

Special Feature

# An East Asian Perspective on Ceramic Exchange between Ming China and Joseon

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## Introduction

The Ming dynasty sought to establish global hegemony after the establishment of the Great Ming Empire in 1368. One of its priority policies at the early stage of the dynastic foundation was to establish a tribute trade system. This system operated on the principle of restricting trade with countries that did not pay tribute to the Ming dynasty. Establishing it, however, required the mutual consent and cooperation of neighboring countries. To this end, the Ming dynasty dispatched Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–1434), who was from a Muslim family, to lead seven maritime expeditions. His voyages, in particular, deployed large-scale ships and great numbers of people to countries that were uninterested in trade, unlike Ryūkyū 琉球 and Thailand, to induce them, through a show of force, to pay tribute to China (Ch'en 2006, 83–84). The expedition fulfilled not only diplomatic goals but also the economic needs of the Ming dynasty by acquiring southern products such as sappanwood and pepper, thereby completing the system of diplomatic and economic tribute trade. As a result, the tribute system of the Ming court was further enhanced.

In this method of trade, ceramics were used as tribute items or as gifts to the countries that sent tribute to China. Liu Xinyuan (1998, 164), a prolific archeologist and researcher of the Jingdezhen imperial kilns, noted that some early Ming ceramics were made not only for the use in the imperial court but also as gifts to be bestowed by the emperor. These exchanges are documented in written sources from many Asian countries. These documented exchanges are supported by the archaeological findings of Jingdezhen imperial kiln wares and Longquan imperial wares.

As the distribution routes changed over time, the use of ceramics acquired many different aspects in diplomatic negotiations between Joseon and the Ming dynasty. This makes a comparative examination from a broader East Asian perspective necessary. To this end, this paper combines materials from Southeast Asia, the southeast coast of China, and the waters around Southeast Asia and uses a comparative analysis to draw out the similarities and differences between Ming porcelain shipment to Joseon and to other parts of East Asia.

Specifically, this research examines a combination of written and archaeological sources, including official records of the Ming court and East Asian states, documents on Ming ceramics excavated from various parts of East Asia, archaeological remains of ships that sailed from the southeast coast

of China to various parts of East Asia, and ceramics recovered from the coastal waters off Southeast Asian countries where they were presumed to have sunk during the voyage.

This comprehensive review focuses on the specifics and commonalities of the Ming and Joseon porcelain exchanges. This will contribute to broadening the view of cultural exchange and mutual influences between Joseon and Ming China, while also providing an opportunity to reconsider the unique status of Joseon in terms of geography and diplomacy.

## Exchange of Porcelains Produced in Imperial Kilns during the Ming Dynasty

Wares from the imperial kilns were sent to various countries in East Asia by the Ming imperial court. Analysis of the time, routes, and types of ceramic items show that despite similarities there were demonstrably marked differences between those that arrived in Joseon from those that arrived in other countries in the region.

In terms of when the trading occurred and transport routes used, one commonality is that the exchanges between Ming and the other East Asian countries occurred mainly in the first half of the fifteenth century through the aegis of the Ming imperial court. In particular, the concentration of exchanges in the first half of the fifteenth century holds our attention in comparison with the steady stream of exchanges between Ming and the West Asian countries over the course of the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. In East Asia, porcelain exchange with Joseon is also unique in that, in addition to the emperor's direct bestowal of ceramics as gifts, the imperial wares were delivered by envoys who were born in Joseon, raised in Ming China and returned to Joseon as envoys of the Ming court.

### *Time Frame for the Export of Imperial Kiln Porcelains to Joseon*

Ceramic historians have long taken an interest in the manner that porcelains produced at the Ming imperial kilns reached the Korean peninsula and its relation to the beginning of ceramic production in Joseon. Studies in the field of ceramic exchange have made great strides through the examination of historical

records categorizing imported ceramics according to who brought them into the country (Yoon 2006; Jeon 2009; Lee 2011). Based on these previous studies, an investigation of the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* (*Joseon wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄) found a total of seventeen instances of ceramic exchanges with the Ming (Table 1). The earliest exchange was observed in the sixth year of the Yongle era (1408), followed by exchanges in 1417, 1418, and 1427 sporadically by Ming envoys.

Interestingly, between 1427 and 1432, twelve shipments of ceramics were noted. Among them were five shipments sent as gifts from the Xuande Emperor 宣德帝 (r. 1425–1435). Other shipments of porcelains were observed in 1450 and 1483 respectively with an interval of twenty to thirty years between them. A study of the history of Joseon-Ming China relations shows that the frequency of the envoys sent from Joseon to China decreased dramatically after the reign of King Seongjong (r. 1469–1494) (Park 2000, 158–59). The decrease in the number of tribute exchanges of imperial kiln wares is consistent with this observation.

**Table 1.** Details of the Porcelains Transferred from Ming to Joseon<sup>1</sup>

No.	Year	Types of wares	Quantity	Delivered by/from	Source
1	1408	Bunsaek Jagi 粉色砂器		Ming envoy Huang Yuan 黃儼 (K. Hwang Eom)	<i>Taejong sillok</i> 太宗實錄, Vol. 15, Year 8, Month 4, Day 17
		Jugi 酒器			
2	1417	Amhwa bunsaek dajong 暗花粉色茶鍾	1 piece	Ming envoy Hai Shou 海壽	<i>Taejong sillok</i> , Vol. 34, Year 17, Month 7, Day 21
		Chabyeong 茶瓶	1 piece		
		Bunsaek dajong 粉色茶鍾	1 piece		
3	1418	Sajong 沙鍾			<i>Sejong sillok</i> 世宗實錄, Vol. 86, Year 21, Month 9, Day 1.
4	1427	Bunsaek sajong 粉色沙鍾	1 piece	Ming envoy Yin Feng 尹鳳 (K. Yun Bong)	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 36, Year 9, Month 4, Day 24
5	1428	Baekso jagi 白素磁器	10 sets	The Xuande Emperor	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 41, Year 10, Month 7, Day 19
		Baekja cheonghwa daeban 白磁青花大盤	5 pieces		
		Baekja cheonghwa soban 白磁青花小盤	5 pieces		
6	1428	Jajong 磁鍾	1 piece	Ming envoy Cui Zhen 崔眞 (K. Choe Jin)	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 41, Year 10, Month 8, Day 11

<sup>1</sup> This table shows a list of Ming porcelains screened from data collected in previous studies (Jeon 2009; Lee 2011).

7	1429	Cheonghwa baekja jong 青畫白磁鍾		Ming envoy Li Ke 李恪	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 43, Year 11, Month 1, Day 27
		Baekja Hwajong 白磁畫鍾			
8	1429	Baekja yeongyang dajong 白磁羚羊茶鍾	30 pieces	The Xuande Emperor	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 44, Year 11, Month 5, Day 2
		Baekja pa chabyeong 白磁吧茶瓶	15 pieces		
9	1429	Amhwa cheongjong 暗花青鍾	4 pieces	Ming envoy Li Xiang 李相	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 44, Year 11, Month 5, Day 4
10	1429	Amhwa jong 暗花鍾	4 pieces		<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 45, Year 11, Month 7, Day 15
11	1429	Baekjagi 白磁器	15 sets	The Xuande Emperor	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 46, Year 11, Month 11, Day 2
		Baekja cheonghwa daejeop 白磁青花大碟	4 pieces		
12	1429	Sajong 沙鍾		Ming envoy Wang Gouer 王狗兒	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 86, Year 21, Month 9, Day 1
13	1430	Ciqi 磁器		The Xuande Emperor	<i>Xuanzong shilu</i> 宣宗實錄, Vol. 61, Year 5, Month 5, Day 17
14	1430	Cheonghwa saja baekja takgi 青花獅子白磁桌器	3 sets	The Xuande Emperor	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 49, Year 12, Month 7, Day 17
		Cheonghwa unyong baekja juhae 青花雲龍白磁酒海	3 pieces		
15	1432	Amhwa jajeop 暗花磁碟		Ming envoy Zhang Dingan 張定安	<i>Sejong sillok</i> , Vol. 56, Year 14, Month 6, Day 4
16	1450	Cheonghwa jong 青畫鍾	6 pieces	Ming envoys Zheng Shan 鄭善 and Yin Feng 尹鳳	<i>Munjong sillok</i> 文宗實錄, Vol. 3, Year of enthronement, Month 8, Day 5
		Cheonghwa baekjong 青花白鍾	5 pieces		
		Jasaek jong 紫色鍾	6 pieces		
		Hwa wanja 畫碗子	10 pieces		
		Suncheon so wanja 純青小碗子	10 pieces		
		Suncheon juju 純青酒注	1 piece		
		Daejung sojeop 大中小碟	60 pieces		
		Cheonghwa soban 青花沙盤	9 pieces		
		Cheonghwa daejan 青花臺盞	1 piece		
		Suncheon jong 純青鍾	6 pieces		
		Jajeop 紫碟	27 pieces		
		Hwa dajong 花茶鍾	6 pieces		
		Cheongmyo geum juju 青苗金酒注	1 piece		
		Cheonghwa baekje wan 青畫白提碗	10 pieces		
Cheonghwa dajong 青畫茶鍾	6 pieces				
17	1483	Jagi 磁器		Ming envoys Zheng Tong 鄭同 and Jin Xing 金興	<i>Seongjong sillok</i> 成宗實錄, Vol. 156, Year 14, Month 7, Day 20

It is notable that the period which saw a concentration of shipments from Ming China followed a similar pattern of porcelains shipments to countries in Southeast Asia. For example, official Ming exchanges with Ryūkyū began during the Hongwu period (1368–1398), slightly earlier than the ceramic exchange with Joseon. According to a study by Peng Ying-Chen (2005), who conducted an in-depth examination of the materials from the Okinawa region in which Ryūkyū was located, ceramic shipments from Ming in the mid and later fifteenth century were significantly fewer than in the early part of the century.

A review of the records of official exchanges between Ryūkyū and Ming shows that the Ming court bestowed products such as silk gauze, a royal robe with dragon designs, and seals as return gifts.<sup>2</sup> However, unlike the case with Joseon, neither lists of gifts nor edicts were found regarding the bestowal of wares. Other records suggest, however, that the ceramic exchanges between the Ming court and the Ryūkyū kingdom could be viewed as government-sponsored trade to a certain extent.

With the arrival of Ming envoy Yang Zai 楊載 (n.d.) in the fifth year of the Hongwu era (1372) to announce the founding of the Ming Dynasty, the Ryūkyū kingdom officially established its relationship with China. After Zhenghe's expeditions, especially, the kingdom became prominent for its role as a transit trade center as the demand for goods produced in Southeast Asian countries such as sappanwood and pepper grew. Furthermore, intermediary trade increased after shipbuilders from the Minnan 閩南 region of southeastern China began to arrive and build ships; thereafter, Ryūkyū emerged as a hub for sea trade to Southeast Asia.

Ryūkyū is located in the middle of the Southeast Sea. It had no relationship with China since ancient times. During the reign of Yuan Shizu (r. 1260–1294), officials were sent to appease the kingdom, but they were unable to reach there...It was not until the first month of the fifth year that the envoy Yang Zai was sent to announce the establishment of the Ming dynasty. Satto 察度 (1350–1395), the King of Chūzan, had his brother Taiki 泰期

and others follow Yang Zai to the Ming court and pay tribute. The emperor was pleased and rewarded him with the *Datong li* 大統曆 (*Calendar of the Great Unification*), patterned silk, silk gauze in differentiated amounts,... In the summer of the ninth year, Taiki followed Li Hao 李浩 to pay tribute and received forty horses. He told him that Ryūkyū people valued only pottery and ironware, not silk. For this reason, ever since, porcelain and ironware were used as rewards.<sup>3</sup>

So far, no records have been found detailing the quantity and types of imperial kiln porcelains shipped to Ryūkyū. Yet, it is worth noting that the Ming envoys dispatched to Ryūkyū to obtain horses and sulfur reported to the emperor the kingdom's preference for porcelain and ironware over silk. In particular, the frequent use of porcelains and ironware as goods later on in the government-sponsored trade suggests that a significant number of imperial kiln wares were shipped to Ryūkyū.

This is supported by the excavation report for Shuri 首里 Castle which found a significant number of imperial kiln wares. Based on this discovery, it can be assumed that the exchange of imperial kiln wares likely continued after the Hongwu period (Chen 2012). However, from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, the frequency of the kingdom paying tribute to Ming gradually decreased, and the overall volume of porcelains imported also declined significantly. In particular, Peng Ying-Chen attributes the decline in the quantity of mid-fifteenth century porcelain excavated from Shuri Castle to a policy implemented by the Chūzan kingdom. According to his research, the kingdom's control over trade goods resulted in a decrease of the transit trade that linked Ming to various parts of Southeast Asia (Peng 2005).

This increase of shipments of imperial kiln ware to East Asian countries in the first half of the fifteenth century followed by its decline in the second half contrasts with the continuity of imperial kiln wares sent to West Asia. The imperial reign marks on the underside of ceramics attest to the continuity of shipments from the early to the middle of the Ming dynasty.

The Timurid Empire sent envoys to the Ming court seventy-eight times

2 *Taizu Gao Huangdi shilu* 太祖高皇帝實錄, Vol. 94, Hongwu Year 7 (1374), Month 11, Day 16; *Taizu Gao Huangdi shilu*, Hongwu Year 10 (1377), Month 9, Day 10; *Taizu Gao Huangdi shilu*, Vol. 126, Hongwu Year 12 (1479), Month 10, Day 22.

3 *Mingshi* 明史, Vol. 332: (清) 張廷玉撰, 清乾隆四年武英殿校刻本: “琉球居東南大海中, 自古不通中國. 元世祖遣官招諭之, 不能達... 五年正月命行人楊載以即位建元詔告其國, 其中山王察度遣弟泰期等隨載入朝, 貢方物. 帝喜, 賜『大統曆』及文綺, 紗羅有差... 九年夏, 泰期隨浩入貢, 得馬四十四匹. 浩言其國不貴絢綺, 惟貴磁器, 鐵釜, 自是賞賚多用諸物.”

over the course of 130 years, beginning in the twentieth year of Hongwu's reign (1387). These visits were mainly concentrated in the first half of the fifteenth century. The Timurids vigorously engaged in exchanges with Ming, including sending horses as tribute. According to the *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* (*Ming shi lu* 明實錄), the Chinese court provided platinum, cotton cloth, tea leaves, and ironware as reciprocal gifts (Han 2020).

Records show that the Ming emperors began to send porcelain to the Timurid Empire beginning in the Yongle era. In particular, porcelain is included in the records of the seventeenth year (1419)<sup>4</sup> and the twenty-second year of the Yongle emperor (1424).<sup>5</sup> A vase held in the Turkish palace is considered to be representative of the types of ceramics produced by the Ming imperial kiln and sent as imperial gifts to West Asia (Figure 1). It has a three-clawed dragon design which is indicative of a gift to a royal relative. The shape and design are characteristic of the porcelains produced at the imperial kilns during the reigns of the Yongle (r. 1402–1424) and the Xuande (r. 1425–1435) emperors. Modeled on Islamic glass and metalware, they would have reflected the intention to offer them as gifts destined for Islamic regions (Chen 2018).

Another piece from the imperial kilns is a yellow-glazed porcelain bowl with the six-character reign mark “Da Ming Zhengde nianjian” (Zhengde Era of the Great Ming 大明正德年間) in blue pigment on its base, which is held in the Topkapi Palace collection (Figure 2). The presentation of these types of imperial porcelain as gifts was more than a simple gesture; they were likely intended to signify the authority of the Ming dynasty and serve as important diplomatic symbols expressing the dynasty's friendly intentions toward West Asian countries.

In summary, official and reciprocal exchanges with both East and West Asia are concentrated in the first half of the fifteenth century. However, in East Asia, there is no documentation of excavated or circulated imperial kiln wares of the mid-Ming period, while the exchange of Ming porcelains with West Asia

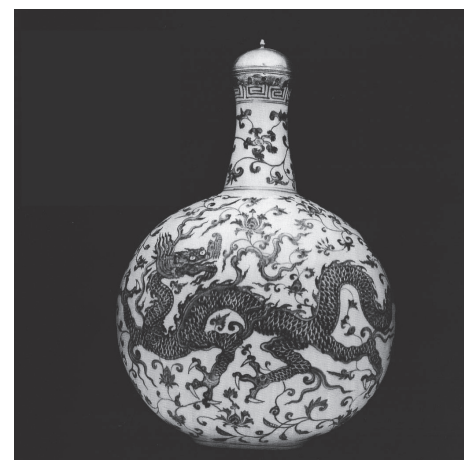


Figure 1. Yongle Era White Vase with Underglaze Cobalt Blue Design, Topkapi Palace (Aisai 2001, 71)



Figure 2. Yellow-glazed Bowl with Zhengde Reign Mark, “Da Ming Zhengde nianjian” Topkapi Palace (Aisai 2001, 84)

continued into the middle period of the dynasty from the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. Such a different pattern of exchange with East Asia and West Asia suggests that the Chinese court applied different criteria and objectives to different regions when it came to allocating gifts of porcelain.

### *Shipping Route of the Imperial Kiln Wares to Joseon*

An important role in the Ming tribute trade system was played by the establishment and operation of related facilities. Regulations such as requiring a permit to visit the Maritime Trade Commission (Shibosi 市舶司), visitation procedures, and taxation were crucial to the efficient operation of the trade system. Each country was assigned to a different Maritime Trade Commission according to region. For example, Joseon was assigned to Dengzhou 登州, Japan, to Ningbo 寧波, Ryūkyū, and to Fuzhou 福州, and countries from Southeast Asia and southern India were all assigned to Guangzhou 廣州. After those bearing tribute entered the port where the Maritime Trade Commissions were installed, they transported their tribute items to Nanjing and Beijing, respectively. They were allowed to trade goods for private use after a portion of the price was paid to the Ming court (Li 2007, 66–67).

When a foreign entourage arrived at the port, the envoy's identity was verified by matching their tally with the corresponding tally held by the

4 *Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* 太宗文皇帝實錄, Vol. 212, Yongle Year 17, Month 5: “永樂十七年, 以失刺思, 亦思弗罕等處使臣辭還, 遣中官魯安葉先等送之, 並齋勅往勞失刺思王亦不刺金, 賜之絨錦金織文綺紗羅玉繫腰磁器等物, 凡安所經亦思弗罕等處其頭目各有賜, 及行亦思弗罕使臣馬哈木等奏願留居京師, 從之, 賜齋有加。”

5 *Renzong Zhao Huangdi shilu* 仁宗昭皇帝實錄, the first section of Vol. 1, Yongle Year 22, Month 8, Day jisi: “永樂二十二年, 下西洋諸番國寶船悉皆停止...一往拖西撒馬兒罕失刺思等處買馬等項及哈密取馬者, 悉皆停止, 將去給賜段疋磁器等件就於所在官司入庫。”

Maritime Trade Commissioner. For example, a two-Chinese-character country name, such as “Ri-ben” (Japan 日本) or “Seom-na” (modern day Thailand 暹羅), was inscribed onto a tally consisting of two parts; one half, with a single Chinese character, was held by the tribute-paying country and the other half, with the other character, was held by the Ming Board of Rites (Libu 禮部). In the case of Japan, the Ming court made tallies with the characters “ri” and “ben” on them and gave a hundred of them, bearing the character “ben,” to Japan. Whenever Japanese envoys arrived to pay tribute, the maritime trade commissioner matched the two halves of the tally and examined the shape of the character “ben” to check the authenticity (Jung 2013, 5–6). These Maritime Trade Commissioners were in use until 1522, the first year of Jiajing’s reign (1522–1566), when the offices in Fujian 福建 and Zhejiang 浙江 were abolished, leaving only the Guangzhou office. The Maritime Trade Commissioner in Guangzhou then changed its tariff system from one where it imposed a 3% tax based on trade value to a tax based on the number of ships. The new system lasted until the Qing dynasty.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike other East Asian countries, which had no choice but to utilize sea routes, the Ming dynasty’s exchanges with Joseon were mostly overland and occurred more frequently than those with other countries (Koo 2013, 96). These frequent exchanges allowed Ming ceramics to reach Joseon through a variety of routes. On five occasions, emperors issued edicts personally bestowing porcelains on Joseon. Additionally, there are twelve instances where Ming envoys personally delivered them as gifts while on their mission to Joseon. Through these channels, Joseon officials seem to have been able to acquire some Ming porcelains, as evidenced by the records of Joseon officials presenting Ming porcelain to the Joseon court. This unusual phenomenon is not evident elsewhere, but it is only observed in Joseon.

On several occasions in the early fifteenth century, some Ming eunuchs of Joseon origin were sent to Joseon as envoys. Further, Joseon girls who had been sent as tribute to the Ming court became imperial relatives and their families received various gifts from the Ming state when envoys visited Ming China on diplomatic missions (Ye 2014, 116–17). It is highly likely that those eunuchs and imperial relatives who were originally from Joseon acquired imperial kiln

wares from emperors.

For example, consider Yin Feng 尹鳳 (K. Yun Bong, d. 1483), a Ming envoy who was originally from Joseon. As a child, he was raised in the household of the Joseon official Yi Bin 李彬 (d. 1410). As a Ming envoy, he made numerous requests to the Joseon court during his stay for goods for his own needs, some of which were handed over to him at Yi Bin’s residence rather than at the palace.<sup>7</sup> Most notably, in 1429, Yi Bin’s wife presented blue and white porcelain to the Joseon royal family.<sup>8</sup> This was also the time when Yin Feng presented blue and white porcelain to the Joseon court at the behest of the Xuande Emperor, so it is quite possible that the porcelain that Yi Bin’s wife offered to the Joseon court was brought by Yin Feng from China. As this case illustrates, the families of Ming envoys in Joseon or imperial relatives of Joseon origin had access to imperial kiln porcelain. This is considered a unique phenomenon even in East Asia, which stemmed from the historical relationship between Joseon and Ming.

### *Porcelain Types Traded*

It is likely that porcelain with the three-clawed dragon design, a symbol indicative of a royal relative, was included in the items shipped to Joseon as was the case for other East Asian countries. Furthermore, the Ming court sent Joseon a set of porcelain tableware, a singular gift not bestowed on any other country in the region. This shipment of tableware is noteworthy because it may represent the case of a special bestowal to Joseon.

Research on porcelain imported into Joseon during the early Ming dynasty has been based primarily on their names recorded in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*. Lee Hyun-jung’s 2011 study compared the names of porcelain types mentioned in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* with those of porcelains produced at imperial kilns and found that they included a variety of types such as Jingdezhen 景德鎮 white wares, blue and white porcelain, single-color overglaze enameled porcelain, and Longquan 龍泉 celadon. She also found that those porcelain wares featured decorations with designs of flowering

6 Gu Yanwu 顧炎武, *Tianxia jingguo libing shu* 天下郡國利病書, Vol. 120: “海外諸番·入貢互市.”

7 *Sejong sillok* 世宗實錄, Vol. 7, Year 1425, Month 2, Day 14: “初, 鳳長於彬家, 遂選入於明. 歲己丑, 奉使而還, 彬論鳳幼時之勞, 贈與鳳弟重富婢乙德.”

8 *Sejong sillok*, Vol. 45, Year 11 (1429), Month 7, Day 15: “李彬妻進青花磁器及螺杯, 賜米豆並三十石.”

plants, flowers in ponds, lions, and dragon with clouds. The decoration techniques including “*anhua*” (hidden decoration 暗花) and “*miaojin*” (gold-outlining 描金) (Lee 2011). In particular, Jingdezhen white wares and blue and white porcelain, jars, dishes, and stem cups accounted for the majority of pieces imported.

Between 1428 and 1430, the Xuande Emperor personally bestowed both white and blue-and-white porcelains on the Joseon court. A large amount of porcelain was imported during this period. The items included large and small dishes, vases, and stem cups, or *jong* (stem supps 鍾) (Kim 2011, 129–30). It is worth noting that “*ta*” (table 桌) and “*takgi*” (tableware 桌器) were listed in the records. According to the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*, the twenty sets of tableware mentioned by the Ming envoy Yin Feng consisted of such items as dishes, bowls, and ewers. Lee Hyun-jeong (2007, 56) assumes that the makeup of the twenty-piece tableware was modeled on the composition of Japanese lacquer tableware.

*Emperor Zhu Zhanji Seeking Amusement in the Royal Palace (Zhu Zhanji*



**Figure 3.** Detail of *Emperor Zhu Zhanji Seeking Amusement in the Royal Palace*, anonymous, ink and colors on silk, 690 x 36.7 cm, The Palace Museum, Beijing (Shenzhen bowuguan 2022, 91)

*xing le tu* 朱瞻基行樂圖) contains a depiction of imperial cuisine, giving us a glimpse of the composition of the royal family’s tableware (Figure 3). The painting illustrates a total of eighteen pieces: four bowls, four small dishes, and five medium and five large dishes. In terms of quantity and item types, this is similar to the twenty-piece tableware set mentioned by Lee Hyun-jeong. Considering that twenty-eight sets of tableware were shipped to Joseon and each set was composed of twenty pieces, it is estimated that a total of 560 pieces of imperial kiln ware arrived in Korea at that time.

Comparing the bestowal of tableware on Joseon with porcelain wares shipped to other countries suggests that the Ming court might have understood Joseon’s needs and position to an extent and purposefully conferred the tableware. Joseon had consistently demanded that Ming treat it with the propriety proper to vassal state.<sup>9</sup> After receiving the tableware, the country vowed to fulfill its commitments as a vassal to Ming.<sup>10</sup> This implies that Joseon’s efforts, since its founding, to emulate Ming propriety and its commitment as a vassal state, can be related to the Xuande Emperor’s gift of a large quantity of tableware.

In particular, the ritual vessels introduced during the Xuande Emperor’s reign as well as the white-glazed porcelain wine jars with cobalt-blue underglaze which were the model for the illustration in the the *Five Rites of State (Gukjo oryui* 國朝五禮儀) had a significant impact on Joseon. Among the porcelains, the white jar with the seven-auspicious-objects pattern in underglaze cobalt blue bears the same design as the porcelain sent by the Ming dynasty to other vassal states, indicating that the Chinese court considered Joseon and the other vassal states to be on equal footing (Kim 2011, 140). Beyond that, it is likely that the Ming court decided the types of wares for all countries, not just for Joseon, by

9 *Taejong sillok* 太宗實錄, Vol. 1, Year 1 (1401), Month 12, Day 9: “A request was submitted to the Board of Rites to give us *Huang Ming zhishu*; [the Board] replied “The rites and institutions of China cannot be implemented in a vassal state” 且啓曰: “請『皇明禮制』於禮部, 答曰: ‘中國禮制, 不可行於藩國’”; *Taejong sillok*, Vol. 23, Year 12 (1412), Month 5, Day 3: “The memorial from the Joseon king states, ‘Regarding the rituals of this dynasty such as those [performed] at the Altar of the Soil and Grain, the altars of mountains and rivers, and the Shrine to Confucius, without knowing the Chinese system, we use the old rites and procedures of the preceding dynasty for the rituals and procedures as a vassal state, which is inconvenient...’ The imperial directive states, ‘They just should follow their own customs’” 本國祖廟及社稷山川文廟等祭, 未知聖朝禮制, 藩國儀式, 仍用前朝王氏舊禮, 深爲未便... 題奏奉聖旨: ‘只從他本俗.’

10 *Sejong sillok* 世宗實錄, Vol. 41, Year 10, Month 7, Day 25.

considering their particular tastes and political circumstances. For example, the Ming's decision to send ancient Chinese bronze vessels to the Japanese reflects the particularity of that country's preference. This indicates that the Ming court carefully implemented its foreign policy by taking account of the cultural and political background of each country.

Such a gift-giving practice is prominent particularly in the diplomatic relationship with Japan. The two countries began their official exchanges in the first year of the Hongwu's reign (1368) when the Ming court sent a diplomatic mission to Japan.<sup>11</sup> The envoys served to proclaim the founding of the Ming dynasty and encouraged Japan to pay tribute. Subsequently, Japan dispatched envoys to Ming China to receive official recognition as a state and tallies from the court. Each time a Japanese envoy entered China to pay tribute, he had to go to the Maritime Trade Commission at the port of Ningbo to match his half of the tally with that held by Commission before they could unload the tribute goods. According to *Collected Statutes of the Ming Dynasty (Da Ming huidian 大明會典)*, Japan sent swords, folding screens, agates, and ox hide to Ming China who reciprocated with court robes, silk gauze, gold and silver, paintings and calligraphy, and coins.

Interestingly, the records of porcelains presented from the Ming dynasty to Japan mention Song dynasty Jian ware as an exchange item, rather than Ming celadon or blue and white porcelain which were popular at that time. According to an account of the fourth year of the Yongle's reign (1406) in the *Scrolls of the Great Ming and Tally of the Two Count (Da Ming biefu bingliangguo gehe 大明別幅並兩國勘合)*, the Ming Emperor Chengzu (r. 1402–1424) sent bronze vessels and ten Jian ware cups with gilded stems to Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義滿 (1358–1408).<sup>12</sup> Gifts of Jian ware from Ming emperors were favored by Japanese emperors and *shōguns* until the early Ming period. *Ornamented Record of the Imperial Visit to the Muromachi Palace (Muromachi dono gyōkōki 室町殿行幸御饗記)* (1437) includes the anecdote of a *shōgun* showing Jian ware cups and *tenmoku* 天目 cups to an emperor who went on an excursion (Hsieh 2005, 168). This happened in the ninth year of the Eikyō's 永享 reign (1437), when the sixth *shōgun* showed thirty-one Jian ware bowls and four oil-spot glaze

*tenmoku* tea bowls to the emperor when he visited Muromachi Palace.

Hsieh Ming-liang (2005, 168) noted that according to the records *Ornamented Record of the Imperial Visit to the Muromachi Palace* the Jian ware cups given by the Ming emperor were used in a tea ceremony but concluded that in the fifteenth century *shōguns* appreciated white-glazed porcelains produced at the Jian kilns in Fujian Province, Jizhou kilns in Jiangxi Province, and at kilns of Jiangxi Province mentioned in *Records of Observations from the Sovereign's Pavilion (Kundaikan sayū chōki 君台觀左右帳記)*.

This suggests that the appreciation of Chinese porcelain in Japan at the time did not merely reflect consumers' taste but also served as an important means of cultural exchange. In particular, the frequent occurrence of ancient Chinese bronze vessels among the Ming dynasty's gifts recorded in the *Collected Statutes of the Ming Dynasty* is also important evidence that the Ming imperial court understood Japan's fondness for antiques.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, among the Ming imperial ceramics sent to East Asia, those with a three-clawed dragon design shipped to Joseon are similar to the Ming wares sent to Seomna and Ryūkyū. This suggests that Ming had a consistent principle with regard to which ceramics to be sent to East Asian countries (Guo 2023, 46–48). The significance of the ceramics with a three-clawed dragon design is that they were part of the Ming dynasty's overseas cultural exchange and foreign policy and were disseminated far beyond Joseon.

*The Ceremonies of the Five Rites of the Veritable Records of King Sejong (Sejong sillok oryuei 世宗實錄五禮儀)* (hereafter, *Oryuei*), contains illustrations of the types of ceremonies and procedures related to royal rituals. The book has preserved the record of these cultural exchanges. In particular, scholars have long debated the possibility that the white-glazed porcelain wine jars given by the Xuande Emperor were the basis for the illustrations in the *Oryuei* (Yun 1993, 80; Kim 2004, 147). The illustrated porcelains feature demon-face and three-clawed dragon designs typical of the porcelain jars fired in the imperial kilns and which completely match the characteristics of the ceramics discovered in imperial kilns (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

The Ming dynasty maintained official relations with East Asian countries by bestowing porcelains with the three-clawed dragon design. Of those

11 *Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu*, Vol. 37, Hongwu Year 1 (1368), Month 12: “遣使頒詔報諭安南，占城，高麗，日本各四夷君長。”

12 *Da Ming biefu bingliangguo gehe* 大明別幅並兩國勘合: “黃銅鍍金廂(鏤)口足建盞一十箇。”

13 *Da Ming huidian* 大明會典, Vol. 228: (明)申時行修(明)趙用賢纂, 明萬曆十五年內府刻本: “日本國, 永樂間賜國王冠服, 紵絲紗羅, 金銀, 古器, 書畫等物。”



**Figure 4.** *Blue and White Porcelain Jar with Dragon Design*, Ming dynasty, Xuande reign, H. 48.4cm, excavated at the imperial kiln in Zhushan, Jingdezhen in 2014, Collection of Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Institute (Shenzhen bowuguan 2022, 20)



**Figure 5.** White-glazed Porcelain Wine Jar with Cobalt-blue Underglaze, *Sejong sillok*, “Orye,” “Garye seorye,” and “Junjak”



**Figure 6.** Shard of *Celadon Bowl with Three-clawed Dragon*, excavated in Okinawa, Okinawa Prefectural Archaeological Center<sup>17</sup>

countries, envoys from Seomna visited Nanjing 南京 in the seventh (1374)<sup>14</sup> and tenth years of the Hongwu's reign (1377).<sup>15</sup> In the sixteenth year of the Hongwu's reign (1383), as the Ming dynasty applied the tribute trade system, it became, along with Japan, one of the first countries to receive tallies (Jung 2013, 5–6). The country brought mainly elephants, ivory, pepper, and sappanwood as tribute; the Ming dynasty gave them various amounts of silk and other goods in return.<sup>16</sup>

Thus far, no discovery of Jingdezhen or Longquan ceramics datable to the fifteenth century have been reported from any excavations in Thailand. However, the collection of ceramics excavated from Southeast Asia and now in the holdings of the Idemitsu Art Museum provides a clue. Researcher Kanazawa Yō notes that the only artifact from Thailand, according to records, is a celadon jar with a three-clawed dragon design similar to a blue and white porcelain

similarly patterned in underglaze cobalt and with a Xuande's reign mark. The stylistic similarity and the records of exchanges between the Seomna and the Ming Empire discussed above suggests that the Ming imperial gifts to Seomna may have included these jars with three-clawed dragon design (Kanazawa 2003, 158).

When Peng Ying-Chen examined the ceramics excavated in Ryūkyū, she suspected that the Longquan imperial ware might have been brought there as gifts from the early Ming emperors. This was based on the fact that Jingdezhen kilns did not produce many blue and white porcelains in the early Ming period. Furthermore, around the time when the Jingdezhen imperial kilns were established, kilns in Chuzhou 處州 (modern Longquan) were requested by an imperial kiln to manufacture some quantity of imperial porcelains. This suggests that the imperial wares presented to the Ryūkyū envoys were likely Longquan imperial wares in the style of Jingdezhen imperial wares and were fired in civil kilns near Chezhou (Peng 2005, 65–66).

<sup>14</sup> *Taizu Gao Huangdi shilu*, Vol. 94, Hongwu Year 7, Month 11, Day 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Taizu Gao Huangdi shilu*, Vol. 115, Hongwu Year 10, Month 9, Day 10.

<sup>16</sup> *Taizu Gao Huangdi shilu*, Vol. 126, Hongwu Year 12, Month 10, Day 22: “暹羅斛國王參烈寶毗牙哩多羅祿，派其臣亞刺兒文智利等，上表獻方物，並命賜予其國王及王子蘇門邦王昭祿羣膺，織金文綺，紗羅，亞刺兒等，賜綺帛，服物有所差異。”

<sup>17</sup> I wish to offer my appreciation to Tatsuya Mori 森達也 and Jie Chen 陈洁 in acknowledgement of their permission to view and use the photos of the artifact respectively.



**Figure 7.** Detail of *Celadon Jar with the Inscription “Jiu” 酒*, excavated inside Shuri Castle SK01, Okinawa Prefectural Archaeological Center, photo by the author

Archaeological study of excavated artifacts also supports these findings. A considerable number of Longquan imperial wares have been unearthed from Shuri 首里 Castle and Watanji 渡地 Village in Okinawa. Among them, the Longquan celadons excavated at Shuri Castle date no later than the 1450s. The most common types of celadons are large vases, jars with flower-shaped lids, ewers, and dishes. Knowing that the royal family of Ryūkyū used to occupy the excavation site and the ceramics have a distinctive five-clawed dragon design, it can be presumed that these Longquan celadons were given by the Ming court (Mori 2019).

Specific examples include the *Celadon Bowl with a Three-clawed Dragon* (Figure 6) and the *Celadon Jar with the Inscription “Jiu” 酒* (*Qing xiang mei jiu* 清香美酒) (Figure 7). The lid has a flower and leaf pattern in underglaze cobalt blue. This typifies the type of imperial wares which were mainly produced in Longquan kilns in the early Ming period (Yang 2021, 92).

Among the porcelain imported into Joseon were ceramics with the three-clawed dragon design which were bestowed to East Asian countries throughout the first half of the fifteenth century. They seem to have been shipped to not just Joseon but many other countries. This can be interpreted as the Ming Empire's efforts to expand its influence in East Asia and to demonstrate its cultural

superiority. The fact that some gifts such as a set of tableware were bestowed only on Joseon means that the Ming court adjusted the types of gifts sent to meet the different tastes of countries in the region. This demonstrates imperial porcelains traded between Ming and Joseon attesting to the commonality and specificity of East Asia.

### **Distribution of Ceramics Produced at Private Kilns during the Ming Period**

Porcelain from Ming was introduced into Joseon by the first half of the fifteenth century, mainly through direct shipments from one court to the other. After this period there is an increasing influx of privately produced Chinese ceramics. This trend becomes noticeable starting in the mid-fifteenth century. Based on analysis of previous research, this section will make a comparative analysis of the Ming wares discovered in Korea and those in East Asia. This will highlight the differences and similarities in the distribution of Ming porcelain produced at private kilns in Korea and East Asia.

#### *Distribution of Ceramics in the Early Ming Dynasty*

Porcelain dated to the early Ming period includes pieces manufactured at the Jingdezhen kilns during the Hongwu, Yongle, and Xuande eras, as well as during the Zhengtong (1435–1449) and Tianshun (1457–1464) eras in the mid-fifteenth century between, and at the Longquan kilns during the same time period. These porcelains have been reported from excavations at Okinawa, in which Ryūkyū was located, and the main island of Japan, as well as underwater sites off the coast of Indonesia, Thailand, Java, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

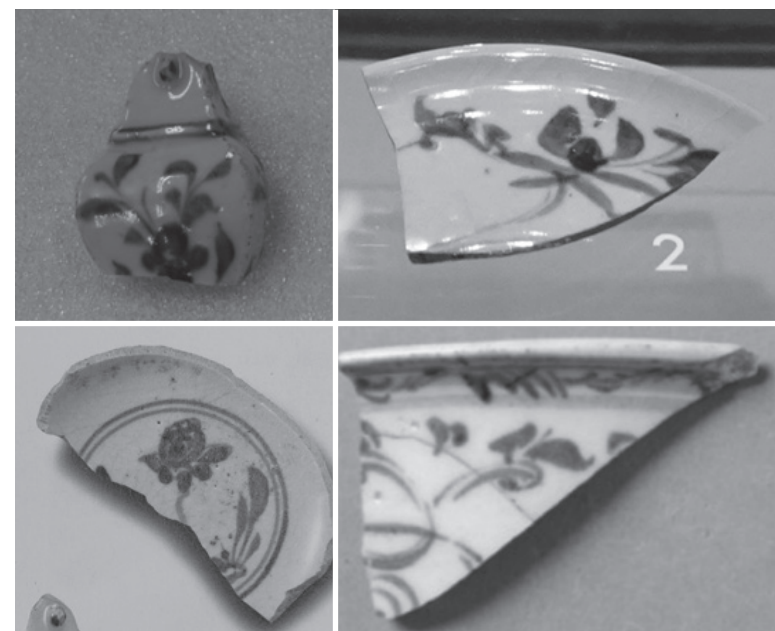
For Joseon, only some pieces of Longquan celadon dated between the end of Yuan and early Ming periods have been found. This contrasts with the later part of fifteenth century when Longquan celadon was frequently shipped to Joseon. This is different from the trend in which Longquan celadon was distributed en masse in Southeast Asia in the first half of the fifteenth century. Longquan wares produced during the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties in Okinawa include bowls, dishes, jars, and vases. Of the blue and white porcelain, eleven pieces date to the Yuan period, and one hundred and ten pieces are

identified as early Ming wares. Also, both white-glazed and colored porcelains have been discovered (Zhang and Qin 2018, 77–78). According to a previous study that collected ceramics from Japan's main island and categorized them by production date, Longquan celadon and Jingdezhen white-glazed porcelain made in the first half of the fifteenth century accounted for the majority of the Ming wares discovered in Japan. Meanwhile, the quantity of blue and white porcelain dated to this time is limited, meaning that the quantity of discovered celadon is far greater (Xie 2005, 164).

It is also noteworthy that the records of the Ryūkyū kingdom indicate the existence of porcelain trade with Seomna. *Li dai bao an* 歷代寶案 contains a list of wares and their quantities for each country that it had engaged with in the porcelain trade since 1425. According to this book, Ming porcelain was transported to the island state on fifteen occasions from the inaugural year of the Hongxi's reign (1425) to the seventh year of the Zhengtong's reign (1442) (*Li dai bao an* 1972, 1273–1302; 1273–1302; 1303–1330). Large and small celadon dishes and small celadon bowls were documented as trade items. These three types of porcelain had almost the same proportions. Trade seems to have been run as an established practice using a basic unit for shipment: ten large celadon dishes, one hundred small celadon dishes, and one thousand small celadon bowls. This is how Ryūkyū operated the intermediary porcelain trade with Southeast Asia.

These ceramics are comparable to those found in sunken ships that had presumably been in service during the early Ming dynasty. These ships were discovered in the coastal waters off the southeast coast of China, specifically around Zhangpu 漳浦, Shazhou Island 沙洲島, and Xiangshan 象山 in Zhejiang. Porcelain recovered from these sites includes blue-glazed ware, *qingbai* 青白 (bluish-white) porcelain, stoneware with brown glaze, and unglazed stoneware (Fujian yanhai shuixia kaogu diaocha dui 2008). Along with the Longquan wares, Qingbai porcelain, which was presumably produced at Jingdezhen, and ceramics from the Cizao kilns in Fujian Province were excavated, all of which can be dated from the late Yuan to early Ming dynasties.

In Korea, white-glazed porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue designs is more numerous than Longquan ware or color-glazed porcelain. Eun-Kyoung Kim's research focuses on Jingdezhen wares of the mid-fifteenth century, and her analysis has resulted in a correction of the production date for them. Previously thought to have been produced between the Chenghua (1465–1487) and the



**Figure 8.** Shards of Early Ming Blue and White Porcelain, excavated at the Hoeamsa Temple and Samcheonsa Temple sites (Gyeonggi-do et al. 2001, 32–33; Seoul Museum of History 2011, 318)

Hongzhi (1487–1505) eras, they are now known to be from the period between the Jingtai (1449–1457) and Tianshun (1457–1464) eras. This established an accurate date of the mid-fifteenth century Ming porcelain excavated in Korea (Kim, Eun-kyoung 2020).

Specifically, the types of objects are bowls, cups, dishes, and vases, and the designs include moonlight, flowering plants, cirrus clouds, tortoiseshell patterns, and Sanskrit syllables (Figure 8). The excavation sites include Hoeamsa Temple which has a deep association with the royal family, government office sites, and residential and commercial areas of the high and middle class of Joseon people.

These early Ming blue and white wares are comparable to ceramics excavated in the inland and coastal areas of Southeast Asia. Blue and white porcelain bowls inscribed with the character “*fu*” 福 and blue and white porcelain wares decorated with pine, bamboo, flowering plums, ocean waves, and moonlight were produced at Jingdezhen and exported in large quantities to Southeast Asia (Yang 2021, 85). Among the blue and white porcelain that reached the shores of Singapore are those with scroll designs as well as those decorated with a tortoiseshell pattern which seems to have been produced

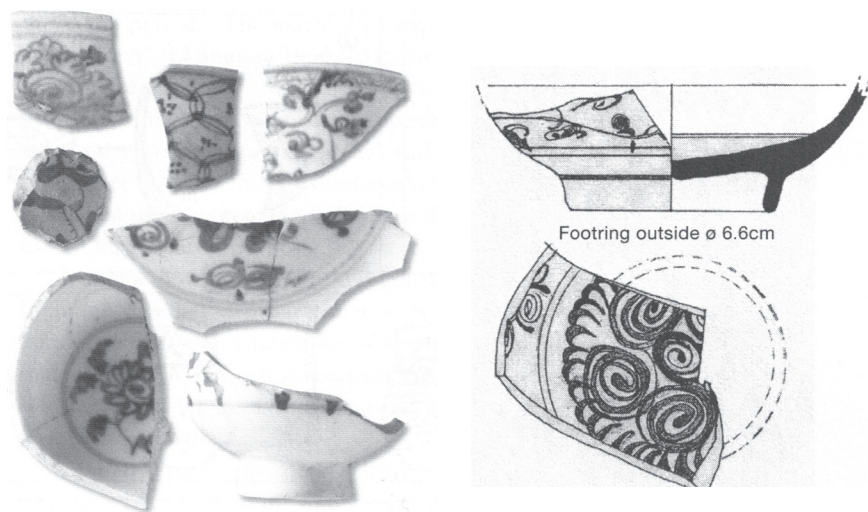


Figure 9. Shards of Blue and White Porcelain Wares, excavated from underwater excavation, Singapore (Miksic 2013, 312–13)



Figure 10. Blue and White Porcelain Bowl, H. 8.0 cm, excavated from shipwreck, Vietnam (Zhongguo Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu bowuguan et al. 2008, 86)

during the Zhengtong's reign (Figure 9). In terms of pattern, these wares found overseas do not differ significantly from those made for domestic consumption in China (Miksic 2013, 310–13). It is also noteworthy that Vietnamese blue and white porcelain was discovered along with Ming Chinese blue and white-glazed porcelain, blue-glazed ewers, and black-glazed porcelain in a shipwreck off the southern coast of Vietnam (Figure 10). Some of the artifacts are decorated with a double vajra pattern and others with *qilin* 麒麟 decoration.

The shape of the blue-glazed ewer and the stylistic features of the blue and white porcelain well reflect characteristics of Ming porcelain made during the period 1436–1465 when the Ming court banned ceramic trade, the so-called “Ming Gap” (Zhongguo Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu bowuguan et al. 2008).

The discovery of sunken ships along China's southeastern coast, coupled with historical documentation, suggest that there was widespread illegal trade between foreign merchants and local people along China's coastline in the early Ming dynasty. Despite the government's strict prohibition of overseas trade, people in coastal regions such as Guangdong, Guangxi, Zhejiang, and Fujian often engaged in illegal trade with foreign merchants as illustrated in the early Hongwu document below. These activities were carried out by Chinese residents in port areas in pursuit of economic gain.

The emperor issued an edict to the Ministry of Taxation strictly forbidding collusion with foreign countries. China has long prohibited gold, silver, coins, silk, and weapons from being exported. *The people in Guangdong, Guangxi, Zhejiang, and Fujian were ignorant and often traded these goods with foreigners.* For this reason, the emperor would punish soldiers, people, and officials in the coastal regions if they were negligent and allowed anyone to secretly make deals with them.<sup>18</sup> (emphasis mine)

However, the Ming court was occasionally flexible in its response; this is also worth noting to understand the context of the illicit trade. That this type of trade was tolerated under certain circumstances indicates that the government condoned illicit trade with foreign merchant ships to some extent. A record from the twenty-first year of the Hongwu's reign (1388) describes a situation in which an illegal trade site in Wenzhou 温州, Zhejiang was seized. Wenzhou is a port located between the Maritime Trade Commissions of Fujian and Zhejiang; it is likely that this corridor was an illegal trade route. The location of the aforementioned sunken ship also proves that these illicit trade activities likely took place between Zhangpu, Fujian, and Zhejiang.

*The people of Yongjia County, Wenzhou were buying goods such agarwood when*

18 *Taizu Gao Huangdi shilu*, Vol. 25, Hongwu Year 23 (1390), Month 10, Day 27: “詔戶部申嚴 交通外番之禁. 上以中國金, 銀, 銅錢, 段疋, 兵器等物, 自前代以來不許出番, 今兩廣, 浙江, 福建愚民無知, 往往交通外番私易貨物, 故嚴禁之. 沿海軍民官司縱令 私相交易者, 悉 治以罪.”

*the Siamese (Thailand) envoys arrived to pay tribute. Now, trade with the outside world is strictly forbidden, and a villager reported this. The provincial surveillance commissioner insisted that the market be closed. The emperor stated, “Yingjia County is a place where people from Siam pass through, so it is only common to trade with them on the way. It is not comparable to trading with the outside world. Release them.”*<sup>19</sup> (emphasis mine)

In the fifth month of the second year of the Yongle’s reign, Minister of the Secretariat Li Zhigang and others reported, “The King of Sannan of Ryūkyū sent envoys to present tribute products and *ordered them to go to Chezhou to buy porcelain* with silver. *Under the law they should be interrogated.*” The emperor stated, “People from a remote region would only pursue their own interest. How could they be aware of the ban? This court should treat them generously. *This does not suffice to punish them.*”<sup>20</sup> (emphasis mine)

These two records reveal the situation of illegal porcelain trade conducted by the kingdom of Ryūkyū. Upon receiving the report of the envoys’ illegal trade activities, the emperor not only acknowledged the geographical specificity of the region but also sympathized with the people and envoys who wished to conduct trade. Considering that illegal trade was tolerated along the east coast of China, in places such as Wenzhou, during the early Ming dynasty, it can be concluded that illegal trade on the southeast coast in the early Ming period was the outcome of a combination of various factors, including the government’s strict ban, the pursuit of economic interests by the local people, the government’s flexible response, and the local merchants’ collusion with foreign merchants. The vigorous mass distribution of Longquan celadon under these circumstances is somewhat different from the practices in Joseon, which requires further contextual analysis.

### *Distribution of Porcelain in the Middle Period of the Ming Dynasty*

Ceramics dated to the middle period of the Ming dynasty were produced during the Chenghua, Hongzhi, and Zhengde eras (1465–1521). Like early Ming porcelain, these wares were distributed to Ryūkyū, Honshū (Japan), the Korean peninsula, and Southeast Asia as well as West Asia. Among the porcelain discovered in East Asia and dated to this period—imperial kiln wares are rare—the majority of wares were produced in private kilns. It is also noteworthy that ceramics produced not only in Jingdezhen but also in Fujian and Guangdong were exported overseas on a large scale. Against this backdrop, the Philippines and Thailand produced porcelain imitating Jingdezhen and Longquan wares, thus laying the foundation for domestic production and creating a new international market structure as competitors of Chinese potters (Huang 2019).



**Figure 11.** Blue and White Porcelain Bowl, H. 7.2 cm, Dangdong-ri, Munsan (Gyeonggi Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Gyeonggi Housing & Urban Development Corporation 2009, 400)



**Figure 12.** Blue and White Porcelain Bowl, H. 6.0 cm, Yadang-ri, Paju, photo by the author



**Figure 13.** Blue and White Porcelain Stem Cup, H. 9.1 cm, Deoksu 6490, Gongju National Museum, photo by the author

19 *Taizu Gao Huangdi shilu*, Vol. 188, Hongwu Year 21 (1388), Month 1, Day 19: “溫州永嘉縣民, 因暹羅入貢, 買其使臣沉香等物. 時方嚴交通外夷之禁, 里人訐之. 按察司論當棄市. 上曰: ‘永嘉乃暹羅所經之地, 因其經過與之貿易, 此常情耳, 非交通外夷之比也. 釋之.’”

20 *Libu zhigao*, Vol. 100, Vol. 2, shengyu 聖諭: “永樂二年五月, 禮部尚書李至剛等奏: 琉球國山南王遣貢方物, 就令賚白金詣處州市磁器, 法當違問. 上曰: 遠方之人知求利而已, 安知禁令. 朝廷於遠人當, 此不足罪.”

Bowls, dishes, cups, stem cups and jars constitute the types of blue and white porcelain originating from private kilns imported during this period. The majority of these pieces are bowls and dishes. They are mainly decorated with such vegetative patterns as pine, bamboo, and flowering plum, as well as other patterns such as auspicious rocks and railing design, floral and scroll design, and medallion design. In addition, the beribboned double vajra design and variant Buddhist scepter design occurred frequently. (Figures 11, 12, and 13). According to previous studies, most of the excavations from this period are concentrated in the old capital city. Some of the ceramics distributed for domestic purpose in China landed in Joseon (Park 2013).

In addition, Longquan wares have been excavated at Gyeongbokgung Palace, Hoamsa Temple site, the site of Ministry of Works Office, Seorin-dong in which there used to be private houses, and the street of government-licensed merchants in the Gwanghwamun area. Most of the wares were bowls and dishes. Analysis of the objects found that most Longquan wares were used by the upper class in Joseon society. Their love for Longquan porcelain resulted in the production of a large, more than twenty centimeters in diameter, porcelain dish in imitation of Longquan ware (Oh 2018).

Materials discovered from two shipwrecks, one in the coastal waters off Pingdan 平潭, Fujian Province and the other off the coast of Hainan Province, reveal the specific characteristics and the various types of private kiln wares traded overseas in the middle Ming period. Further, the porcelain from sunken ships like the Lena wreck off the coast of Vietnam, the Xuende near Malaysia, and the Brunei near Borneo along the southeast coast of China and near Southeast Asia demonstrate the wide trade network, the geographical scope of the circulation of the mid-Ming period porcelain, and variety of ceramic objects.

The artifacts uncovered from the Pingdan site includes a large number of blue and white porcelain and *wucai* 五彩 porcelain. The production of *wucai* wares began in the Zhengde's reign. Based on the design of these blue and white porcelain, one can assume that the ceramics were produced at private kilns in Jingdezhen in the middle of the Ming dynasty (Yang 2015, 42–45).

The artifacts found in the South China Sea are located along the west coast of southern China, to the southwest of Hong Kong and Macau, and off the northeast coast of Vietnam. There sites were discovered in 2022 and excavations were conducted the following year. Two sunken ships were discovered and contained artifacts datable from the Hongzhi to the Zhengde



**Figure 14.** Blue and White Porcelain Shards Dated to Mid-Ming Period, excavated from Pingdan and Xisha wrecks (Guojia wenwuju kaogu yanjiu zhongxin 2021, 82; 2021, 187)

eras with a majority of them coming from the Zhengde period on ship number one and from the Hongqi period on ship number two. Most of the ceramics excavated were Jingdezhen blue and white porcelain and Longquan celadon. Others included various types of Ming porcelain such as white-glazed porcelain, Qingbai porcelain, green-glazed porcelain, yellow-glazed porcelain, blue-glazed porcelain, red-and-green colored porcelain, and enameled porcelain (Guojia wenwuju kaogu yanjiu zhongxin 2023, 11) (Figure 15).

The 1997 discovery of the Lena Shoal wreck in the Philippine waters yielded a large number of blue and white porcelains dating from the Hongzhi to the Zhengde eras. Therefore, the artifacts are presumed to date to the Zhengde's reign in the first half of the sixteenth century (Goddio et al. 2002, 182). In addition to the Jingdezhen blue and white porcelain, Longquan wares and some Southeast Asian porcelain were discovered, which reflect the diversity of porcelain distribution at that time. Around the same time, large quantities of the Ming dynasty blue and white porcelain, and red and green colored porcelain were excavated from the Xuende lying in Malaysian waters. Although large quantities of blue and white porcelain were found inscribed with a Xuande's reign mark, a study suggests that they were produced as imitations of Xuande wares during the Zhengde to Jiajing eras (Brown 2009). These places the artifacts in the first half of the sixteenth century (Orillaneda 2014). In addition to Chinese blue and white porcelain, Thai celadon was also found, providing a perspective into the various networks of porcelain exchange at the time.



**Figure 15.** Porcelain of the Mid-Ming Period Excavated from the South China Sea  
(Guojia wenwuju kaogu yanjiu zhongxin et al. 2023, 11)

The Brunei was discovered in 1997 off the northeast coast of Borneo, Southeast Asia, and is suspected to have plied a route between the Philippines and Brunei. The artifacts are largely dated to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Of the more than 12,000 artifacts recovered, nearly half were reported as ceramics produced in Southeast Asia. This includes Thai celadon, Vietnamese blue and white porcelain, and other pottery from Southeast Asia. In addition, there were more than 200 pieces of white-glazed porcelain from Jiangxi and blue and white porcelain from China, as well as ceramics from Sichuan and Zhejiang Provinces (Pirazzoli-t' Serstevens 2011).

Scholars who have studied the ceramics from the Brunei have noted that the excavated porcelain mostly displays typical Chinese designs, without any particular Islamic designs (Pirazzoli-t' Serstevens 2011, 9). The blue and white porcelain found in the coastal area of Singapore is comprised of various types of wares which were presumably produced during the Hongzhi's reign, indicating a wide distribution of Chinese ceramics. However, their design features are not much different from Chinese wares produced for domestic use (Miksic 2013, 310–13). Of interest is the proportion of Chinese and Southeast Asian-produced ceramics found on shipwrecks in Southeast Asia. The nearer to Southeast Asian shores that sunken ships were found, the larger proportion of Southeast Asian ceramics onboard.

On the other hand, a larger quantity of mid-Ming period ceramics, compared to early Ming wares, have been found in Japan. From the late fifteenth century to the first half of the sixteenth century, the quantity of celadon, white-glazed porcelain, and blue and white porcelain increased. Notably, from the first half to the second half of the sixteenth century, the quantity of blue and white porcelain increased while the quantity of celadon decreased. The three main types of Ming porcelain excavated throughout Japan are blue and white porcelain, celadon, and white-glazed porcelain. Other types such as black-glazed porcelain, *sancai* porcelain ware, and red-and-green enameled porcelain have been also found (Hsieh 2005, 163–64).

The analysis leads to the conclusion that the increased activity of Hakata merchants was a major factor in the increased number of Ming ceramics shipped to the Kyushu region (Seong 2024). Hakata merchants, disguised as emissaries for Joseon and Ryūkyū, brought significant quantities of ceramics to the Korean peninsula (Yun 2016, 29–39).

By the end of the fifteenth century, the number of ceramics transported to the Korean peninsula by these Hakata groups reached into the thousands.<sup>21</sup> Trade routes, however, were changing. Responding to the increased activity of Japanese in the Jiajing's reign, the Maritime Trade Commissions in Fujian and Zhejiang were abolished, and only the Maritime Trade Commission in Guangdong remained, making Gwangju the only legitimate trading port.<sup>22</sup> The Portuguese occupation of Macau and the subsequent establishment of trade routes also contributed to this shift in porcelain distribution channels.

The Maritime Trade Commission in Guangdong levied a tax on the value of trade volume in the late fifteenth century, and an open market was held in the sixteenth century. In so doing, the need for trade with tribute products greatly declined and illicit trade rose markedly (Han 2020, 18). As a consequence, while the Ming blue and white porcelain and celadon are continuously observed in this period, it is clear that the amount of blue and white porcelain excavated in Asia surpassed the amount of celadon.

Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, in addition to porcelain made in China, locally produced celadons were circulating on a large scale. This reflects the

<sup>21</sup> *Sejong sillok*, Vol. 34, Year 8, Month 11, Day 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Mingshi* 明史, Vol. 332, No. 75: “嘉靖元年, 給事中夏言奏, 倭禍起於市舶, 遂革福建, 浙江二市舶司, 惟存廣東市舶司。”

growing regional demand for an alternative to Longquan celadon due to the decline in its production, but it also demonstrates the development of pottery production technology in many parts of Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the trade patterns began to change, in comparison with those during the early Ming period, as the operations of the Maritime Trade Commission centered around Guangzhou and the formation of new trade routes involving foreign powers such as the Portuguese grew. Against this backdrop, the role of Ryūkyū in the early Ming period as a transit center for trade with Northeast Asia declined while the Hakata merchants emerged onto this regional trade landscape.

Ming private kiln wares, including both blue and white porcelain and celadon from this period, have been discovered in the Korean peninsula. However, it appears that these items were not connected to the Southeast Asian porcelain trade routes via Ryūkyū. Consequently, celadon designed to mimic Ming ceramics has not been found in the Korean peninsula. Moreover, the quantity of Longquan celadon wares which had shrunk in other regions had increased slightly in Joseon, likely influenced by the strategic distribution efforts of Japanese merchants (Seong 2024).

### *Distribution of Ceramics of the Late Ming Period*

Late Ming porcelain typically refers to porcelain produced primarily in and during the reigns of the Jiajing and Wanli Emperors and includes porcelain produced at the end of the Wanli's reign, as well as porcelain produced from the mid-to-late sixteenth century to the early seventeenth century (1522–1644).

The retail market began to develop in earnest after 1567, when the Ming dynasty's policy banning trade was eased and the Yue port was opened (Ch'en 2006, 85). During this period, the scope of trade greatly expanded from tribute trade and various types of exchanges emerged. Thus, began a booming period for the export of Chinese porcelain.

In particular, the implementation of the “crafted at an official pottery and fired at a private kiln” (*guanda minshao* 官搭民燒) policy which means to boost the production of porcelain at private kilns in Jingdezhen (Lu 2023) and spread pottery production techniques and styles to Fujian and Guangdong (Huang 2019, 45–46). This reflects the opening-up of the overall trade environment and changes in production at Chinese pottery workshops. Excavated materials from this period appear in a variety of locations, including Japan, the shipwrecks of

Nan'ao 南澳 No.1 and the Portuguese Wanli shipwreck, and Singapore, and the main wares in circulation show a diversified pattern in which Zhangzhou 漳州 wares grew to become one a major component alongside Jingdezhen wares.

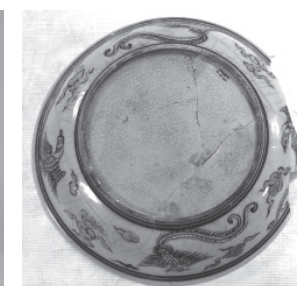
Late Ming ceramics excavated from the Korean peninsula (Figures 16, 17, and 18) often feature the reign names of Ming emperors and auspicious phrases such as “Changchun fugui” (longevity and fortune 長春富貴), “Fugui jiaqi” (fine vessel for wealthy nobility 富貴佳器), and “Wanfu youtong” (infinite good fortune 萬福攸同) (Park 2021). In particular, late Wanli and Tianqi era (1621–1627) blue and white porcelain dishes with a wide foot and a variety of decoration were used in many parts of the Joseon capital. These influenced the production of porcelain in Joseon's royal kilns (Park 2022a). Among the Ming pieces discovered, there are a blue and white porcelain inscribed with “Da Ming Wanli nianjian” (during the reign of the Wanli reign of the Great Ming 大明萬曆年間), and a small amount of colored porcelain, such as *wucai* made in Jingdezhen and red-and-green enameled porcelain from the Zhangzhou kilns (Kim 2019, 19).



**Figure 16.** *Blue and White Porcelain Dish Shard*, D. 14.6 cm, excavated at Cheongjin Zone 8, Seoul Baekje Museum, photo by the author



**Figure 17.** *Wucai Porcelain Bowl Shard*, H. 2.2 cm, excavated at Cheongjin zones 12–16, Seoul Baekje Museum, image provided by the Museum



**Figure 18.** *Red-and-green Enameled Porcelain Dish Shard*, D. 16.9 cm, Cheongjin Zone 8, excavated on a street of government-licensed Merchants, Seoul Baekje Museum, photo by the author

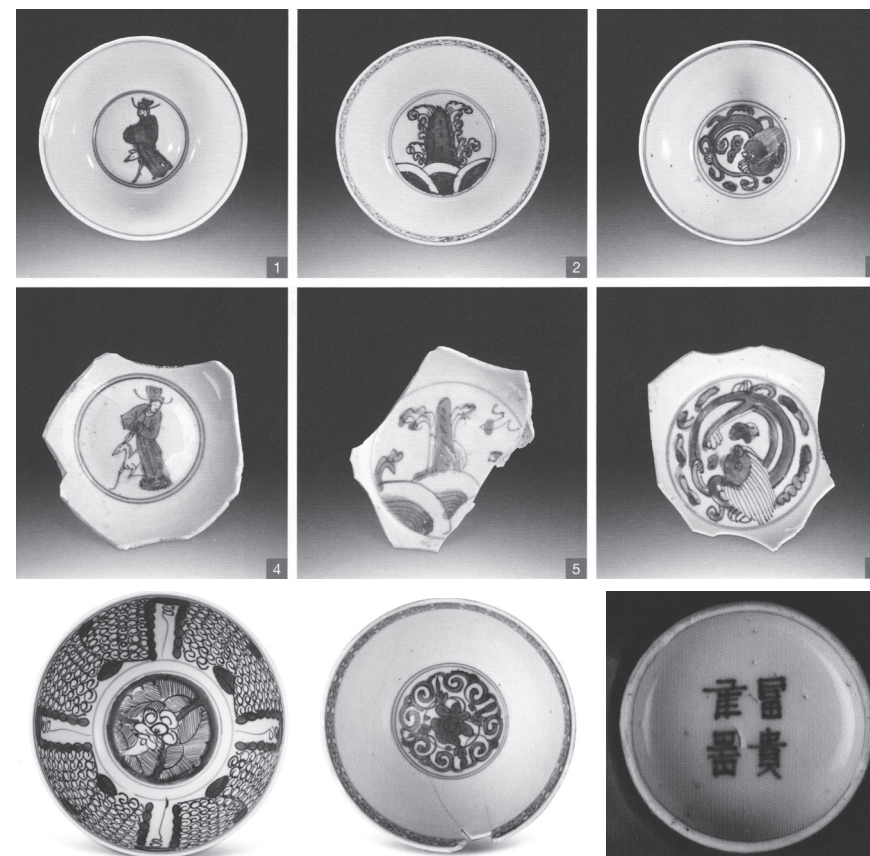
The large quantities of salvaged Jingdezhen ceramics from wrecks such as the Wanli and Nan'ao No.1 are some of the important materials for the study of the export of Jingdezhen ceramics to East Asia. The Wanli was a Portuguese-flagged ship which is believed to have sunk around 1625 on its voyage to Europe. This archaeological excavation is significant as there is no record of this historical event in the Portuguese literature (Flecker 2023, 93). The thirty-seven



**Figure 19.** Blue and White Porcelain Wares of the Late Ming Period Excavated from the Wanli Shipwreck (Sjostrand and Syed Idrus 2007, 147; 2007, 116; 2007, 230; National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage and Guangdong Museum 2016, 136; 2016, 138; 2016, 144)

thousand or so pieces of Jingdezhen blue and white porcelain found among the salvaged material include Kraak porcelains and feature a range of various new designs such as florals, flowering plums, and grapes (Sjostrand and Syed Idrus 2007, 147) (Figure 19).

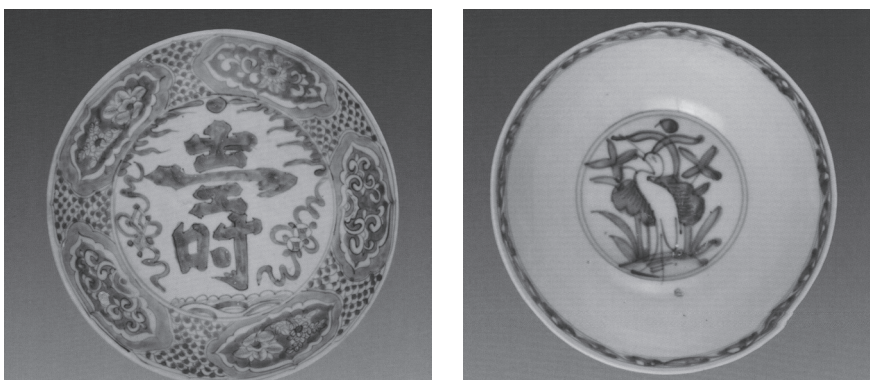
Several pieces are inscribed with “Bingxu nian zao” (crafted in the *bingxu* year 丙戌年造) on Nan’ao No.1 and most blue and white porcelain recovered from the ship is characteristic of the Wanli’s reign porcelain which accords with the date of the wreck in the late sixteenth century, around the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the Wanli’s reign (1586) (Guo 2023). It is notable that the finds from Nan’ao No.1 show that little Kraak porcelain was discovered and the ceramics featuring new designs fashioned at Jingdezhen were emerging (Chen 2018, 87; 2018, 95) (Figure 22). These new designs feature flowering branches, sometimes with fruit, chrysanthemums and branches, serpents, swastika-shaped clouds, sea water, and snails. A bowl shard with a serpent design was one of the blue and white porcelain pieces excavated in the waters off the coast of Singapore, which were presumably produced during the end of Ming period (Figure 20). This indicates that Ming blue and white porcelain wares continued to circulate throughout Southeast Asia from the early Ming to the late Ming dynasty (Miksic 2013, 310–13).



**Figure 20.** Blue and White Porcelain Wares of the Late Ming Period Excavated from the Nan’ao No.1 Wreck (National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage and Guangdong Museum 2016, 32; Guojia wenwuju kaogu yanjiu zhongxin 2021, 160)

In addition to Jingdezhen wares, large-scale imports of Zhangzhou wares are also observed in Japan in the late Ming and early Qing periods. According to a review of surveys of excavated Zhangzhou wares across Japan, including pieces from the Osaka castle, the wares first appeared in the late sixteenth century, with a surge in production from the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth century (Morimura 2002, 391).

Proof of the mass distribution of Zhangzhou porcelain is found not only in Japan but also in Southeast Asia, with the Binh Thuan shipwreck, discovered in southern Vietnam in 2002, being an important example of such distribution (Flecker 2023, 94). The main items recovered from this ship, which dated to the Wanli’s reign, are private kiln wares produced in Zhangzhou kilns used by people in the Guangdong region. They include blue and white porcelains, many



**Figure 21.** Blue and White Porcelain of the Late Ming Period, excavated from the Binh Thuan shipwreck (Zhongguo Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu bowuguan et al. 2008, 173; 2008, 177)

of which are plates with the design of a geese in a lotus pond and the design featuring the character for longevity in the center and flowers in segmented panels (Zhongguo Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu bowuguan et al. 2008, 173; 2008, 177) (Figure 21). This suggests that thanks to advanced production techniques introduced from Jingdezhen, Zhangzhou wares were included among the late Ming export items as demand for Chinese ceramics expanded in Japan and Southeast Asia.

In Japan, after blue and white porcelain begins to make up the majority of excavated porcelain, Longquan celadon having become nearly nonexistent in these sites, Kraak porcelain, which began to be produced around the Wanli's reign, starts to appear in large quantities. The excavation sites are concentrated in Nagasaki 長崎 Port, Sakai 堺 Port, Osaka Castle 大阪城, the residences of the Edo *shōguns*, the site of Hachioji 八王寺 Castle, and the ruins of Sendai 仙台 Castle. Mention of blue and white porcelain can be found in the records of tea gatherings and banquets given by the upper class, such as *Record of the Gathering at Heavenly King Temple* (*Tennōjiya kaiki* 天王寺屋會記), *Sōtan Diary* (*Sōtan nikki* 宗湛日記), and *Matsuya Gathering Record* (*Matsuya kaiki* 鬆屋會記) (Zenta 2020). In addition to blue and white porcelain, a variety of other ceramics, such as red-and-green enameled porcelain, black-glazed porcelain, and *sancai* porcelain, which are fired at low-temperatures, have been excavated in the Kyūshū, Chūgoku, Kinki, and Hokkaidō (Hsieh 2005).

Similarly, to other East Asian countries, porcelain with the same designs as those ceramics produced after the Wanli's reign, such as those found in the

Nan'ao No.1 wreck, have also been discovered in Korea. Yet, in contrast to excavations in other East Asian countries, few Zhangzhou and Kraak wares have been excavated in Korea. In light of this discrepancy, it is likely that Jingdezhen wares made up the majority of the porcelain dated to the end of Ming dynasty circulating in Joseon. If this was indeed the case that the distribution routes were different from those for Kraak and Zhangzhou wares that enjoyed great popularity in Japan and Europe.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the porcelain exchanges between Ming China and Joseon and compared them with the official porcelain exchanges between Ming and other East Asian countries. This comprehensive analysis was conducted to highlight the commonalities in porcelain exchanges across the region, while simultaneously detailing the distinctive differences observed. Additionally, this research incorporated an evaluation of archival documents and artifact analysis to provide a richer, multi-faceted perspective on the dynamics of cultural exchange and economic influence in East Asian porcelain trade.

The results show that the dates of porcelain bestowed by the Ming court on East Asian countries were concentrated in the first half of the fifteenth century. However, unlike East Asia in which Longquan celadon circulated in large quantities, Ming porcelain that reached Joseon consisted mainly of white-glazed and blue and white porcelain. It is also notable that porcelain was transferred not just through the official gifts from the emperors to Joseon but also through Ming envoys who were originally Koreans. The composition of the porcelain gifts for Joseon was distinctive in that it included a set of table wares. This can be seen as the Ming emperors reflecting the preferences of other countries when deciding on gift items.

The changes in the volume of Longquan celadon imported into Joseon is in contrast to that of Southeast Asia, suggesting the possible involvement of Japanese traders. On the other hand, the shapes and designs of blue and white porcelain that were popular in the mid and late Ming periods share commonalities throughout East Asia. But there is a certain difference between the introduction of Zhangzhou porcelain and Kraak ware into Joseon and to Southeast Asia or Japan in the late Ming dynasty, as only small quantities of

these wares are found in Joseon.

In conclusion, the exchange of Ming porcelain with Korea was the result of complex interactions shaped by the Ming dynasty's foreign policy, regional trade networks, and the preferred porcelain types and economic conditions of individual countries. Future in-depth analyses and new excavations will undoubtedly provide additional insights into various aspects of ceramics imported into Joseon, the cultural exchanges, and economic relationships throughout East Asia.

Translated by Soyun LEE

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## Abstract

This paper compares the exchange of Ming porcelain between Ming China and Joseon in comparison with those exchanges between Ming and other countries in East Asia in order to bring out similarities and differences and highlight the complexity and dynamics of East Asian cultural exchanges. First, the similarities are that the times when the Ming court bestowed porcelain on other countries were concentrated in the first half of the fifteenth century in most of the Asian region. Within the framework of tribute trade, porcelain with a three-clawed dragon design was found in large quantities. During similar periods of time, Longquan celadon and Jingdezhen blue and white porcelain as well as private kiln porcelain wares increased and had common features. Second, what makes the exchange with Joseon distinctive is the introduction of porcelain overland by Ming envoys whose country of origin was Joseon and the shipment of table ware sets manufactured by Ming imperial kilns. Also, most of the Ming porcelain discovered in Joseon has been Jingdezhen blue and white porcelain which was common with other East Asian countries, but only a few discoveries of Longquan or Zhangzhou wares, nor was there much Kraak ware from Jingdezhen kilns or Southeast Asian celadons. These differences put Joseon in a unique position. This analysis provides an implication that diplomatic interactions and the changes in distribution brought about by the main trading forces should be considered in order to have a deep understanding of porcelain exchange between Ming China and Joseon and throughout East Asia.

**Keywords:** Ming porcelain, East Asia, Joseon, Three-clawed dragon, Chinese envoys originally from Joseon, Jingdezhen, Longquan

