

Goryeo Celadon Ceramics in Context
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Summary of lecture:

Of all the arts of Korea, ceramics have received the most attention from scholars and connoisseurs outside the peninsula and celadon wares (K. *cheongja* 青磁), in particular, have been highly admired and they are seen to exemplify one of the highlights of Korean culture. Goryeo celadon ceramics are characterized by their translucent glazes, organic sculptural shapes, and innovative designs (including *sanggam* inlay, underglaze copper red and overglaze gilding). We will see how this is manifested in ceramic designs through references to examples in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, as well as other noteworthy collections.

Goryeo celadon ceramics are essentially high-fired stonewares covered with a lime glaze. In terms of their early manufacture several links can be made to Yue wares made in Zhejiang province on the Chinese mainland. Celadon began to be manufactured in Korea during the 10th century, but they stopped being made when the Goryeo kingdom fell to the Yi rulers of the new Joseon kingdom (AD1392-1910). As white porcelains were preferred by the new elite of Joseon, the production of celadon was not revived until the Colonial period (1910-1945), when the Japanese established so-called 'new Goryeo kilns' (Shin Goryeosso 新高麗燒) where contemporary interpretations of Goryeo celadon were made.

Most of the ceramics discussed in this lecture date from the 12th century which is largely regarded as a highpoint of Korean celadon production. However, in the final part of the lecture we will look at ceramics produced in the 13th and 14th century. This time is largely regarded as a period of decline, but the objects themselves tell a different story, suggesting that potters continued to manufacture highly advanced and aesthetically pleasing vessels throughout the latter half of the Goryeo rule, albeit in lesser numbers. Celadon wares of this late period are significantly different in shape and iconography from earlier examples, as they reflect the impact of the close relations established between Goryeo and the Yuan dynasty following Goryeo's surrender to the Mongols in 1270, a year before Khubilai Khan (r. 1260-1294) established the Yuan empire. The merging of local traditions with Mongol artistic practices gave rise to new ceramic forms and patterns which may at first glance appear alien to Goryeo cultural customs, but which, upon closer inspection, fit firmly within Korean cultural parameters of the time.

Time frame:

The Goryeo kingdom witnessed the end of the Tang dynasty (618-906), the rise and fall of Song (960-1279), the Jin (1115-1234) and Yuan (1279-1368) dynasties, as well as the early years of Ming (1368-1644), not to mention the rise and demise of the northern Liao dynasty (907-1125). Likewise, it is contemporaneous with the closing decades of the Heian rule (794-1185), the rise and fall of the Kamakura period (1185-1336), and the early years of the Muromachi era (1336-1573).

Centers of production:

The most important centers of production were at Sadangni in Gangjin district in the southwestern tip of the peninsula and at Yucheonni in Buan district, located on the southwestern coast, as both of these kilns made celadons for the royal court.

Important historical records referring to celadon:

- *Goryeo-sa* (History of Goryeo) compiled in the early 15th century

- *Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* (Illustrated Record of the Chinese Embassy to the Koryŏ Court during the Xuanhe Era) by the Chinese scholar-official Xu Jing (1091-1153), written in 1123
- *Su Jung Geum* (C. *Xiuzhongjin* 袖中錦) by the Song Dynasty writer Taepyeong Noin [C. Taiping laoren 太平老人]

Decorative techniques used on Goryeo celadon wares:

- Incised decoration
- Carved decoration
- Mould-impressed decoration
- Open-work decoration
- Sanggam 象嵌 inlay
- Yeoksanggam 逆象嵌 (reverse inlay)
- Underglaze copper-red
- Underglaze iron-oxide
- Applied white slip
- Applied black slip
- Overglaze gilding

Additional Readings

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