

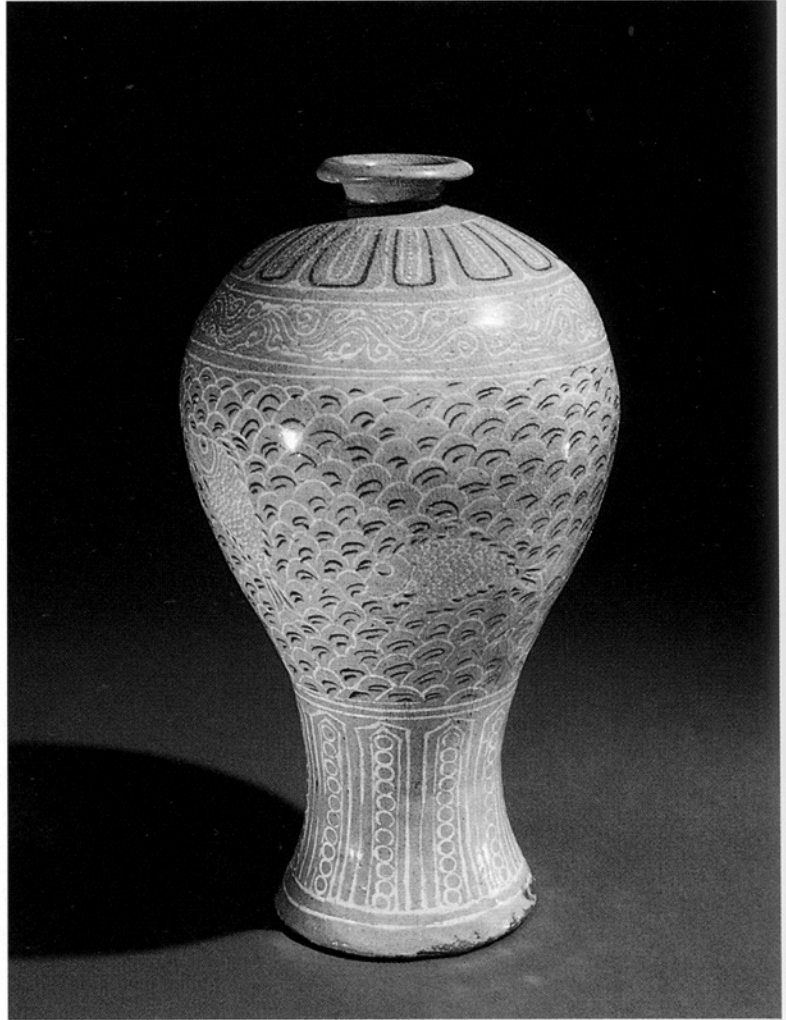
The terminology for the different types of punchong can be confusing, as Japanese as well as Korean terms are in general use. This is because the unpretentious punchong wares were highly prized by the Japanese for use as tea ceremony utensils from the sixteenth century onwards. Indeed, the Japanese invasions have been partly attributed to their desire to seize Korean potters for Japanese kilns and the term 'pottery wars' has been used by Japanese scholars to describe the invasions.⁶⁶ The main characteristic of punchong is the use of white slip to cover the fairly coarse grey stoneware clay body. Sometimes the slip was applied by dipping and sometimes by brushing. The patterns were applied using a variety of techniques, such as stamping, painting, inlay, incising or carving (*sgraffiato*). Finally a transparent, greyish-green glaze was applied and the piece was fired. The following are the main techniques with their English, Korean and Japanese terms. It is clear that the Japanese terms are less precise, many varieties of punchong being called Mishima, after the Japanese name for the Korean port used to export the wares to Japan.

Inlaid wares (*sanggam* or *Mishima*): Incised designs are filled with white or black slip as in Koryo celadons. These can be subdivided into linear inlay (*son sanggam*) and planar inlay (*myon sanggam*). The latter is unique to punchong wares, making its appearance after 1420. It developed into reverse *sgraffiato*, where the background design is carved away.

Stamped wares (*inhwa* or *Mishima*): Repeated rows of stamped, regular patterns are applied, including the 'rope curtain' pattern or chrysanthemum florets. This technique reached a highpoint of popularity in the period between 1417 and 1468. Also included in this category are the stamped wares with inscriptions consisting of the names of government offices, production areas or of potters.

***Sgraffiato* wares (*pakji*; Japanese: *hori-mishima*):** The design is incised and its background carved away to reveal the clay body. Sometimes iron pigment is applied to the revealed body to make it turn black in firing. Popular during the reign of King Sejong, both the technique and the designs show clear influence from Chinese Cizhou wares. Incised slip wares (*sonhwa*, *chohwa*; Japanese: *hori-mishima*) displayed incised linear decoration, without the background carved away.

Iron-painted wares (*cholhwa*; Japanese: *e-hakeme*): Slip is brushed on the entire surface and then designs are painted with a pigment containing iron, which fires black or dark brown. Lively fish and lotus designs are particularly popular, giving a spontaneous impression. This technique has been traditionally associated with Mt Kyeryong near Kongju, but is not limited to that area.



72. Maebyong vase with inlaid decoration of fish among waves. Inlaid punchong ware. Early Choson period, 15th century AD. Ht: 31.5 cm.

Brushed slip wares (*kwiyal*; Japanese: *hakeme*): The slip is applied with a coarse brush, leaving visible and decorative brushmarks. Produced all over the country in the latter half of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, often at the same kilns as white porcelain, these wares were probably intended for the common people as substitutes for the white porcelain used by the aristocracy.

Wares dipped in slip (*punjang, paekto*): Widely made in South Cholla province in the second half of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, this plain white ware should not be confused with the white porcelain it was probably intended to imitate.

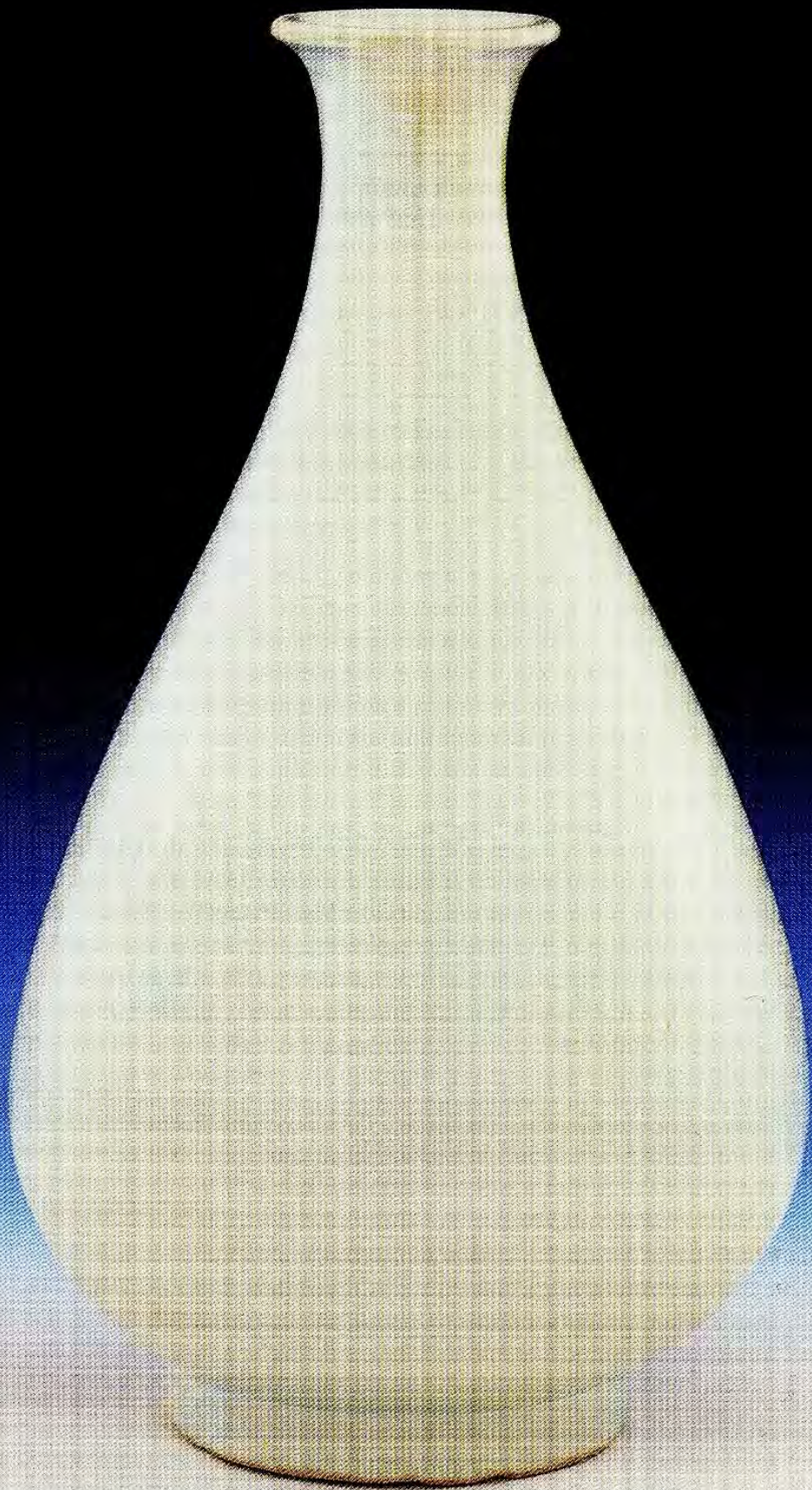
In general, the techniques that produced inlaid, stamped, sgraffiato and incised slip wares were predominant before 1470 and the remaining three after that date. The clay body was less pure and the glaze less evenly applied in the latter three techniques. Although punchong ware is often described as a popular, utilitarian ware, in practice it was used by the court and by aristocrats at the beginning of the Choson. For example, inlaid punchong vases were made for Princess Chongso (1412–24) and stamped punchong for Princes Wolsan and Onyong. Until 1420, white porcelain was rare, even at court, and punchong was used instead. The fact that inscriptions have been found on stamped punchong but not on slip-painted items may suggest that the latter were not used by the aristocracy, only by commoners.

Archaeological investigations have revealed punchong kiln sites dotted over the whole of Korea, particularly in the south. The kilns were climbing brick tunnels, situated on either a hillside or a man-made mound. Many excavated dated pieces can be used to establish a chronology of development.⁶⁷

Porcelain

Although white porcelain had been made in the Koryo period at some of the kilns producing celadons (see section on Other wares in chapter 3, p. 106), its widespread production in Korea did not occur until the fifteenth century, when it developed rapidly. The *Sejong sillok* notes a census of kilns carried out in 1424–5 which shows the existence of 185 punchong kilns and 139 porcelain kilns at that time. The increase in production of porcelain during the reign of King Sejong can be partly attributed to the fact that it was needed to replace gold and silver, which was demanded as tribute by the Ming. In 1407 King Taejong had been forced to decree that ceramics and lacquer should be employed instead of gold and silver wares and by 1419 the use of gold and silver was prohibited at government functions. Even after the Ming removed gold and silver from the list of tribute in 1429, its use at the Korean court was not resumed.⁶⁸

One of the important events in the development of porcelain in the early Choson was the establishment of the official government-controlled factory (*punwon*), probably inspired by the official Chinese kilns at Jingdezhen. The exact date of the establishment of the Punwon in Kwangju district, near Seoul (not Kwangju city in South Cholla province) is a subject of debate; it seems likely that it was in the second half of the fifteenth century, possibly in the late 1460s.⁶⁹ According to the *Sejong sillok*, the finest porcelain was made in four kilns, Kwangju, Koryong, Sangju and one other. Pure white, undecorated porcelain produced at this time was regarded as of high enough quality to be presented to the Ming emperor and was requested by the Ming as tribute. After the establishment of the Punwon at Kwangju, the white porcelain used at the Korean court was produced there exclusively.

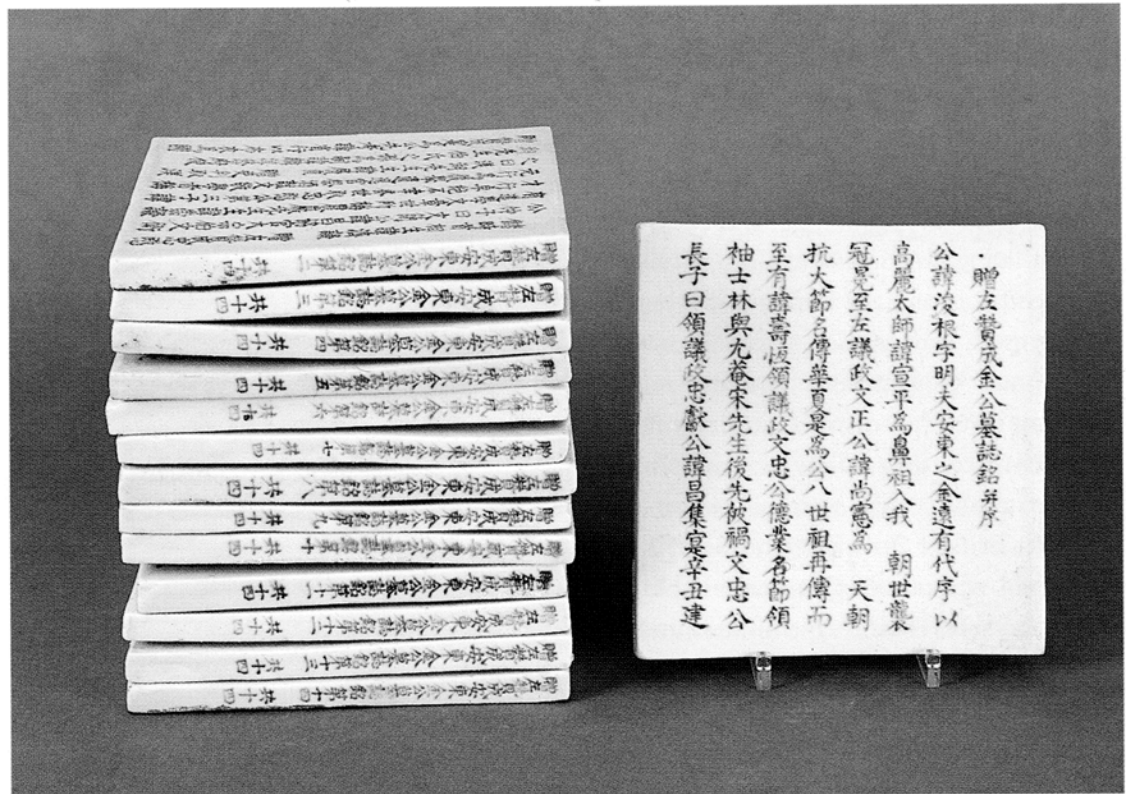


73. Left: White porcelain bottle vase, showing the Confucian Korean predilection for plain white wares. Early Choson period, 15th century AD. Ht: 34 cm.

74. Right: Set of fourteen porcelain epitaph tablets decorated in underglaze cobalt blue calligraphy with details of the lineage and achievements of Kim Chun-gun (1814–47). Choson period, c. 1849. 9 × 8 cm.

Other kilns produced the white porcelains which were used increasingly by aristocrats outside the court from the late fifteenth century onwards.

Korean and Japanese scholars have proposed various chronologies for Choson porcelain.⁷⁰ Chung Yang-mo divides the ceramic history of the dynasty into three periods: the early Choson (1392–1649), the mid-Choson (1651–1751) and the late Choson (1752–1910).⁷¹ The early period is characterized by great influence from Chinese porcelain which was imported and used as models. Although the Korean preference was for plain



white wares, underglaze blue was also developed, at first using expensive cobalt imported from China. As early as the reign of King Sejo (1455–68), however, the discovery of a cobalt blue substitute (called Mohammedan blue after the Chinese term) was recorded at Miryangbu, Uisonghyon and Sungchonbu and that of iron-blue from Kangjinhyon. In 1469 it was recorded that potters 'tried the Mohammedan blue produced in Kangjinhyon and the result was satisfactory'.⁷² The designs on early Choson blue and white often incorporate Chinese features such as bird and flower painting and floral lappets around the base and neck.

The plain white porcelain of this period is distinctively Korean, being creamier in colour than the bluish-white Chinese porcelain. Although vessel shapes were also influenced by China, for example pear-shaped vases (fig. 73), large lidded jars and stem-cups, some shapes were exclusively Korean, such as covered bowls. Inlaid decoration of lotus or foliage scroll designs in black slip was also produced on white porcelain in the early period and sometimes epitaph tablets were written with inlaid slip. Later in the Choson period, many of these tablets were produced, decorated in underglaze blue (fig. 74). Plain white porcelain was also used in the early Choson, in the same way as punchong ware, for

placenta jars. (Great value was placed on placentas, perhaps because of their life-giving properties. The placentas of newborn children of high-ranking yangban and the royal family were often buried in small, sealed lidded jars within another, larger, jar).

Underglaze blue porcelain was at its peak of quality in the late fifteenth century, after which it went into a decline. The eighteenth century, however, saw a revival and the 'autumn grasses' design was particularly popular. The availability of cobalt from China meant that many pieces of underglaze blue with a variety of designs could be produced, including writing utensils, wine and table vessels. Underglaze iron and underglaze copper-red decoration was used either alone or in combination (fig. 75; see also fig. 66).⁷³

Up until the late Choson period the Punwon had been relocated every ten years to a new forest area in Kwangju district in order to ensure a good supply of firewood for the kilns. As the Punwon had moved around, the forest areas had been considerably reduced through the use of the slash and burn method of gathering firewood. However, in the early eighteenth century the Punwon was permanently located near present-day Kumsa-ri and Punwon-ri in Kwangju district near the Han river, and firewood was transported there by river.⁷⁴ From the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, many ceramics were made for use on the scholar's desk, such as water-droppers, brush-washers, brush- and paper-holders. These were usually decorated with underglaze cobalt blue, iron-brown or copper-red and their forms often imitated natural forms, such as fruit, animals, fish or mountains. Large storage jars decorated with dragons in underglaze blue, sometimes with details highlighted in red or brown, are also a feature of this period, as are vessels completely covered in underglaze blue or red or brown which has been brushed on with visible horizontal brushstrokes.

The fact that overglaze enamels were not developed in Korea, despite its close contacts with Qing China where these became prevalent, is probably largely because their bright colours did not appeal to Korean taste. In the Neo-Confucian Choson the preference was for plain, austere wares. There was also an increasing fashion in eighteenth-century Korea for 'Koreanization' in all aspects of cultural life, as epitomized by 'real landscape' and genre painting. As observed by Yi Kyu-gyong, a nineteenth-century Korean scholar: 'The greatest merit of white porcelain lies in its absolute purity. Any effort to embellish it would only undermine its beauty' (see fig. 73 and fig. 8).⁷⁵

For further brief discussion of Choson ceramics, see Appendix 1.

Influence on Japanese ceramics

During the early Choson, ceramics were an important trade item between Korea and Japan, as the Japanese ceramics industry was less well-developed than that of Korea. Korea's punchong wares and white porcelains were greatly appreciated in Japan, where at that time few kilns were capable of making glazed ceramics. Punchong wares particularly



75. Porcelain vase decorated with a dragon painted in underglaze iron-brown. Choson period, 17th–18th century AD. Ht: 33.7 cm.

appealed to adherents of the *wabicha* style of tea ceremony, who liked simplicity and humility above all. Korea's unpretentious punchong wares were well suited for use in that ceremony and were admired for their imperfections and roughness. Simple bowls which would have been used every day for eating rice in Korea thus came to be imported into Japan and were regarded as objects of great aesthetic beauty. Their value was reflected in the way they were preserved through generations, often being repaired with contemporary Japanese lacquer or gold leaf (fig. 76). Tea stains which penetrated the slip and caused discoloration were also highly prized as evidence of the bowl's age.

After Hideyoshi's invasions in the late sixteenth century and the consequent abduction of thousands of potters, colonies of Korean potters established themselves on Kyushu and

started to produce the wares they had made in Korea. It is therefore difficult to tell whether pieces from this period were products of Japan or Korea, but in any case they were products of Korean potters. Koreans such as Yi Sam-pyong, Pal San, Son Kai and Li Kyong were instrumental in starting production at Karatsu, Takatori, Agano, Yatsushiro and Hagi, which were to become famous Japanese kilns. Yi Sam-pyong is further credited with the discovery in 1616 of porcelain clay in the Arita area. He built his kiln at Tengudani, thus starting the production of 'Japanese' porcelain. Yi, a native of Kongju county in South Chungchong province, is thought to have been an employee of the Punwon official factory at Kwangju and was therefore a potter of the



76. Stoneware punchong bowl with stamped slip decoration and later Japanese lacquer repairs. The Japanese had high regard for such wares, which were imported and used in the tea ceremony. They had considerable influence on subsequent Japanese ceramic development. Choson period, 15th century. Diameter: 16 cm.

highest ability, with advanced knowledge of kiln-building and glazing. Excavations at the Tengudani kilns have shown that the kilns used in the seventeenth century were Korean-style climbing kilns.

Although there was little intermarriage between the Korean immigrants and the native Japanese, a gradual assimilation took place which resulted in distinctively Japanese interpretations of the original Korean ceramics being produced. Stamped and brushed slip decoration, for example, which were basic features of punchong wares, were adapted to Japanese taste, becoming more regular, geometric and decorative. Kyoto potters were particularly successful at applying punchong decorative techniques to shapes other than tea-bowls, and cylindrical-shaped Raku bowls decorated with stamped slip were first produced by the Korean potter who is known by his Japanese name of Chojiro.⁷⁶

The fundamental role played by Korean potter-prisoners in the development of Japan's ceramic industry, both stoneware and porcelain, has been little appreciated in the West, despite the great popularity of the Japanese wares and the large numbers imported from the mid-seventeenth century onwards by the Dutch and the British.