

Korean Ceramics of the Joseon Dynasty (1392 – 1910)
Robert D. Mowry, September 26, 2013

This illustrated slide lecture will introduce Korean ceramics of the Joseon (also spelled Chosŏn) dynasty (1392-1910), placing those wares within the overall historical context of Korean ceramics and also pointing out characteristics and innovations that are uniquely Korean. It will begin with a look at *buncheong* (*punch'ŏng*) wares, the robust descendants of the famed celadons of the Goryeo (Koryŏ) period (918-1392), surveying the incised and inlaid pieces of the fifteenth century as well as the slip-painted ones of the sixteenth. It will then move on to the aristocratic porcelains, treating both those embellished with molded decoration and those emblazoned with designs in underglaze cobalt blue, copper red, and iron brown. In addition, the lecture will explore relationships between Joseon-period ceramics and paintings, just as it will also touch on relationships between Joseon-period ceramics and those of China's Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Joseon Dynasty (also spelled Chosŏn Dynasty; 1392–1910)

Capital at Seoul

Buddhism pushed aside

Neo-Confucianism adopted as the state philosophy

Ceramics

Buncheong ware (also spelled Pun-ch'ŏng ware)

Stamped designs inlaid with white slip

Designs incised and/or carved in a coating of white slip

Designs painted in brown slip on a white slip ground

Porcelain

Plain porcelain

Porcelain with decoration painted in underglaze cobalt blue

Porcelain with decoration painted in underglaze copper red

Porcelain with decoration painted in underglaze cobalt blue and copper red

Porcelain with molded and openwork decoration

Earthenware (도기 , 도자기 ; 陶器 = **dogi, dojagi ; taoqi**): Employing humble clays, earthenware is fired in the range of 800° to 900° Celsius. Because of its low firing temperature, earthenware is porous; unless the piece is glazed, capillary action will pull liquids through the porous walls. Earthenware is typically buff but, depending upon the clay used, may span a range of earth tones from black and gray to brown and white. **Basic characteristics: low-fired, porous, opaque, and typically buff.**

Stoneware (단단한 도자기 ; 硬陶 = **dandanhan dojagi ; yingtao**): Employing sophisticated clays, stoneware is fired in the range of 1100° to 1200° Celsius. Because of stoneware's high firing temperature, the particles of silica in the body clay melt and fuse together in a process known as vitrification, making stoneware impervious to liquids, even without a glaze. Stoneware pieces are coated with glaze partly to aid in keeping them clean but mainly to make them as colorful and as beautiful as possible. Stoneware is typically light gray but depending upon the clay used and the firing conditions, may be black, white, brown, or dark gray. **Basic characteristics: high-fired, vitrified, non-porous, opaque, bell-like ring, and typically light gray.**

Porcelain (백자 ; 瓷器 , 白瓷 = **baekja; ciqu, baici**): Employing two white clays, kaolin and petuntse, porcelain is fired in the range of 1300° to 1400° Celsius. As with stoneware, porcelain's high firing temperature

results in vitrification, so that porcelain is impervious to liquids, even without a glaze. When properly prepared, mixed, and fired, kaolin and petuntse give rise to a fine-grained, white ceramic ware that is translucent, due to the high silica content. **Basic characteristics: high-fired, vitrified, non-porous, white, bell-like ring, and translucent.**

Celadon (청자 ; 靑瓷 = cheongja; qingci): A celadon glaze is a high-fired, transparent, pale bluish green—or sometimes pale grayish blue—glaze that is typically applied over a light gray stoneware body. The characteristic bluish green color results from a small amount of iron oxide in the glaze. The Chinese term for celadon is *qingci* 靑瓷, which is pronounced *cheongja* in Korean. The first character in the compound, 靑 (*qing* in Chinese; *cheong* in Korean), means “pale bluish green” and refers to the color of the glaze; the second character, 瓷 (*ci* in Chinese; *ja* in Korean) means “high-fired ceramic ware” and refers to the underlying stoneware body.

The word “celadon” came into English from the French. It first appeared in France in the seventeenth century as the name of the shepherd, Celadon, in the pastoral romance novel *l'Astrée* by Honoré d'Urfé (1568–1625). Because Celadon wore sage green ribbons, his name became associated with the color. (d'Urfé, in turn, borrowed his character from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.)

Buncheong (Pun-ch'öng = 분청 ; 粉靑 = Chinese = fenqing): A descendant of Goryeo celadon ware, buncheong ware—which is sometimes also termed buncheong sagi (분청사기 ; 粉靑沙器 = Chinese = fenqing shaqi)—boasts decoration created through the use of slip inlaid into or applied over a gray stoneware body and covered by a thin, lightly hued celadon glaze. The stoneware body is similar to that of Goryeo celadon ware, just as the glaze is also closely related; however, because the glaze of buncheong ware is lighter in hue and more thinly applied than that of celadon ware, buncheong ware typically appears gray rather than bluish green. In the fifteenth-century wares, white slip was typically inlaid into designs stamped into the stoneware body; alternatively, the stoneware might be entirely covered with white slip into which designs were incised or carved. In the sixteenth century, designs were typically painted in brown slip on a white slip ground. Buncheong ware was produced at numerous kilns throughout Korea, but particularly in the southwestern part of the peninsula. The most famous buncheong kilns, particularly those of the sixteenth century, were located at Gyeryongsan, in Chungcheongnam-do province (계룡산 , 충청남도 ; 雞龍山 , 忠淸南道).

Korean Ceramics of the Goryeo and Joseon Dynasties:

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China

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Vol. 11 Sui and T'ang Dynasties

Vol. 12 Sung Dynasty

Vol. 13 Liao, Chin, Yüan Dynasties

Vol. 14 Ming Dynasty

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Chronology of Traditional Korean History

Three Kingdoms Period (traditionally, 57 BC – AD 668)

Silla (Shilla; traditionally, 57 BC – AD 668)

Goguryeo (Koguryō; traditionally, 37 BC – AD 668)

Baekje (Paekche; traditionally, 18 BC – AD 660)

Gaya Confederacy (Kaya; traditionally, AD 42 – 532)

Unified Silla Kingdom (668 – 935)

Goryeo Dynasty (Koryō; 918 – 1392)

Joseon Dynasty (Chosŏn; 1392 – 1910)

Sometimes also called the Yi Dynasty, after the surname of the Royal Family = Yi