



CHINA

THE HISTORY AND INFLUENCE OF
CHINESE PORCELAINS

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The image features a light beige background with a repeating pattern of traditional Chinese motifs. At the top and bottom, there are decorative borders with stylized, flowing scrollwork. The main body of the page is filled with a repeating pattern of circular symbols, each containing a variation of the 'shou' (longevity) character, interspersed with smaller, intricate geometric designs.

*China is made in China;
China is made of China.*





Sophisticated,
Delicate,
and Elegant.

These are the most frequently used words to describe Chinese porcelains.

Chinese porcelains are admired for their sheer beauty, which can unfold in multiple ways: the advanced technology embodied in their shapes and glazes, the embellishment of Chinese landscape paintings, the ancient poems, and so on. This aesthetic undoubtedly turns Chinese porcelains into a great collection of art. Whether they are exhibited at museums or act as a cultural carrier transported to other countries, whether they are exhibited under the spotlight or inside a glass cover, and whether they're simply monochromatic or vibrant with complicated patterns, they can always illuminate a sense of sophistication, delicacy and elegance.

Yet, beyond the aesthetic appreciation, there is more. This “more” is usually omitted by the masses. In other words, there is an implicit beauty of porcelains that people fail to notice. That is, when they are not put under the spotlight, Chinese porcelains can still play an irreplaceable role in daily life. From imperial porcelain wares to the ones widely used among the ordinary people, from covering elegant Chinese landscape paintings to recording the ordinary people's daily lives, Chinese porcelains always exhibit a dualness. While most people can only see one side of their beauty, with this booklet, we will also reveal the other side of porcelains under the spotlight.

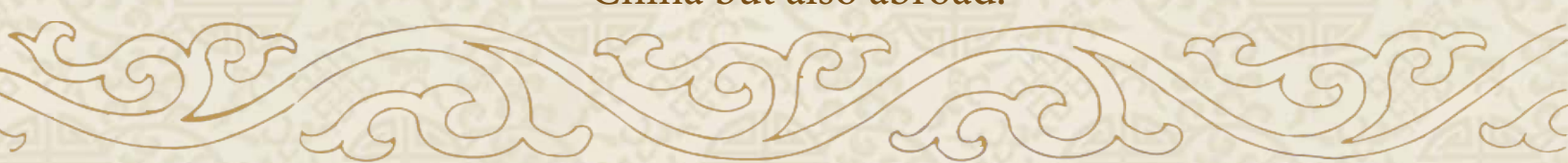




Chinese porcelains are a reflection of Chinese society at each specific time. By examining their shapes, glazes, colors, and patterns that could include paintings or poems, the porcelains demonstrate not only technological development but also the changes related to the social environment, as well as in the material and spiritual life of the Chinese people. Consequently, in this booklet, we will select a few Chinese porcelains from each time period, take a close look at them and use what we have learned in class as a lens to see how previous social life has been represented.

Chinese porcelains are the witness of Chinese history. They have endured for over thousands of years, and have gone through a series of transformations: first from ceramics to blue porcelains and later evolved to white and other kinds of glazed porcelains. By tracking these changes, we are able to trace back and understand Chinese history. Moreover, Chinese porcelains can offer a look at China's invention, development and transformations. Thus, this booklet will provide a linear timeline of the development of Chinese porcelains.

Finally, Chinese porcelains are the carrier of Chinese culture. A large number of Chinese porcelains, either exhibited at museums or used in homes, is covered with Chinese poems, paintings, or meaningful symbols such as dragons and lotuses. As a result, Chinese porcelains are the highly concentrated essence of Chinese culture. Beginning with the Silk Road in Western Han dynasty, the spread of Chinese porcelains simultaneously promotes the spread of Chinese culture. Thus, in this way, Chinese porcelains can carry and enrich Chinese culture. From what we have learned this semester, we are able to analyze the influence of Chinese porcelains not only in China but also abroad.






Acknowledgements

The idea for this brochure first came out when we saw the Large Vase with Variegated Vases. We were impressed by its high techniques and complicated decorations. It reminds us that China is pronounced and spelled exactly same as china which is in lowercase. Therefore, we started our project to trace the development of porcelains; at the same time, tracing back the Chinese history and cultures.

We would like to thank our Professor Laurence Coderre and our instructor Melissa Lefkowitz for providing us a strong culture and history backgrounds and guiding the production of this work.





Announcement

Due to its origin as ceramics and as a continuous transformation of Chinese porcelain, there is always a debate on the exact time Chinese porcelain began. Consequently, we choose the Qin dynasty, which in our opinion, is the earliest starting date. But, again, it isn't certain that Chinese porcelain came out of the Qin dynasty.






XIA, SHANG, ZHOU

Before Qin

Before Qin dynasty, ceramics played a key role in people's daily life. Although the technology of producing porcelains was not available, there were various designs of symbols, patterns and characters on the pottery, and different colors including grey, black, red, white on glazed claywares.

During this time period, only nobles had the access to use bronzes. Common people, on the other hand, used pottery in their daily lives. This set up the key and major role of porcelains which developed from pottery later. Because of the increasing consumption in and demand of claywares, pottery-making skills were largely promoted. Meanwhile, the usage of pottery was expanded to not only containers but also be served for necessities, architecture and rituals.





THREE-LEGGED GREY POTTERY TRAY

Period: Xia dynasty

Height: 13 cm, Diameter: 20.8 cm

Grey pottery, open lid, thin and polished body that concaves inside. Flat bottom, three wide-tile feet and the bottom of the feet faces toward outside. Two string patterned lines around the surface of the feet. This is one of numerous claywares from Xia dynasty used in the ordinary people's daily life.

WHITE POTTERY
POT WITH CARVED
TAOTIE AND
DOUBLE RINGS

Period: Shang dynasty

Height: 22 cm

Diameter: 9.2 cm



Since late Shang dynasty, the increase of kiln's temperature and finer clays, the quality of white ceramics promoted. Another aspect revealing such improvement is that the pot is completely covered with Taotie pattern. The elaborate carving techniques also show the high level of development of late Shang white ceramics.

Among bronzes in Shang and Zhou dynasties, Taotie motif was commonly used. Not only for decorations, the pattern of Taotie represents the merge of people's religious beliefs in daily lives.



YELLOW POTTERY GUI

Period: Zhou dynasty

Height: 29.2 cm

During Zhou dynasty, Gui was used as wine container. This yellow pottery gui has long and thick neck, three feet and the back foot is farther from the front feet which are also larger. There is a twisted handle between the neck and the back foot. Two string patterned lines around the feet. The shape of this Gui is made like a crowing cock.

QIN

Not only famous for Qin Shi Huang, the first Emperor (Huangdi) of China, Qin dynasty is also noted for the Terracotta Warriors, a collection of ceramic sculptures buried with the emperor after he died.

Terracotta Army impresses people by both its overwhelming size (more than 8,000 soldiers, 130 chariots, 520 horses and 150 cavalry horses) and various vivid warrior figures who have distinct facial expressions, clothings and weapons. Through 1:1 size between real men or horse and the ones in Terracotta Army in Qin dynasty, we can see the high level of pottery-making techniques on both the fabric of the clay and the skills of craftsmen back to that time.

This prepared a solid foundation for later porcelain development.



#1 Bronze Carriage in the Mausoleum of Emperor Qin

This carriage is a remake a two-wheel carriage that is 1:0.5 size of the real carriage in Qin dynasty.

The carriage is made entirely in bronze an involves many techniques including casting, inlaying, welding, snap connection. It is by far the largest and most complex and complete carriage that was excavated in Chinese archeological history.



On the surface of the carriage there are various patterns like cloud patterns and geometric patterns. The complexity of this carriage shows the elegance and manificance of carriage in Qin.

Kneeling Warrior

Period: Qin dynasty

Height: 128 cm



This warrior has an armor covering his shoulder and front body. The warrior's left leg squats and right leg kneels on the ground. He is in the position of shooting an arrow. From this ceramic warrior, we can imagine the battles in Qin. The production of kneeling warrior is more difficult than making a normal standing warrior because it requires a more careful shaping of his facial expression, bun, armor and shoes.

At the same time, because of the squatting position, which decreases the height of the warrior, the kneeling warriors are better preserved than others.

Various Facial Expressions of Warriors

Period: Qin dynasty

As we can see from the warriors' facial expressions from above, each warrior has his own distinctive features. Since there are numerous unique warriors, we often use the phrase, "thousands of warriors, thousands of faces," to describe the Terracotta Army. The characteristics of their facial features reflect the commonality of Chinese people's facial features. Also, the excellent pottery-making skills are demonstrated through such diversity of warriors.



HAN

Han dynasty plays an important role in the development of Chinese porcelain.

Since Han dynasty, pottery has entered a new age. People applied the glazes on pottery. This application of glazing marks the appearance of Chinese porcelains in history.

Because pottery is porous, with the glazing, it turns into waterproof wares -- porcelains. The major difference between pottery and porcelain is the ability of absorbing water. With the application of and improvement in glaze, porcelains are more favorable compared to the pottery.

Tracking the ceramic wares in Han dynasty, we are able to see a gradual transformation from pottery to porcelains.

During Han dynasty, porcelains not only brought changes to the daily life of Chinese people, but also contributed to a globalization of Chinese culture in which a large number of porcelains were transported abroad through the Silk Road.



Proto-Porcelain Celadon Pot with Incised Phoenix Decora- tion and Double Rings

Period: Western Han dynasty

Height: 32.5 cm

Diameter: 14.2 cm

This pot was a transitional product from pottery to porcelain, which developed from hard ceramics with stamped decoration and glaze.¹

The pot is completely glazed as celadon. There are phoenix decoration on its neck. Phoenix is a sacred bird in ancient Chinese legends and honored as the noble bird from the country of the east. Also there are five string patterns on the neck, shoulder and belly. This pot has a simple design and the patterns are concise as well. The glazing is rich and has a deep color.

Although proto porcelains are essentially different from pottery, their firing technique can still not be compared to that of the real porcelains, so they are called proto porcelains.

Green-glazed Pottery Pot with Animal-mask Ears

Period: Eastern Han dynasty

Height: 25.5 cm

Diameter: 13-15 cm

Although it is categorized as a pottery, this pot still plays an important role in the transitional period. It has low-temperature lead green glaze over the entire body (aka “melon skin green”). The lead glaze was invented much later than the blue-green celadon glaze. The lead glaze has a more polished, smooth surface and the layer is pure and transparent like glass. As a result, this pot embodies the improvement in porcelain glazes.



Celadon *Yi* Ewer

Period: Eastern Han dynasty



Yi has two functions: one is as a basin for washing and the other is as a container to wash brush pen. This Yi has tints of yellow or tan colors because of the earliest colored glaze in Chinese porcelain, “celadons” were not pure green. Thus, Yi is a transitional product from proto-porcelain to porcelain.

Celadon Jar with Five Mouths

Period: Eastern Han Dynasty

Height: 46.5 cm

Diameter: 6.4-16.5 cm

This sophisticated jar indicates the great porcelain-making skills during Eastern Han period. Its waist is decorated with bears, tortoises and lizards.

The earlier shapes of jar, like this, were simpler, while later jars carry more decorations such as figures and animals. In the Western Jin period, this form evolved into the granary model that achieves important achievement in ancient art.




Silk Road (Han Dynasty)

The Silk Road was an ancient trade route during Han dynasty. Its establishment marked the opening of trade between China and western countries. Cultures from both east and west were able to mix together, learn from each other and eventually develop into a better and collective conglomerate. The influence of Silk Road is still maintained today as when President Xi of China offered the idea of “One Belt One Road Initiative” in which focused on the close connectivity between Eurasia countries.

As many western products like textiles and gold came into China during Han dynasty, Chinese goods were able to be transported abroad as well. Among all the Chinese goods that were sent abroad, Chinese porcelains were undoubtedly the most influential ones that impressed westerners. In fact, porcelains were a tool that can reveal the mystery and national mythology of China by showing Chinese society and characters. Westerners had a new way to know and approach



the eastern cultures.



One of the most important kilns was the Tongguan kiln in modern day Changsha, Hunan Province. During the Tang dynasty and Five dynasties periods, the Tongguan kiln contributed over 80% of all the porcelains that were transported abroad and among the ancient Maritime Silk Road, porcelains that were found in over 29 different countries were produced in this kiln. The prosperity of the Tongguan kiln not only facilitated the local economy, but also helped developed the technological advancements in making the porcelains. Porcelains evolved from tools that could make daily tasks more efficient to many pieces of great art that were appreciated for both their aesthetics and meanings behind.



TANG


In Tang dynasty, the production of Chinese porcelains were divided demographically:

Southerners produced mostly celadons (jade and green colored porcelains), while northerners produced mostly white porcelains.

One of the most important kilns in Tang was “Changsha kiln,” a commercial kiln known for its massive and international export. During the mid Tang dynasty, there was a large-scale exported porcelains from Changsha kiln. Through the Maritime Silk Road, porcelains made in Changsha kiln with various patterns were continuously transported abroad.


In order to incite the export, craftsmen with commercial ideas painted the wares with western designs such as the palm tree or covered with western characters like Arabic.

As a result, exported Changsha wares strengthened the influence of Chinese culture on the world and set a solid foundation for later Chinese porcelains.



At the same time, Changsha kiln also initiated a new glazing technique -- under-glaze -- a breakthrough of the monochrome celadon wares. After fired at high temperatures, the polychrome could stand for a long time. Therefore, Changsha wares broke the balance between white and blue porcelains and established a new demographically porcelain production: celadon in the South, white in the North and under-glaze colors in Changsha.

There is another reknown pottery category in Tang dynasty -- tricolor pottery. Tri-color glazed pottery was a lead-glazed pottery that was made in high fired body and low fired glaze. They were mostly used in funerary of the emperors and were put together in the tombs. Tri-color did not limit the pottery to only have three colors and because of the flexibility of lead-glazed, the pottery can be made into various colors. We can also infer from the tri-color glazed pottery that Tang was greatly influenced by western cultures. Due to the nature of pottery, however, this brochure does not include these beautiful potteries.





Brown-speckled Ewer Applied with Molded Decoration

Period: Tang dynasty

This ewer contains a design of date palm tree, which explicitly indicates that it is an exported porcelain.

Ewer with Lion Decoration

Period: Tang dynasty

This is the only one ewer decorated with a lion in Changsha wares.




Ewer with Bird Decoration

Period: Tang dynasty



Ewer with Poems
Period: Tang dynasty



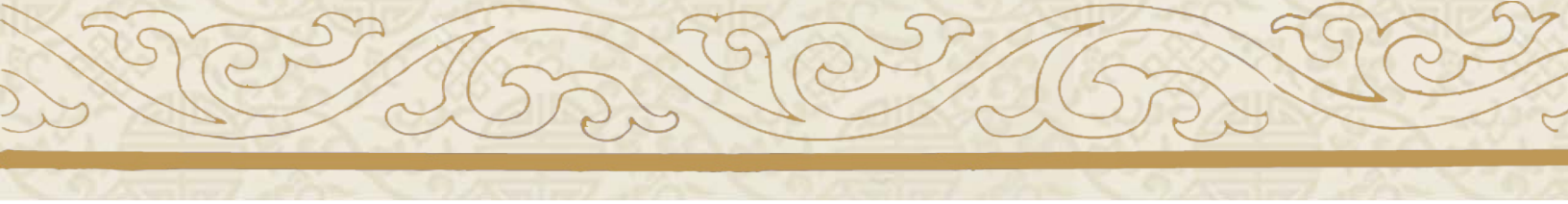


From previous two pages, it is obvious that a large number of Changsha wares are ewers, the wine vessels. The reason of the popularity of ewers is deeply connected with the society at that time. We know that Tang dynasty was a Golden Age of poems, and for poets, people always say that they could not write poems without drinking. Therefore, the demand of wine vessel increased.

As a matter of fact, the spout (so-called “Zhuzi”) on wine vessel was not appeared until ewers made in Changsha kiln. Thus, Changsha ewers are the prototype of today’s wine vessels and teapots.

On the previous page, all four eweres are covered with Chinese characters. Except the top left one, the others contain poems on them. According to the vice president of the Palace Museum, these poems were written by folk artisans. Some are about love, and some are about the social atmosphere. In this way, it also enriched and prospered Tang poetry. The top left one has five Chinese characters, “ren, yi, li, zhi xin.” It is the core idea (five virtues) in the *Mencius*.

As a result, Changsha ware is a cultural messenger. It spread Chinese culture and thoughts around the world and put the tag “Made in China” everywhere.



SONG

Porcelains show great variety and excellence in the Song period. The five major kilns were Ru, Ding, Guan, Ge and Jun, along with the products of the kilns of Yaozhou in the north, and Longquan and Jingdezhen in the south.



Ru Wares

Period: Song dynasty

Ru kiln was an imperial kiln, and it focused on blue porcelains. Although the brightness of blue was not consistent, but the key tone is “duck-egg” or “sky-blue.” The upper class in Northern Song period loved the elegance brought by this color.



Ding Wares

Period: Northern Song dynasty

Ding kiln was the earliest imperial kiln in Northern Song dynasty and it was the only kiln that produced white porcelains. Based on the technology of producing white porcelains since Tang dynasty, Ding kiln promoted the techniques of carving on porcelains.



Guan Wares

Period: Song dynasty

As the name suggests, Guan kiln was the direct kiln under the feudal government. Guan wares have neither complicated carvings nor color glazings; instead, Guan wares are more in common with the “ice cracks.” They are majorly in simple monochrome.



Ge Wares

Period: Song dynasty

Ge wares focus on the pattern of “ice cracks.”





Jun Wares

Period: Song dynasty


Jun Wares majorly produced blue porcelains, but it also produced porcelains in other colors.



Song Porcelains & Zhu Xi's Neo Confucianism

Many different Chinese philosophies contributed in influencing and creating Neo Confucianism, of which had a large impact on the porcelains in the Song dynasty as well. Among these philosophies, the essential idea of “non-action” and “serendipity” in Taoism particularly helped to serve as one of the fundamental elements in Neo Confucianism. As a result, most of the porcelains in the Song dynasty were made in the glazing of jade-green, a peaceful and harmonized color.

Secondly, Zhu Xi mentioned the concept of the goodness in human nature, in which was contradicted to Buddhism's idea of “no desire” and also to the unlimited material desire. Therefore, Song's porcelains were mainly made as tools to make daily tasks more efficient rather than objects that were appreciated purely for their aesthetics. And the decorations on the





porcelains were usually simple and soothing.

Thirdly, Neo Confucianism promoted the idea that beauty was not complete until an unity of aesthetics, morality, humaneness and culture was achieved. Therefore, many of the porcelains in Song were represented euphemistically, in other words, the porcelains would give people hints rather than a clear message so people could come up with multiple different interpretations towards one single object. And that contributed to the uniquely beauty of porcelains in Song.

YUAN

From Yuan to Qing dynasty, the production prospered and the quality of porcelains improved. While the five major kilns started since Song dynasty still played an influential role in the porcelain production in Yuan, Longquan and Jingdezhen kilns caught up with their quality and quantity and later even surpassed them.

The ordinary Yuan Tao or “Yuan Dynasty Porcelain” of Chinese collectors generally resembles the imperial ware of the Song dynasty, as it is fashioned in the same way and differs only in comparative coarseness and inferior technique. White porcelains became the mainstream and the glazing also had jade color infused within, which promoted the later development of blue and white porcelains in Ming and Qing dynasty.





Period: Yuan dynasty
Height: 7.9 cm
Diameter: 46.1 cm

The representation of porcelain in Yuan dynasty must be the well-known blue-and-white porcelain. The Prototype of blue-and-white porcelains appeared in Tang dynasty, and during Yuan, the technology of making blue-and-white porcelains already matured. Later the popularity of blue-and-white porcelains had an impact on the position of blue porcelains.

Blue and White Phoenix and Kirin Dish

The dish is fully glazed in blue and white except the bottom. Its surface has multiple layers of blue and white patterns. Inner side of the dish has the designs of white peony. At the center, there are a phoenix and the kirin, with white lotus and cloud patterns on the side. All the symbols combined together convey a strong sense of Chinese culture.

Blue and White Dragon Pattern Octagon Vase

Period: Yuan dynasty

Height: 46 cm

Diameter: 6.2-13.4 cm



The bottle has a small mouth, short and thin neck, and eight edges. On the shoulder there are grid patterns and under them are cloud patterns. Inside them are patterns depicting phoenix and kirins flying through the peony. The center of the bottle has four white dragons, with wave and fire patterns on the side. The bottom has cloud patterns with peony leaves within.

Porcelains in Yuan are usually large with complex patterns, multiple layers, and careful designs, which changed the traditions of simple patterns in Tang and Song. The huge cloud patterns on the shoulder and the bottom of the bottle draw ideas from the patterns of the silk cape in Yuan. The frequent appearance of dragon patterns is also one of the characteristics of the porcelains created in this time period.



Blue and White Underglaze Red Carved Pot

Period: Yuan dynasty

Height: 41 cm

Diameter: 15.5-18.5 cm

Straight mouth, short neck, slip shoulder, drum belly, ring foot, this pot is has a lion and umbrella shaped lid. The glaze is smooth, upper part is thin and lower part is thick. The blue and white patterns are really bright while the red underglaze is relatively dark. The lid is covered with blue and white lotus patterns, grass patterns and grain patterns. Under the shoulder there are cloud patterns and inside the patterns are water patterns with white lotus. Outside the belly there are diamond shaped beads which has rocks, peony and chrysanthemum within. As we can see from a closer look above, the patterns have a cameo effect.

The artisans in Yuan successfully managed to combine blue and white with red underglaze together on a single porcelain. The appearance of this new technique symbolized the technological advances of the development of porcelains in Yuan.



MING

During Ming dynasty, the techniques of porcelain-making was superb so as the kilns. Jingdezhen kiln was the major contributor to the production of high-quality porcelains that distinguishes others from their whiteness, smoothness, and translucence.

In Ming China, porcelain was an important domestic product that was consumed at *all levels* of society. It was also exported and given as foreign tribute, collected and written about by Chinese consumers. The large production supplied not only the whole country but also much of the rest of the world as well. For example, in 1577, the peak year, for 96,500 small pieces, 56,600 large ones, and 21,600 items for use in sacrificial ceremonies.

The quality of porcelains in such high production was also excellent so that they were in immense demand outside China, which further urged the porcelain industry. As Patricia Buckley Ebrey says, “the ceramic industry was able to survive by responding to the preference of foreign markets” even there was a decline in imperial orders.



Paintings and Poems on Ming Porcelains

In Ming dynasty, the blue-and-white porcelains became the mainstream. With advanced glazing skills, these porcelains were often painted with Chinese landscape or Chinese social activities. Therefore, the paintings on the porcelains provides us a chance to look into details of the society from each time period.

Blue-and-White Vase with *The Romance of Western Chamber*

Because of the prosperity of blue and white porcelains in the Ming dynasty, not only the technological skills of creating the porcelains were improved, but also the porcelains became more creative as they drew from a variety of sources. Landscape paintings, Chinese poems, Chinese literatures and even Zaju from the Yuan dynasty became elements in constituting the porcelains and were often directly painted on the surface of the porcelains. With these elements, the porcelains had more liveliness because they could convey clearer messages to the observers and owners. Every stroke and every character were carefully



designed to make people feel more connected with the poems, the paint-

ings, the stories, and the porcelains. The process of making these porcelains was like as if creating a remixing of different Chinese cultures and art into a collective essence. When combining with porcelains, the vulgarity of Zaju or the love stories in *The Romance of the Western Chamber* was erased and elevated into elegant products. And the paintings on the porcelains could also reflect the emperor's tastes so that later generations could consider an emperor's porcelain collections to be one important factor of his personality.

Blue-and-White Character Story Jar

Period: Ming Chongzhen

Height: 14.5 cm Diameter: 19 cm

This jar depicts a story that came from Romance of The Three Kingdoms that Li Xiao was asked by Dong Zhuo to bring treasures like fine horses, gold, jewelry and jade to Lv Bu's military site in Luoyang and convinced Lv Bu to surrender. The artisans carefully implemented this story plot into the decorations of the porcelains. The figures were all vividly representative and the color of the blue and white patterns were bright. It was one of the best porcelains created in Chongzhen period.



Between the end of Ming and the start of Qing, literature and art prospered in China, which helped to provide many creative elements for the patterns on the porcelains. They also greatly influenced the artistic designs on the porcelains. The porcelains that came from folk kilns drew their elements from many books and dramas like Romance of The Three Kingdoms, The Romance of The Western Chamber and Water Margin because of the popularity of dramas with pictures in Ming.

QING

Porcelains from the Jindezhen kilns in Ming and Qing periods have high quality and sophisticated decorations. Through a long-time development since Tang dynasty, the blue-and-white porcelain-making technology were at the peak in Qing dynasty.

It is hard to generalize the style of porcelains in Qing dynasty as we did before, because each emperor had different taste and preference. Some are simple and elegant, while some are bright and vibrant. Regardless of the pattern, all Qing porcelains were produced with high quality. Therefore, there are a large number of artworks in Qing dynasty.


Large Vase with Variegated Glazes

Period: Qing Qianlong

Height: 86.4 cm Diameter: 27.4-33 cm








This breathtaking piece is regarded as “Cimu” (Mother of Porcelain), a precious masterpiece in Chinese porcelain history.

This vase has a flaring mouth-rim, a long neck and a melon-shaped body. On the two sides are handles in the shape of dragons. It is covered with sixteen colors of glaze. From the top to the bottom the glazes include gold, purple-ground and green-ground famille rose, Ge-style celadon, blue-and-white, turquoise green, flambé, “contending colors”, Ge celadon, blue-and-white, green-ground famille rose, red-ground with gold painting, Guan-style celadon, and cloud blue with gold painting. They are separated by some stripes of gold glaze. The patterns on the vase include interlocking flowers and lotuses, medallion of flowers, palm-leaves, rectangular spirals and hooked chrysanthemums. On the belly are twelve framed panels with polychrome paintings of buildings, landscapes, and historic stories. Some paintings have implied meanings. For instance, a flower with bat and ruyi scepter means that fortune and longevity will last forever. Others are blessings for good luck or peace.

This vase integrates techniques innovated over many dynasties. Since various glazes need different firing temperatures, the craftsmen had to re-fire this object many times. Despite the complex process, the vase has harmonious patterns and elegant colors. It displays sophisticated porcelain production techniques.





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