

52. These two celadon vases illustrate the influence of Chinese Ru ware on early Koryo celadons. Right: Chinese Ru ware, late 11th to early 12th century AD. Ht: 19.8 cm. Left: Korean celadon, Koryo period, early 12th century AD. Ht: 19.5 cm.



inkstones of Duan, the peonies of Luoyang, the tea of Jianzhou, the brocade of Shu, the porcelains of Dingzhou ... the secret colour ware of Gaoli [Koryo] ... are all first under heaven.⁸⁵ The fact that they were compared with such high-quality Chinese products shows the high esteem in which Koryo celadons were held in Song China. They have been excavated from the area of the Southern Song capital at Hangzhou, from Yangzhou and from the Yuan dynasty capital site of Dadu (present-day Beijing), evidence of the presence of celadons in trade or tribute from Korea to China in both the Southern Song and the Yuan.⁸⁶

The best literary source of information about Koryo celadons is Xu Jing's account of his trip to Korea in 1123. Xu was a Chinese emissary of the Song dynasty who visited Korea and wrote a forty-chapter summary of Korean affairs, religion, people, customs and products. He notes:

The pottery wares are green in colour and are called kingfisher-coloured by the people of Gaoli. In recent years they have been made more skilfully and their colour and lustre have become finer. There are wine pots of gourd shape with small covers in the form of a duck amidst lotus flowers. They also make bowls and dishes, cups and tea-bowls, flower

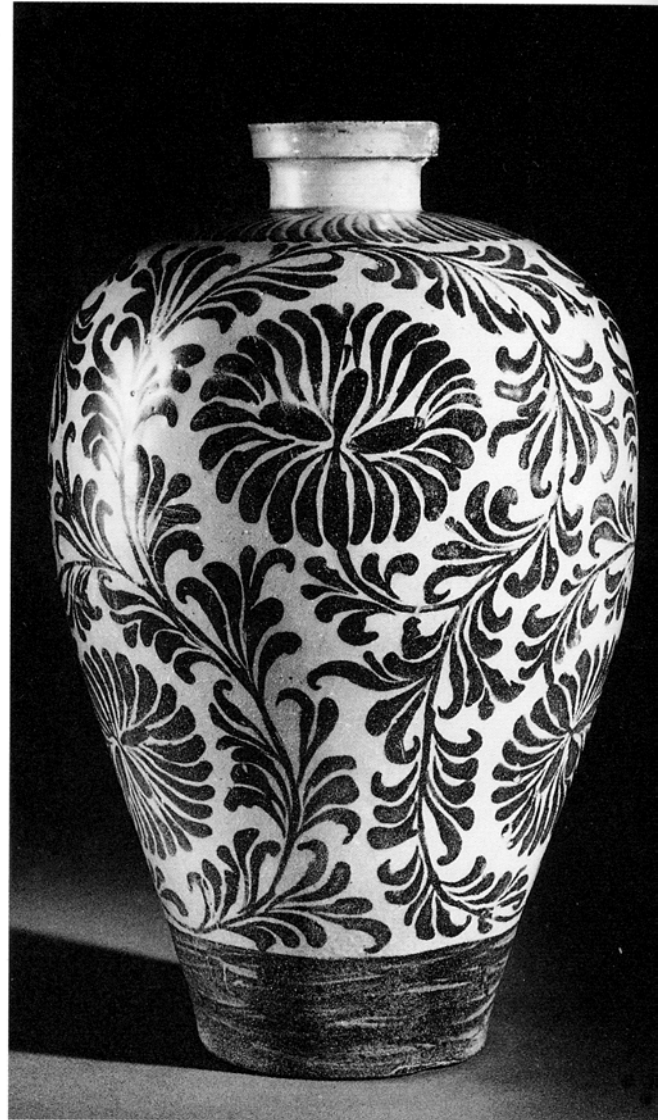
vases and hot water bowls, all copied from the forms of Ding ware, so that they are not illustrated here, but the wine pots are specially shown because they are different.⁸⁷

Unfortunately, the illustrations made by Xu Jing were lost.

Xu refers to the influence of Ding wares on Koryo celadons, but these were not the only Chinese wares to pattern the development of celadon manufacture during the Koryo. The earliest Chinese influence came in the ninth–tenth century from the Yue kilns in southeast China. It is thought possible that Chinese potters migrated by sea at that time from Five Dynasties China to southwest Korea. Whether or not potters actually travelled to Korea, the technique of making celadons clearly did. Scientific analysis of clays and glazes of both Chinese Yue wares and Koryo celadons has revealed many similarities.⁸⁸ Vessel shapes, decorative motifs and the widespread use of the wide flat footring all derive from Yue wares. There was also considerable influence from north Chinese wares through the northern land route to Korea. Vessel shapes and carved and moulded decoration show similarities with Ding wares and northern celadons from Yaozhou, while the use of three or six small stones as spurs on which to rest the piece in the kiln during firing derived from Ru wares. The bluish glaze and elegant shapes also show influence from Ru (fig. 52). Chinese Cizhou wares with underglaze iron-painted decoration had an effect on Koryo celadons, which were produced with similar decoration (fig. 53). Liao, whose Khitan people were defeated by Koryo in the eleventh century, also exerted a clear influence. Many Khitans came to Korea and practised their crafts there. Xu Jing refers to them thus: ‘I heard that there are many thousands of Khitan captives, of whom one in ten was a craftsman. Those with special skill were selected for the Royal palace.’ Their contribution accounts for the similarity in the floral scrolls and openwork decoration between Liao and Koryo ceramics. Koryo vessel shapes, such as the vase with ‘dished mouth’, also owed a debt to Liao white porcelain, and the Korean practice of making celadon figures recalls Liao green-glazed earthenware figures.⁸⁹

The Koryo craftsmen managed to absorb these many Chinese influences, both technical and stylistic, and yet to produce unique and distinctively Korean creations. The vessels which particularly impressed Xu Jing were the celadon incense-burners, based, no doubt, on Song archaistic bronzes but embellished with animal figures on their lids, through whose mouth the incense would rise: ‘A lion emits incense and is likewise kingfisher coloured: the beast crouches on top, supported by a lotus. This is the most distinguished of all their wares: the others resemble the old “secret colour” of Yuezhou and the new kiln wares of Ruzhou.’⁹⁰

Innovations introduced by Koryo potters, which distinguish Korean celadons from Chinese ones, include vessels shaped like vegetables and animals such as gourds, melons



53. Stoneware *maebyong* vase, actually a wine container, with large underglaze iron-brown chrysanthemums under a celadon glaze. The iron-painted decoration shows some links with Chinese Cizhou wares, but such decoration was first used under a celadon glaze in Korea. Koryo period, 12th century AD. Ht: 25 cm.



54. Tea bowl of stoneware with very rare underglaze copper-red decoration of flower scrolls under a celadon glaze. Koryo period, early 12th century AD. Diameter: 17.8 cm.

(see fig. 56), flowers, ducks, monkeys and turtles or with applied figures of lions, dragons, rabbits and fish. Large areas of openwork or relief-carved lotus petals are also distinctive Korean features. The most important decorative innovation was the use of inlay (*sanggam*), which was probably introduced in the second half of the twelfth century. This was probably inspired both by Silla regularly stamped decoration on pottery and also by inlay on metalwork and lacquer. Designs of clouds, cranes, flowers or grapevines were incised on the leather-hard body of the vessel. Then black or white inlay⁹¹ was painted into the incised designs and the excess wiped off. The vessel was then glazed and fired (see fig. 56).⁹² Painting in iron-brown or copper-red under the celadon glaze and in gold over the celadon glaze were also Korean innovations (see fig. 53). Extant vessels painted in red or gold are extremely rare, but the British Museum is fortunate in having one of the best examples of the very difficult underglaze copper-red technique (fig. 54). Although underglaze red was used on Chinese porcelain in the fourteenth century and as early as the Tang dynasty on Changsha wares, it was never very successful because it was difficult to ensure a good colour.⁹³ Underglaze red was never used on celadons in China, although underglaze iron-brown was used sparingly, particularly in the Yuan.

The chronology of Koryo celadons is the subject of scholarly debate in Korea. Gom-pertz bases his views on Japanese⁹⁴ scholarship and Korean scholars such as Choi Sun-u, Chung Yang-mo, Yun Yong-yi and Kim Jae-yeol all have slightly differing opinions.⁹⁵ The general consensus is that celadons began to be produced in Korea in either the ninth or the early tenth century. A jar in the Ewha University Museum, with an inscription dating it to 993, is used as evidence of the production of celadon at that date. However, although the inscription tells us that it was made for royal use at rituals in memory of the first Koryo king, Taejo, this jar is a rather strange one, with a pale greyish-brown glaze. It probably represents a transitional, experimental phase in celadon development. Ninth- to tenth-century kilns producing celadons were located at Kangjin and changhung in South Cholla province, at Shinan and Kochang in North Cholla province and at Wondang and Yangju in Kyonggi province.⁹⁶ Excavations in recent years at So-ri in Kyonggi province and at Kangjin have provided interesting new theories about the dating of the earliest Koryo celadons and their relationship to Chinese wares.⁹⁷ In the early eleventh century, celadon was still not used commonly because the Chinese *Song shi* records that in the year 1005 all vessels used in private households in Korea were made of bronze.⁹⁸ Early Koryo (eleventh- to early twelfth-century) celadons were plain or embellished with incised or carved decoration, as evidenced by those excavated from the tomb of King Injong (reigned 1123–46).⁹⁹ The highpoint of celadon manufacture, when exquisite inlaid decoration was produced, is usually said to last from the mid-twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century, up to the Mongol invasion in 1231. The period of court exile in Kanghwa island followed by subordination to the Mongols until the end of the dynasty in 1392 is seen as the period of decline. Nonetheless, many beautiful pieces were produced during this period.¹⁰⁰



55. White porcelain cupstand with incised decoration of chrysanthemums and squared spirals. White porcelain was made in the same shapes and at some of the same kilns as celadons but in smaller numbers. Ht: 5 cm.

Many Koryo celadons were manufactured for the use of aristocratic ladies in the form of cosmetic sets, including round boxes for rouge or face powder and small bottles for hair-oil. Elegant drinking cups and cupstands (fig. 55), wine ewers, spittoons, tea bowls (see fig. 54) and pillows all demonstrate the refined lifestyle of the court. By the Koryo, tea drinking had become very fashionable, as is evidenced by Xu Jing's description:

The people of Gaoli have become much addicted to tea drinking and many kinds of tea implements are made: a black tea bowl ornamented with gold, a small tea bowl of kingfisher colour and a silver tripod for heating water are all modelled after Chinese wares. When a party is held, tea is made in the courtyard and covered with a silver lotus [lid]. It is served with a dignified step. Only when it is announced that the tea is ready does everyone drink: thus it is unavoidable that some should drink their tea cold. In the tea room, the tea things are placed in the centre of a red table cloth and covered with red silk gauze. Tea is set out three times daily and is followed with hot water: the people of Gaoli regard hot water as medicinal. It does not fail to please them when guests drink up their tea completely: if some is left it is considered discourteous. For this reason one should always make a point of draining one's tea bowl.¹⁰¹

It is apparent from this account that considerable ceremony was attached to the drinking of tea. As in China and Japan, tea drinking was originally associated with Buddhist monks and important Buddhist festivals always involved tea drinking. References to tea drinking are also found in literature and poetry of the Koryo period. As in China, where Yue wares were thought perfect for tea drinking, so Koryo celadons were closely associated with the practice.

By the mid-twelfth century, celadons had become so popular that they were even used for roof-tiles on the summer palace built by the profligate King Uijong. The moralizing *Koryo sa* records that in 1157:

More than fifty sections of the people's houses were destroyed and the Taep'yong-jong building constructed. The Crown Prince was ordered to inscribe a tablet; famous plants and flowers were installed; rare and precious articles were displayed on all sides. To the south of this building a lake was made and the Kwallan-jong pavilion built. To the north, the Yang-i-jong pavilion was constructed and roofed with celadon tiles.¹⁰²

This represents the highpoint of the flourishing period of Koryo celadons, when the Koryo aristocracy was enjoying an extravagant life in the capital, before it was brought to an end by the Mongol invasions.

Celadons were also made in large numbers for use in Buddhist rituals. Special shapes, often influenced by and paralleled in silver and bronze, were produced in celadon for specific Buddhist purposes. Examples include the *kundika* (see fig. 49), spouted bowls, bowl and ewer sets for hand-washing, alms bowls and many different varieties of incense-burner.

Most Koryo celadons were made in the southwest of the peninsula and transported up the west coast to the Koryo capital at Songdo (present-day Kaesong). A recently excavated shipwreck off the island of Wando in southwest Korea attests to the large numbers of celadons shipped at a time.¹⁰³ The kilns were of the sloping 'dragon kiln' type, which had been in use in Korea for high-fired wares since at least the Three Kingdoms period. There

were about 270 kilns in existence in the Koryo period, of which about 240 were concentrated in the southwest in the Cholla provinces (see map 5, Appendix 1, p. 222). The two kilns at Sadang-ri in Kangjin district and at Yuchon-ri in Puan district were, to some extent, regarded as official factories. The latter developed much later in the Koryo than the former.¹⁰⁴ Excavations at Kyongso-dong in Inchon revealed a single, sloping tunnel kiln without partitions inside. At Sadang-ri it has been shown that the kiln was on a natural slope, rising at an angle of 5–6°. It has a number of chambers, each with two or three openings. Its length is 7 m (23 ft) and its original width is judged to have been 143–151 cm (56–59 in).¹⁰⁵ The celadons were fired in a reducing atmosphere at a temperature of 1100–1200°C. As with Chinese celadons, it was a small amount of iron oxide in the glaze which, combined with a reducing atmosphere, produced the celadon green colour. It is thought that the bluish tinge to the best Korean celadon glaze is a result of ferrous oxide dissolved in a lime glaze.¹⁰⁶ Some of the very earliest Koryo celadons were sometimes yellow, the result of an inability to control the reducing atmosphere. Towards the end of the Koryo, the celadons again became yellowish or greyish and the designs either schematic or over-elaborate. The fact that the designs became so complicated has been suggested as one of the causes of the decline in the quality of the glaze, which came to assume secondary importance.¹⁰⁷ The greyish, coarser body was a precursor of the *punchong* slip-decorated stonewares, into which Koryo celadons were to develop in the early Choson period.

(See Appendix 1 for an account of the technology and sources of Korean celadons.)

Other wares

White porcelain was not made in the same quantities as celadons, but finds at kiln sites show that it was produced at some of the same kilns as celadons. High-quality white porcelain was made at Yuchon-ri in Puan district of North Cholla province. Lesser-quality white ware has been found at two other sites, So-ri in Yongin district of Kyonggi province and Sadang-ri in Kangjin district of South Cholla province. They may have been produced from the first half of the tenth century until the fourteenth century, but the chronology is at present unclear. Chung Yang-mo states that the kiln at So-ri, discovered in the 1960s, showed evidence of having produced white porcelain as early as the ninth century.¹⁰⁸ Moulding, incising, carving and inlay were used to decorate white wares (see fig. 55).¹⁰⁹

Black wares can be seen as a development of underglaze iron-painted celadons. In the case of completely black wares, the underglaze iron was painted over the complete surface of the vessel and then a celadon glaze applied. Sometimes these black wares were decorated with incised, inlaid or slip-painted designs. They were made at Sadang-ri in South Cholla province and at Jinsan-ri in Haenam district of the same province. Bottles, ewers, bowls and *maebyong* vases were made.¹¹⁰

Unglazed stonewares were probably in common use by ordinary people during the Koryo and are mentioned by Xu Jing, who says that large ones were used for preserving wine and for storing water on sea voyages, encased in a plaiting of vine or rattan to prevent breakage.¹¹¹ Many examples of this unglazed ware exist, in similar shapes to celadons, for example, pear-shaped vases with a pouring hole in the side, *maebyong* vases and spouted ewers. They are usually completely undecorated.

56. Stoneware wine ewer in the shape of a melon or gourd, with inlaid decoration of stylized chrysanthemums under a celadon glaze. Naturalistic fruit and vegetable shapes were favourites with Koryo potters. Koryo period, 12th century AD. Ht: 22 cm.