

## **The Characteristics of Korean Ceramics Collected by the West in Modern Times**

Prof. Dr. Namwon Jang  
Ewha Womans University

This presentation is based on a few cases of celadon collected in the West from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Joseon government signed various treaties initiating an official relationship with the West. After 1882, when the government signed the United States–Korea Treaty, the Joseon dynasty began to encounter Western cultures. As the Joseon dynasty changed its name to the “Korean Empire” and began actively participating in international expos held in America and Europe, westerners started learning about Korea and its art. Foreign diplomats, soldiers, missionaries, scholars, medical doctors, and teachers came to Korea, and some collected Korean artworks and antiques. Westerners who had never visited Korea could also purchase and collect Korean artworks indirectly. Many of the Korean art collections in American museums began to develop through donations from these early collectors of Korean art and artifacts.

Through this process, a substantial number of westerners began to encounter and collect Korean ceramics. One such figure was William Richard Carles (1848-1929), a British diplomat who served as Vice-consul in Korea between 1884 and 1885. He published a book in 1888 entitled *Life in Corea* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1888) which includes descriptions of the ceramics he collected in Korea. Particularly notable were ceramics from “Song-do,” which he purchased in Seoul. Explaining that “Song-do was formerly the place of manufacture of the best Korean [Korean] pottery,” he offers detailed descriptions of the ceramics, their clay-inlay decoration, and production techniques with accompanying illustrations. He purchased celadons from the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392) that “were said to have been taken out of some large grave near Song-do.” Song-do, meaning ‘city of pine trees,’ was a nickname of Kaeseong, the capital of Goryeo.

Ceramic collectors from abroad at that time were mostly interested in Goryeo celadons, which were known for their beautiful greenish color and delicate clay inlay. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese people had already begun purchasing and collecting Goryeo celadons. As more westerners began visiting Korea later in the century, they began to take up the fad of collecting celadon. After first attending the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, the Joseon dynasty (soon to become the “Korean Empire” in 1897)

continued to participate in the world expos held in Europe and America, which further contributed to the circulation of information on Korean artifacts including ceramics. After Korea became a Japanese colony in 1910, Europe and American collectors had limited access to Korea, and Korean artworks and crafts were collected primarily through Japanese dealers. As a result, Goryeo celadon was originally collected from the viewpoint of ethnologists for Westerners, and gradually changed its character as an object of artistic collection or academic research. And the price of Goryeo celadon rose to an obstacle to the formation of a new collection.