various missions throughout China, including Shanghai, Chongqing, Fuzhou and Tianjin, wrote Life in Korea (1888), which gives the following account:

In the winter after my return to S[eoul] [in 1884-85], I succeeded in purchasing a few pieces of celadon, part of a set of twenty-six, which were said to have been taken out of some large grave near Song-do [Gaegyeong]….the main patterns appear to be engraved on the clay, and the subsequently applied glaze is put on repeatedly to produce a smooth surface. They are made of an opaque clay of a light reddish colour, and appear, as usual with Oriental fictile ware, to have been supported in the kiln on three supports, and the supports used, in several instances at least, have been small fragments of opaque quartz, portions of which still adhere to some of them. In one of the smaller pieces is a radiate ornament at the center, which appears to have been made up of a series of irregular white fragments of quartz or porcelain. Embedded in the clay before the baking, they would project above the surface even though thickly covered under the glaze.

This paragraph gives a detailed description of three quartz supports used for baking celadon during the Goryeo period. Although Carles partly misunderstood the process of celadon production, he provides illustrations of the celadon he saw (Figure 9).

British ministers William G. Aston (1841-1911) and Thomas Watters (1840-1901) also collected Korean ceramics with anthropologist interests. Meanwhile, Aubrey Le Blond (1869-1973) and his wife Elizabeth Le Blond (1861-1934) collected more than one hundred pieces of Korean ceramics during their travels to different areas of Korea. They held an exhibition dedicated to Korean ceramics in 1914 (Choi 2020). Interest in and the collecting of Goryeo celadon in Europe and the United States continued to grow further during the twentieth century.

On the other hand, the Korean Empire (1897-1910) had a rather formal relationship with France concerning celadon. In 1886, when Joseon established diplomatic relations with France, Victor Collin de Plancy (1863-1922) was appointed as the first minister and came to Joseon two years later. In an effort to mediate between Emperor Gojong and French President Sadi Carnot, he arranged an exchange of ceramics produced in both countries as a gift, to
commemorate the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. France sent a ceramic vase made by the Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres and Emperor Gojong sent two Goryeo celadons—“Celadon Bowl with Incised Parrot Design” and “Celadon Bowl with Peony Design in Relief” (Figure 10)—in return (Eom 2015). We can see that Goryeo celadons were chosen as not only official but also signature Korean gifts.

Closing

This paper questions the validity of the general theory which argued that the interest in Goryeo celadon—as the epitome of the Goryeo culture—rose only in the Korean modern period, as the Japanese valued the Goryeo culture to be relatively superior to that of the Joseon period, which they propagated as a decline from the former. Hence, examined here is the Joseon contemporary views and perceptual changes towards Goryeo celadon, by reviewing historical records, collections of literary works, diaries, and other materials written by Joseon literati who would play a role in linking their Goryeo predecessors—their own successors—with the modern world.

_Goryeosa_, compiled by the Joseon court, was established as the official history of Goryeo in the sixteenth century, but it was only since the eighteenth century that the Joseon people began to quote or acknowledge Goryeo history. Apart from _Goryeosa_ and other history books, _Gaoli tujing_ written by a Chinese envoy, was heavily quoted in historical records and collections of literary works as it provided detailed accounts of Goryeo culture and relics. Contemporary interest in and understanding of Goryeo celadon that grew in the late Joseon period was based on either _Gaoli tujing_, a work of the Northern Song period, or on _Xiu zhongjin_, a Southern Song work, as both of them were repeatedly quoted.

Meanwhile, literati texts written in the late Joseon period describe the Goryeo celadons as physical objects, that were either owned by the authors or seen by them and remembered with specific images. In the late nineteenth century, Goryeo celadons were even selected as royal gifts for the Japanese court. Unlike previous studies which have emphasized the process of modernized Japan and Western powers indulging in Goryeo celadon out of cultural interest and taste since 1900s, Goryeo celadon was actually collected and appreciated starting in the eighteenth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Goryeo celadons were continuously stolen from graves and bought by the Japanese.

The expressions “ancient vessels of Goryeo” or “Goryeo biseak” were often used by people in the late Joseon period while the term “cheongja” was rarely used for celadon. Instead, “biseak” was widely used as a gloss to indicate celadon in general. In particular, the accounts which show the collecting, the interest, and the appreciation of Goryeo celadon are concentrated in historical records and literary collections produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through those writings, it is understood that Goryeo celadon was thought of as something exquisite or elegant, profound, and authentic that could hardly be mimicked. Starting from the eighteenth century, information on Goryeo became increasingly common as books and artworks from China was introduced and rapidly disseminated. Various historical books including _Gaoli tujing_ and collected literary works were copied, kept, and read. In particular, the _Gaoli tujing_ was found to have survived in various manuscript exemplars produced in Korea; this has implications for other important texts. Various pieces of information on Goryeo continuously and repeatedly contributed to the formation of how Goryeo was viewed, and this viewpoint was reconstructed and established as the present image of the dynasty. In conclusion, the interest and perception of Goryeo celadon did not spring from nowhere. The memories
and experiences gleaned from texts and physical objects overlapped with each other, and were interwoven during the Joseon period to imbue Goryeo celadon with symbolic meanings.

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References


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Abstract

This study looks at the following questions: how did Goryeo celadon; which flourished during the Goryeo dynasty and was known to contemporary China and Japan, suddenly draw interest from Korean and Japanese scholars in the modern period when it started to be collected and reproduced, and even exhibited around the world; and how was it perceived during the Joseon dynasty. It examines the contemporary views and perceptional changes towards Goryeo celadon by reviewing historical records, collections of literary works, diaries, and other materials written by Joseon literati who would play a role in linking their Goryeo predecessors and their own successors in the modern world. The accounts which show the interest, the appreciation, and the collecting of Goryeo celadon are concentrated in historical records and literary collections produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through those writings, it is understood that Goryeo celadon was thought of as something exquisite or elegant, profound, and authentic that could hardly be mimicked. Meanwhile, literati texts written in the late Joseon period describe the Goryeo celadons as physical objects, that were either owned by the authors or seen by them and remembered with specific images. In the late nineteenth century, Goryeo celadons were even selected as royal gifts for diplomacy. This study finds that unlike previous studies which have emphasized the process of modernized Japan and Western powers indulging in Goryeo celadon out of cultural interest and taste since 1900s, Goryeo celadon was actually collected and appreciated starting in the eighteenth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Goryeo celadons were continuously stolen from graves and bought by the Japanese. Starting from the eighteenth century, information on Goryeo became increasingly common as books and artwork from China was introduced and rapidly disseminated. Various historical books including Gaoli tujing and collected literary works were copied, kept, and read. In particular, the Gaoli tujing was found to have survived in various manuscript exemplars produced in Korea; this has implications for other important texts. Various pieces of information on Goryeo continuously and repeatedly contributed to the formation of how Goryeo was viewed; this viewpoint was reconstructed and established as the present image of the dynasty. The memories and experiences gleaned from texts and physical objects overlapped and interwove in the Joseon period to imbue Goryeo celadon with symbolic meanings.
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