Ideology, Politics and Vessels: White Porcelain Wares at the Early Joseon Royal Court

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1. Introduction

This study explores one of the specific processes through which white porcelain wares were adopted as a type of important vessel at the royal court of the early Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) in Korea. With special reference to the early Joseon Dynasty, the paper attempts to show how the development of certain types of vessels for use in Chinese and Korean royal courts was closely related to and strictly controlled by institutions created by state ideology and politics.¹

1) White porcelain vessels from the early Joseon Dynasty

It is known that the technique of manufacturing well-vitrified and

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¹ This article is based upon my doctoral research on vessels for use in China and Korea during the medieval period
high-fired white porcelain vessels began no later than the beginning of the second half of the 15th century during the early Joseon Dynasty.² The center for the production of this type of vessel was the Gwangju [廣州] kiln complexes southeast of Seoul in Gyeonggi-do [京畿道]. As is well-known, textual sources indicate that vessels for use at the royal court were manufactured at these complexes sometime during the 15th century.³ At the kiln sites, a large number

² Two slightly different scholarly opinions have been put forward with regard to the earliest manufacture of high-fired and high-quality white porcelain vessels. Based upon Sejong sillaok wony [世宗實錄地里地], Geographical Survey Compiled from the Veritable Record of King Sejong [世宗], r 1419-1450, which includes data collected in the period between 1424 and 1432, and a comparison with a few white porcelains which have been securely dated, Chung Yang-mo believes that high-quality white porcelain wares began to be produced from the beginning of the reign of King Sejo (1455-68) at the Gwangju kiln complexes (Chung, 1983, pp 164-166) Yun Yong-1 holds that the manufacture of high-fired and high quality white porcelain vessels was only achieved from the second half of the 15th century, beginning around 1469-1470 and reaching a peak between the 1480s and 1490s Yun’s theory is based upon Gyeongguk daejeon [經國大典, National Code] which was completed in 1469. In Gongdang yo [工匠條, section on craftsmen] included in Gongjeon [工典, section on manufactures], there are records concerning innovations made in the management system for potters and the manufacture of court wares. Based upon these records, Yun proposes that the Bunwon [分院, Official Branch of the Bureau of Royal Cuisine] was established in Gwangju late in the reign of King Sejo Yun Yong-1 "Joscon sidae bunwun-uu seongnup-gwa byeoncheon-e gwanhan yeon-gu (2)," 1981, p 55. With reference to this fact along with a few white porcelain vessels which have been securely dated, Yun also assumes that kilns manufacturing most of the dishes and bowls of high quality were worked from sometime in the reign of King Sejo to King Seongjong (r. 1470-1494), relocating roughly every 10th year.

³ As one of the representative examples, Yonggae chonghwa [譚齋齋話, Essays written by Yonggae] in Daejong yeseung [大東野乘, An Unofficial History of the East] records that officials were dispatched every year from spring until autumn from the Seong-won [司醸院, Bureau of Royal Cuisine] to Gwangju Goseon gukyeok chongseo, Vol 49 Daedong
of white porcelain shards of contemporary type vessels such as bowls and dishes were recovered. Given the predominance of the use and flourishing of the celadon ware industry throughout the Goryeo Dynasty (935-1392), the development of this type of high-fired porcelain vessel was fairly sudden. Accounts for such a change have been provided.

One view considers that the technique of this type of vessel might have been achieved under the influences of both low-fired white wares from the Goryeo Dynasty and the high-fired and well-vitrified porcelain wares from the late Yuan (1279-1368) to early Ming (1368-1644) Dynasties. The other view is that the technique of manufacturing high-fired white porcelain wares was newly introduced by Ming. If similar Chinese vessels stimulated the production of

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yoseung, 1971, p 655. Since Seong Hyeon [成頤] (Yongjae is the pen name of Seong Hyeon) lived from 1439 to 1504, Yongjae chonghwa is generally regarded as the work of the second half of the 15th century

4 Some scholars believe that white wares began to be manufactured around the end of the Silla Dynasty (57-935). Refer to Chung, 1989, pp 423-431. It is certain that white wares were being manufactured around the 10th century during the Goryeo Dynasty. The kilns known to produce this type of vessels are located at Yong-in-gun in Gyeonggi-do, Yong-in seo-ri goryeo baekjeon, 1987, Samsung Cultural Foundation. During the 12th century, this type of vessel was produced in a large scale at Yucheon-ri, in Buan-gun in Jeolla-do, and a small scale production was also carried at Sadang-ri in Gangjin-gun. See Buan Yucheon-ri Goryeo doja (Ewha Womans University, 1983). A particularly fine and delicate crazing is characteristic, sometimes occurring in lines but in a network, and it is evident that the glaze rarely 'fitted' the body, for it often flaked or peeled off in patches due to unequal expansion or contraction between two. Recently kiln sites producing white wares have also been found at Seoksu-dong, in Anyang-si in Gyeonggi-do. According to Jeong, the technical conditions of the shards collected at the sites can be allocated at the transitional stage between Goryeo low-fired white porcelain and high-fired and well-vitrified high quality of white porcelain.
white porcelain vessels in Korea, through which process was such an influence exercised? Scholars generally hold that it was through the gifts of these wares from Chinese emperors or envoys to Joseon sovereigns, as occasionally documented in historical records.\(^6\)

It has also been noted that white was traditionally one of the most favored colors in Korean history. In addition, fairness of mind and frugality, important virtues in Neo-Confucianism, were often been compared to the white color as revealed in certain poems from the Joseon Era, which might be related to the favoring of this type of color in porcelain wares during the Joseon Dynasty.\(^7\)

More recently, it has been pointed out that white porcelain wares were initially used at the royal house during the reign of King Sejong [世宗, r. 1419-50] when this type of ware was chosen as a substitute for gold and silver vessels to save precious metalwork. This policy resulted in the production of white porcelain wares for use in both some state ancestral ceremonies and on the king's table, harboring the development of the white porcelain ware industry.\(^8\)

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5 Kang, 1989, p 340

6 In the 7th month in 10th year of the reign of King Sejong (1428), the Chinese emperor presented him with white porcelain vessels JWS (Joseon wango sillek, hereafter JWS), Vol 3 Sejong sillek, gwon 41, p 138, upper-b Following this, a number of Chinese porcelain wares were given to King Sejong by Chinese emperors or their envoys. They include those presented in the 5th month, in the 11th year of the same reign (1429), JWS, Vol 3 Sejong sillek, gwon 44, p 179, lower-a, in the 11th month in the same year, JWS, Vol 3 Sejong sillek, gwon 46, p 203, lower-b, in the 7th month, in the 12th year of the same reign (1430), JWS, Vol 3 Sejong sillek, gwon 49, p 245, lower-b-p 246, upper-a.


8 Paek, 1989, pp 4-12. Following this view, a number of scholars have pointed out that white porcelain wares were employed at state ceremonies and the royal court
Apart from this fairly general explanation, however, the specific background under which contemporary Chinese white porcelain wares induced the production of a similar type of vessel has not been adequately addressed.

2) Research methodology

Would there be any systematic way to account for the sudden flourishing of high-fired white porcelain wares and the way in which this type of ware came to be employed in certain important functions at the early Joseon Court?

In resolving these inquiries, based upon my research on similar Chinese vessels, I approach this issue in terms of Confucian-style rites practiced in state ceremonies and at the royal court.\(^9\) It does not mean that all the demands of white porcelain vessels were related to such Confucian-style rites. Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of the production of these wares appears to have been made in a context in which Confucian style rites regulated their use.

Particularly in the case of vessels for important functions such as state ceremonies, extensive regulations were applied to ware-shapes and surface decorations.\(^10\) It is also held that certain types of

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9. The research on Chinese vessels was conducted from late 1992 to 1996, and Korean section, from 1994 to 1997 in China, Japan, Korea and United Kingdom. Parts of the results were published in "Ming Dissertations An Update," Ming Studies 43, Spring 2000, "From Ming China to Joseon Korea—manufacturing blue-and-white wares," Proceedings of Asian Ceramic Conference, Resolving the Enigmas of the 15th Century, Field Museum, 1998, pp 1-10, and other publications. Due to space restrictions, in this paper only a brief discussion on the subject—the early Joseon white porcelain wares—will be introduced. The further details will be published independently.
ceramics were produced for burial.11

Apart from this, it has hardly been thought that the designs as well as functions of certain contemporary types of vessel in particular, porcelain wares, which look like those of daily use were systematically chosen in terms of rites. Even in the case that some of them are regarded to have been produced for certain ceremonies, such an assumption has been deduced based upon a small amount of information occasionally found in scattered places in certain historical records, diagrams or artifacts recovered at some ceremonial sites.

Both the early Ming and Joseon Dynasties were firmly established on Confucian principles. In order to promote the legitimacy of Ming as the successor to the Tang (618-906) and Song (960-1279) Dynasties after the intervention of the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) and the Mongol invasion, Zhu Yuan-zhang [朱元璋] (Hongwu; 洪武, r. 1368-98) claimed to establish a state solidly based upon Confucianism.

Confucianism and state rituals were also greatly emphasized from the beginning of the Joseon Dynasty since the state was established with the support of Neo-Confucian scholar-officials of the late Goryeo Dynasty. The dissemination of Neo-Confucianism already began around the late period of the Goryeo Dynasty.12 Instead of belles-lettres and philosophical glosses which had hitherto been emphasized, scholars turned to the study of the Chinese Classics and history. This new trend in Confucian studies provided intellectual fulfillment to the new literati class of that time. The growth of Neo-Confucian philosophy exercised significant influence over the wider society.13 In

10 Refer to JWS, Vol 5 Sejong sillaḵ, gwon 132, pp.304-305
11 Refer to JWS, Vol 5 Sejong sillaḵ, gwon 132, pp.370-373
12 Lee Ku-bak, 1983, pp.165-166
China, rites, originating in ancient state religion and thoughts, and developed by Confucian scholars, were conceptualized and called "li" (禮). Li continuously constituted a central concept in social norms and ethics in Confucian societies.

Early Joseon Confucian scholars began to clamor for a reform program and to envisage a new age in which Confucian norms and values would shape state and society. In particular, both state and court rites were instrumental for the royal house to demonstrate its absolute authority and dignity, as well as to exemplify a fair standard of ethics to the rest of society. Thus, the project of devising their own state rites was an urgent task for the newly established Joseon Dynasty whose official ideology was Neo-Confucianism. During the second year of the reign of King Taejo [太祖] (1393), Ulrye sangeongsa [儀禮詳定司; The Office for Ritual Construction] was organized for the specific purpose of creating state rites. In 1420, King Sejong proceeded to establish an institution, the Jiphyeonjeon [集賢殿; Hall of Worthies], where a number of competent scholars were charged with the studying, discussing, and writing about classics, state systems and rites of ancient China and Korea. In this manner, state rites were gradually designed and ultimately edited and copied into the final volume of the Sejong sillok [世宗實錄; Veritable Record of Sejong], finished in 1451, under the title of Oryem [五禮儀; Five Rites Ceremonies] The five rites consist of: Gillye [吉禮; auspicious ceremonies]; hyungnye [凶禮; ceremonies for ominous occasions]; binmye [賓禮; ceremonies for receiving guests];

13 Lee Ki-baik, 1983, pp 165-66
14 Deuchler, 1980, pp 23-24
15 JWS, Vol 1 Taejong sillok, gwon 3, p.232, upper-a
16 JWS, Vol 2 Sejong sillok, gwon 7, p.376, upper-a, b
Gullye [軍禮; military ceremonies] and garye [嘉禮; celebratory ceremonies]. According to Gullye seorye [吉禮序例; Introduction to the Auspicious Ceremonies] in Oryeui, Dang, Song and Goryeo practices as well as those of Hongwu and contemporary China were also largely referred to.\footnote{JWS, Vol 5 Sejong sillok, gwon 128, p 176, upper-a}

3) Aim of study

This paper, firstly, aims to precisely reconstruct one of the processes in which the vessel design with underglaze white decoration was employed in the early Joseon royal house and to show that these vessels were not arbitrarily chosen according to the user's tastes, but designed to comply with relevant rites based on Chinese ancient institutions and framed within the context of Neo-Confucian ideology.

A second consideration is the political relationship between Joseon and Ming. These two states based their diplomatic relations on Confucian rites. Zhu Yuan-zhang built a universal empire and endeavored to demonstrate that himself was the orthodox inheritor of the mandate of Heaven. Therefore, the hierarchical system in Confucian world order and balance of etiquette between these states emerged as an important issue. In this context, this paper also examines how the particular types of vessel adopted for certain uses in the Ming imperial house influenced the selection of wares intended for similar uses in Joseon at the beginning of the dynasty.

The subject of rituals alone can be a fairly complex subject. The focus of this article, however, is not in the discussion of such, but in
suggesting a new approach for the study of certain contemporary types of wares. For this reason and in consideration of space restrictions, here some general aspects of the relationship between rites and use of white porcelain wares at the early Joseon royal court will be outlined, while the discussion of the details is to be introduced in an independent paper.

2. White porcelain vessels for use in ancestral shrines inside the court

In the 29th year of the reign of King Sejong (1447), white porcelain wares replaced vessels made of silver for use in two shrines built inside the court, Munsojeon [文昭殿] (a shrine for King Taejo [太祖], r. 1392-1398, Queen Sinui [神懿], 1337-1391, King Taejong [太宗], r. 1401-1418 and Queen Won-gyeong [元敬], 1365-1420), and Hwideokjeon [輝德殿] (a shrine for Queen Soheon [昭憲], 1395-1446, the wife of King Sejong).

In the entry for the 6th month of the 29th year of the reign of King Sejong (1447), Sejong silleok notes the following:

The King said to the Ministry of Rites, "From now on use Baekjagi [白磁器, white porcelains] instead of silver wares which have been used (so far in the ceremonies) of Munsojeon and Hwideokjeon."

It has been suggested that white porcelain wares came to be used

on the King’s table and two ancestral shrines built inside the royal court, Munsojeon and Hwideokjeon, due to a policy of saving gold and silver, and also to avoid exposing the use of gold and silver vessels to Chinese envoys, which could provoke a claim for the re-institution of annual tribute. The annual tribute of gold and silver to China troubled the Korean government from 1273, when Korea was politically controlled by Yuan China. The practice continued until 1429 even after the Joseon Dynasty was established. This situation led to the encouragement of the use of porcelain wares as important functions for court vessels.\(^\text{19}\)

This explanation contributes to our understanding of the usage of white porcelain wares inside the royal court. This view as yet does not provide any reason why white porcelain wares had to be chosen, particularly in the case of ancestral shrines. I differ as to the reason behind the change. The reason ought to be sought in the process of ritual revision.

A thorough survey of *Sejong sillok* shows that the replacement of sacrificial vessels was one of the steps in establishing detailed rites for the shrine after the death of Queen Soheon. From the third month to the fifth month of 1447, ritual details for Hwideokjeon, including major sacrificial ceremonies held on the four seasonal days and ceremonies conducted on festive days, were specified.\(^\text{20}\) It was in the same year that silver vessels used at both Munsojeon and Hwideokjeon were replaced with white porcelain wares. It is,

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19 Paek, 1988, pp 9-11

therefore, apparent that this replacement occurred as part of ritual revisions

A similar case can be found in 1436 when Munsojeon was relocated to a new building. Certain rites for this shrine were modified and ritual details were newly codified. King Sejong suggested to the Ministry of Rites that the wooden wares which had been used up to that time in numerous formal ceremonies held at Munsojeon be replaced with red-colored wooden wares. The reason for this revision was that he felt sorry because the etiquette of serving the ancestral spirits was unbalanced, while silver vessels were used at daily meal services at Munsojeon, in major ceremonies held at the same shrine wooden vessels were employed.21

1) Contemporary types of vessels for use in Munsojeon and Hwideokjeon

The question remains as to why silver vessels for use in Munsojeon and Hwideokjeon should have been replaced with those of "white porcelain." Before finding the reason behind the adoption, however, the use of silver vessels itself poses an important inquiry. Why were silver vessels being used at daily meal services in this type of shrine? The use of silver means that contemporary type of vessels, not a traditional sacrificial vessel such as tou [豆, ceremonial container for dry food], was being employed.

In order to understand the employment of white porcelain wares in this type of shrine, I believe, it is very important to examine this issue in the context of relevant rites.

21 JWS Vol 4 Sejong sillok, gwon 73, p.2, upper-b
With regard to Hwidokcheon, following the death of Queen Soheon in the third month of the twenty-eighth year of his reign (1446), King Sejong discussed the location of *hongeon* [魂殿; spiritual shrine] and ordered the repair *Bopyeongcheong* [報平聰; Bopyeong Office] inside the Changdeokgung [昌德宮].

According to *Oryeui*, the practices conducted in this type of shrines are classified into *hyeongnye* or ominous ceremonial occasions. Among the ceremonies held in the spiritual shrines is *Joseok sangsikui* [朝夕上食儀; daily offering of meals in the morning and evening]. The examination of the ritual details shows that contemporary types of vessels were to be employed. It was for this type of ceremony that white porcelain wares were ordered to be used.

If we look at Munsojeon, this shrine originated in Yinsojeon [仁昭殿] (a spiritual shrine for King Taejo and Queen Shnu). In 1433 Insojeon was put together with Gwanghyojeon [廣孝殿], a spiritual shrine for King Taejong (r. 1401-18) and Queen Won-gyeong, and relocated to an eastern part of the royal court and named Munsojeon. This shrine was basically modelled upon *womnyo* [原廟] (literally original ancestral shrine, shrines where ancestral portraits were preserved and where the spirits were worshipped).

The rituals for use in Munsojeon were not listed in *Oryeui* since they had not been incorporated into the Five Rites Ceremonies as yet.

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22 JWS, Vol. 4. *Sejong sillok*, gwon 111, p 662, lower-b
23 JWS, Vol. 5 *Sejong sillok*, gwon 134, pp 382, 397-403
24 JWS, Vol. 5 *Sejong sillok*, gwon 135, p 399, lower-a, b
25 Refer to JWS, Vol. 5 *Sejong sillok*, gwon 135, p 399, lower-a, b
Nevertheless, as court rituals held for the royal lineal ascendant, the ceremonies in Munsojeon were of utmost importance. As Sejong Sillok frequently records, at Munsojeon daily offering was practised along with other types of rituals. Given that Munsojeon was originally a spiritual shrine prior to its modification into womnyo, it is reasonable to understand the daily offering practices in a similar context to those conducted at Hwideokjeon.

This understanding still poses another inquiry: why was the color white chosen? Although no specific record remains, circumstantial evidence suggests that white porcelain wares were already being used at King Sejong's daily table by the middle period of his reign. If this was the case, it would be plausible to assume that King Sejong simply ordered that similar types of vessels be employed for his ancestors.

A thorough examination of the entire context, however, shows that more significant reasons were behind the replacement. As previously stated, the practices in Hwideokjeon belong to ominous ceremonies including funeral and mourning ceremonies. From the time of carrying out soryeomjeon [小敛奠; the rite of tying the body before placing it in the coffin] onwards, in every case, vessels without color and decoration were used. The only exception to this rule was that

27. The gyummao practices involve an extremely complicated line of evolution Yet, in this paper, discussion of the details is beyond the scope.

28 For example, the Heir Apparent conducted this type of practice in person at this shrine two times in the 6th month of 1447. They include the first day and the 14th day JWS, Vol 5 Sejong süllok, gwon 116, p.25, upper-b, p.27, lower-b.

29 The details of this section of research will be discussed in an independent paper.

gold and silver vessels were to be used for wine.\textsuperscript{31} It is highly likely that this rite was specified under the direct influence of *Zhuji jiali* [朱子家禮; House Rules of Master Zhu] devised by Zhu Xi [朱熹, 1130-1200]. According to *Zhuji jiali*, during funerals and mourning periods, gold, silver and other types of precious materials and decoration were not to be adorned on the robes of the mourners.\textsuperscript{32}

The family rites were recommended for use in ancestral ceremonies from the late Goryeo Dynasty under the influence of Neo-Confucianism. Although these were not yet widely practised, the rites were at least consulted for the royal funeral and mourning ceremonies from the beginning of the Joseon Dynasty.\textsuperscript{33} In particular, it is important to note that in 1446, following the death of Queen Soheon, mourning rituals and morning garments for the Heir Apparent and court officials and ladies were specified according to their ranks. On this occasion, Zhu Xi's rites were practised to a large extent.\textsuperscript{34}

It appears that use of materials without decoration and coloration was one of the most important forms of etiquette in Confucian-style rites, particularly when expressing reticences, and was strongly emphasized in both funeral and mourning ceremonies. It is highly likely, therefore, that the use of white was also derived from this type of Confucian rite.

Given that Munsojeon was originally a spiritual shrine, the use of white in the ritual implements for use at this shrine can be

\textsuperscript{31} JWS, Vol 5 *Sejong sillok*, gwon 134, p.383, upper-b.

\textsuperscript{32} Refer to *Zhuji jiali*, juan 6 More details of this section of research will be published independently

\textsuperscript{33} Deuchler, 1980, p 118

\textsuperscript{34} JWS, Vol 5 *Sejong sillok*, gwon 111, pp 660 lower-b-661 lower-b
understood in a context similar to that of Hwideokjeon.

The next question is, then, why were the materials without coloration and decoration used as porcelain wares? According to my research on Chinese vessels, a large proportion of the white porcelain wares of contemporary type produced for the early Ming imperial court were destined for Fengxianidian [奉先殿] and other equivalent types and ranks of ancestral ceremonies practiced by the court. While zongmiao [宗廟; Main Ancestral Hall] played a role as a main ancestral shrine for the deceased emperors outside the court, Fengxianidian took the role of such a shrine inside the court. In the third year of the reign of the Hongwu Emperor (1370), Fengxianidian was built independently at the northern part of the court. After relocation of the capital during the reign of Yongle, the shrine was built as it was in Nanjing [南京]. In this shrine, incense was burned.

35 Recently, it has been suggested that white porcelain bowls and dishes were manufactured for use in ceremonies held at zongmiao [Ceremonial Hall for the royal lineal ancestors and deceased sovereigns], paos [祭祀, ceremonies performed at altars placed at the four cardinal directions of the suburbs] and Fengxianidian, the ancestral shrine built inside the Ming imperial court and the imperial tombs (Lau, 1993, pp 83-99) According to this view, the edict was issued by the Hongwu Emperor in 1369, and stated that sacrificial wares were to be manufactured using porcelain. According to my doctoral research independently conducted from 1992, amongst white porcelain wares of daily use type employed as ceremonial vessels at the early Ming imperial court are mainly those produced for Fengxianidian and other equivalent types and ranks of ancestral ceremonies, than those for zongmiao and paos. I agree with the suggestion that some white porcelain wares were made for use in zongmiao and paos. However, in many respects, my results contrast sharply with previous viewpoints. These include the period in which these vessels were used; the proportion of porcelain vessels used in zongmiao, paos, Fengxianidian, and possibly, at the imperial tombs, the specific types of vessel used, and the specific reason for employing porcelain vessels. The details will be published independently.
every morning and evening, along with other numerous types of practices.\textsuperscript{36} Thus, the function of Fengxiandian was apparently very similar to that of Munsojeon.

A thorough historical survey shows that among the white porcelain vessels ordered to be manufactured for Fengxiandian were those particularly for use in the mourning ceremonies for Taizong [太宗] (Yongle Emperor) and Renzong [仁宗] (Hongxi; 洪熙 1425), as well as in occasions after the mourning period.\textsuperscript{37}

Given the entire context, it is highly likely that the use of porcelain at Munsojeon and Hwideokjeon was made in a similar context to that in early Ming imperial court.

Thus, why did the Chinese and Korean shrines share the use of white in their vessels? An explanation to this question might be found in the fact that in designing their ceremonial vessels, not only Joseon but also Ming probably referred to Zhujì jìali. From the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, as was the case with Joseon, Zhujì jìali was encouraged to be practiced. A thorough analysis of textual sources suggest that the use of contemporary type of vessels and white at the Ming imperial house was partly due to this type of rite.\textsuperscript{38}

2) Balance of etiquette in the relationship with China

A question arises as to why the Joseon royal court followed the Ming practice of using white porcelain. Despite the regulation of the use of materials without coloration and decoration, it would not have

\textsuperscript{36} Da Ming Huidian, juan 89, p 1411.

\textsuperscript{37} The details of this analysis will be introduced in an independent paper

\textsuperscript{38} This section of research will be further discussed in an independent paper
been necessarily "porcelain."

Yet it is important to note that there existed channels in the international relationship between Ming and Joseon through which the styles used in the manufacture of Chinese Ming Imperial ceremonial vessels exercised significant influence upon the production of similar implements at the Joseon royal court.

According to Sejong sillok of the early 15th century, there were occasions when the Chinese emperor dispatched envoys to Korea to perform sacrificial ceremonies for certain persons during the mourning period. In many of these cases, Ming envoys brought food for the dedication. For example, in the entry for the twelfth day of the fourth month of the second year of the reign of King Sejong (1420) we find the following:

Ming envoys accompanied by a musical band brought items for sacrificial ceremonies at the spirit shrine of King Sunhyo [順孝] (King Jeongjong; 定宗, r. 1399-1400) The sacrificial food consisted of more than thirty plates.39

The Ming envoys were even accompanied by their own cook for this ceremony.40 Numerous historical records also reveal that there were various occasions when Korean envoys visiting the Ming imperial court could observe ceremonies for imperial ancestors. For example, on the death of important members of the Ming imperial family, Korean envoys were invited to participate in ceremonies for the Ming imperial ancestors. At the death of the Yongle Emperor, in

39 JWS, Vol 2 Sejong sillok, gwon 8, p 279, upper-b
40 JWS, Vol 2 Sejong sillok, gwon 8, p 279, upper-a
the ninth month of the sixth year of the reign of King Sejong (1424), the King dispatched envoys for mourning.41 On the death of the Xuande [宣德] Emperor (1435), mourning ceremonies were also performed inside the Joseon royal court.42

By this time, white porcelain vessels were being used in shrines for imperial ancestors in the Ming dynasty. Therefore, if the Chinese envoys had brought sacrificial wares with them, they are very likely to have been made of white porcelain.

A great number of records from Sejong Sillok show how King Sejong paid great attention to matters of etiquette. One example is a record from the fourth month of the seventeenth year of the reign of King Sejong (1435).

In (1435), the King ordered Secretary Sin In-son [辛引孫] to visit the headquarters of the government for a discussion. "Last time when we held a party for (the Chinese delegate) Chang Sheng [昌盛], we did not use porcelains presented by the Chinese Emperor. Chang Sheng said, "why don’t you use those wares?" I answered, "since the porcelains presented are of excellent quality, but ours are of coarse quality, we were afraid that it would not be a polite thing to serve guests with wares of inferior quality while wares of excellent quality are set on the host’s table." Chang Sheng replied that it did not matter at all since those porcelains were presented to me from his Emperor, and he strongly requested me to use them. Thus, I used them."43

These passages show that it was considered proper etiquette to

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42 JWS, Vol 3 Sejong sillok, gwon 67, p 610, upper-b - lower-a
43 JWS, Vol 3 Sejong sillok, gwon 68, p 622, lower-b-p 623, upper-a
employ on the king’s table the porcelain wares presented by the
Ming emperor to show respect to the gift during the formal banquet
ceremonies held to entertain Chinese envoys. However on such
occasions, those wares were set on the king’s table, not those of the
envoys, since the wares had been specially presented to the Joseon
king by the Ming emperor. On the envoys’ tables, porcelain wares
manufactured in Joseon were used. Compared to similar Chinese
wares, Korean porcelain vessels were of a rather coarse quality,
which caused the king great concern.

The situation in the ancestral shrines must have been different
from on the tables for Chinese envoys. Nevertheless, we can assume
that the overall concern for the balance of etiquette probably led to
the replacement of silver vessels for the ceremonies to white
porcelain wares as were employed by the Ming imperial ancestral
shrine.

As can be glimpsed in the above record, it is also highly likely
that white porcelain wares had also been used in other places inside
the court even before this type of ware was used at the ancestral
shrines. It is also very likely King Sejong used white porcelain wares
at his dinner table. Yet such choices must have been made in the
context of rites, and amongst rites, more often, in terms of balance of
etiquette for the relations with China. This general atmosphere of the
period probably led to the improvement of manufacturing techniques
for white porcelain vessels.

3. Conclusion

According to Deuchler, the transformation of Korean society during
the early Joseon Dynasty was not just a reform in the conventional sense but was a massive shift away from the culture of Goryeo, through the application of Neo-Confucian concepts and values and a unique experiment in social engineering.44 Neo-Confucianism added to Korea’s socio-political thought a new and comprehensive dimension, and provided the universalistic basis upon which the state itself rested.45 In this reorganization of society, the Neo-Confucians used rites, in other words, Ye [禮], proper ritual behavior.46

The present study shows that, surprisingly, what was even included in the specific programs and systems of transformation of the society toward the direction of Neo-Confucianism and ye were specific details on the contemporary type of vessels for use in the royal court.

What was taken into account by the Joseon government was not only rites related to vessels in accordance with their functions, but also the balance of etiquette in consideration of hierarchy within international society and of the dignity to be maintained as an independent state. That is to say, for Joseon, the nature of the balancing itself was extremely subtle, being both literally diplomatic and political, so that even the details of rites not specified in the framework of rites had to be neither superior nor far behind those practised by Ming.

In particular, the reason why the Joseon royal court followed the similar Ming example of adopting porcelain wares for their important vessels can be related to the political situation of the early Joseon

45 Deuchler, 1980, p.73
46 Deuchler, 1980, pp.75-83
court and its diplomatic relationships with Ming.

To enhance the position of the Ming in international relations, Emperor Hongwu constructed an international order with an emphasis on discriminating rites between the Ming and the surrounding countries by using Confucian rituals. In this ritual system, the surrounding countries were evaluated on the basis of hierarchy under the Ming which was placed at the top. From the beginning of the newly established Joseon Dynasty, Neo-Confucian officials were dependent on the authority of and enjoyed close diplomatic relations with the newly-born Ming Dynasty. The Neo-Confucian officials turned against the Yuan Dynasty which politically controlled the Goryeo Dynasty, in favor of supporting Ming. They finally overthrew the Goryeo Dynasty, claiming that Ming was the orthodox inheritor of Han [漢] (B.C. 202-A.D. 220) China. Government policies were pursued in line with Ming political and administrative models, driven by the influence of Neo-Confucian scholar-officials.47

As is widely known, in the course of usurping, the first sovereign of the Joseon Dynasty, Yi Seong-gye [李成桂] needed to confer legitimacy on the authority of the new dynasty in China, Ming. However, from the beginning, Ming never easily acknowledged the legitimacy of Yi.48

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48 Da Ming Huidian recorded Yi as the son of the notorious, and anti-Ming, Yi In-ryang. Nevertheless of the repeated requests for the correction, the long held Ming misapprehension was not settled until 1584 when a new edition of Da Ming Huidian inserted a foot note for the correction. (Ming Huidian, juan 105, p.2) For further account for this controversy, refer to Deuchler (1980, p.87) Research on the controversy over the revision of the Da Ming Huidian from a Chinese point of view, see L. Carrington Goodrich, "Korean Interference with Chinese Historical Sources" (Journal of the North
This difficult relationship appears to have driven Joseon to pay extra attention to handling the matter of balancing rites and etiquette between the two countries in the context of an international hierarchy defined in Confucian terms. Of course, another important element added to the Joseon government’s concern was caused by the annual tribute of gold and silver to China.

In particular, King Sejong was a highly competent politician who successfully improved diplomatic relations with Ming emperors. Research and compilation of royal rituals were accelerated under King Sejong who, after developing the proper procedures for the wedding of the Heir Apparent, gave orders in 1444 to scholar officials to compile the remaining four of the Five State Rites. King Sejong apparently supervised the compilation personally and had his own ideas incorporated into the final version.\textsuperscript{49} The king, while being extremely careful to practice the rites befitting of the position of Joseon in the Confucian world order, also aimed to keep pace with trends in contemporary Ming etiquette. He paid great attention to not being behind the trends of the time and to be seen to be as equally sophisticated and refined as, if not superior to, China in conducting rites. This is because, as mentioned above, he desired to achieve Joseon’s own authority and to garner respect in international society.

Behind the development of high-fired and well-vitrified porcelain wares from the early Joseon Dynasty was also such a complex structure of ideological and political interactions which were directly connected to the mechanism of the design of certain vessels for use

\textsuperscript{49} Deuchler, 1980, pp 118-119
inside the court. Grasping the synthetic nature of such concerns is essential, therefore, if we are to trace the precise mechanism through which certain types of ware emerged as important court vessels.
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