

Ancient Chinese Ceramics

Chinese ceramic dates back to the Neolithic Age (approximately 8000-2000 BC). The earliest Chinese pottery was often red, brown, and gray. Archaeological finds show that primitive celadons were made during the Shang (16th-11th century BC) and Western Zhou (c. 11th century-770 BC). During the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) great progress was made in the application of colors and glazes on items for everyday use.

The greatest advance came in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) when potters made further contributions to the production of painted porcelain. Tang artists created beautiful Sancai porcelain finished in tints of burgundy, blue, and celadon. They also produced the famous figurines of people and horses in these three colors that are so loved in the modern world.

In the following Song Dynasty (907-1279 AD) porcelain kilns were distributed throughout the country and different schools appeared. The white porcelain at Ding kilns in Hebei Province employed such new techniques as carving, painting and printing for their ornamental designs. Jingdezhen wares in Jiangxi Province created *Qingbai* porcelain that the glaze were considered as beautiful as light celadon jade. Using the traditional paper-cut or paint brush, Song porcelain makers decorated their vessels with pretty pictures of landscape, human figures, flowers or birds. They also discovered the secret of "cracked" pottery and porcelain that appear so delicate. Connoisseurs both in China and abroad consider monochrome Song porcelain among the finest examples of Chinese genius in porcelain making.

Later in the Yuan (1271-1368) and especially in the Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, artists continued Song traditions. They discovered a process that invigorated and transformed Chinese porcelain making-the making of blue and white porcelain. Previously potters had never been able to apply colors successfully to a piece of unfired porcelain. Craftsmen discovered, however, that cobalt, which is not native to China, could be applied to unfired pieces, placed in a high-temperature kiln, thereby creating stunningly beautiful patterns of blue on a cream or white base. This style remains popular after nearly seven hundred years.

The Phases of Chinese Ceramics

Neolithic (5500 – 1700 BC) – Red and Grey Pottery

Han (206 BC – 220 AD) – Low-Fired Glazed Pottery

Tang (618-907) – Sancai, Polychrome Glazed Pottery

Song (960-1279) – Qingbai, Ding ware, Lu ware, Guan ware, Ge ware, Jun ware, Jingdezhen ware, Monochrome porcelain

Yuan (1217-1368) – Renowned for Blue and White

Ming / Qing (1368-1911) – Wucan, Fencai, Susancai



