



Seven hundred years ago, when Marco Polo marveled at the wares he had seen in China—porcelain dishes “so fine that you could not imagine better”—he reflected the perennial admiration of foreigners for the superb ceramics of the East. Chinese porcelain has been collected and treasured in Europe and America for centuries, but it may come as a shock to find out that the wares we’re most familiar with—the plates, jars, umbrella stands resplendent with jewel-colored birds and flowers—are a late and specialized development in Chinese ceramic history.

This history stretches back seven thousand years, to the dawn of civilization, and includes many of the world’s greatest examples of ceramics. As might be expected in any tradition so long-lived, it mirrors the history of China itself, the eras of prosperity or confusion, of isolation or far-ranging, enthusiastic contacts, but it has a rhythm of evolution and development of its own: even in periods of chaotic uncertainty potters will perfect a technique or refine a shape, and even in periods of exuberant opulence potters will lovingly employ a glaze of uncanny subtlety that had been developed centuries before.

Through the ages, however, Westerners have acquired only a small variety of the ceramics produced in China. What they got, generally, was what there was most of; the finest types were often made in such limited quantities that the entire production was reserved for the court. Even so, Westerners craved Chinese porcelain (between 1604 and 1654, three million pieces were imported into Holland) and have been dazzled by what they received: blue and white wares that almost every European factory began by emulating; breathtaking single-color wares like the oxblood vase shown on the cover; florid enameled wares whose effusiveness is tempered by the prettiness of the details.

The Metropolitan Museum’s collection of Chinese ceramics, which was begun almost a century ago, contains many such pieces. But what is remarkable is that it includes a variety of other types, lesser known, less understood. It contains, for instance, the exquisite white porcelain that embodies the sophisticated simplicity of Sung taste; there is a vase whose striking design of peonies was formed by carving away a khaki slip to reveal a white layer beneath; there is Kuan ware, so delicate that its glaze is often thicker than its clay.

This *Bulletin* presents an introduction to the history of Chinese ceramics through examples in our collection. Some of these pieces are among the most familiar types of Oriental art (and, thanks to the firm prejudice of the eye toward the familiar, among the most popular); others were rare even in their own day. All, however, reflect the extraordinary range—in time, in style, in variety of techniques—of the Chinese potter’s art.

Thomas Hoving
Director

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Highlights of Chinese Ceramics

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*Adapted from the author's
comprehensive survey of the history
of Chinese pottery: "A Handbook of
Chinese Ceramics" (Metropolitan
Museum, 1975)*

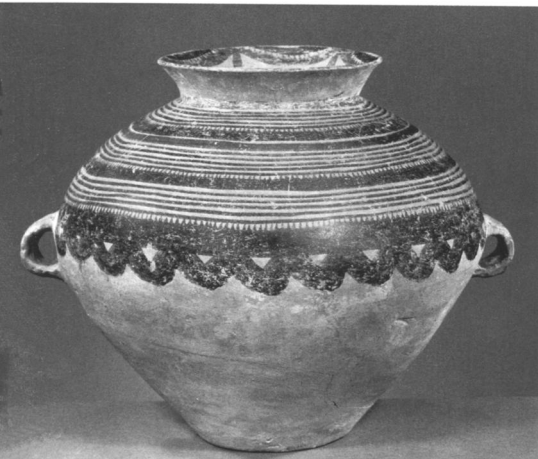
The Chinese have been making pottery for well over seven thousand years. The beginnings are still shrouded in mystery, and we cannot chart that banner moment when the concept of baking clay into useful vessels materialized. There is some evidence that crude pottery was being produced in several parts of China by the Mesolithic period. By the Neolithic era the ceramic industry was so important in the agricultural communities of northern China's Central Plain that even semipermanent villages contained a pottery manufacturing center as well as a dwelling area and cemetery. An enormous number of Neolithic sites, belonging to diverse cultures and many periods, have been excavated in China. Common to most of these primitive cultures were relatively coarse utilitarian cooking, serving, and storage utensils, which were either unembellished or decorated in an unpretentious manner. Other types of pottery, including painted, black, and white wares, have also been found in the excavations of Neolithic sites; generally these exhibit a better quality of potting, and it is speculated that some of them were reserved for ritual use.

1. *The distinctive product of what is known as the Yang-shao Neolithic culture was painted earthenware of remarkable refinement. Fashioned of fine-grained clay, the reddish or buff-colored vessels were burnished and decorated—usually in black or black and red pigments—with geometric designs or, more rarely, with anthropomorphic or zoomorphic patterns. Vessels found in the Pan-shan hills of eastern Kansu Province are considered by many to be the peak of Yang-shao painted pottery. The most impressive of these Pan-shan wares are large, thin-walled ovoid jars, embellished on the upper portion with a wide variety of designs. Painted in black and red, this handsome example evidences the mastery of technique achieved by the Chinese potter at a prehistoric date.*

Kansu Province, Neolithic period, Yang-shao culture, Pan-shan type. Earthenware, height 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 60.81.1

Cover: Figure 34, a vase in the spectacular oxblood glaze, one of the most popular of all the Ch'ing dynasty single-color wares. Bequest of Mary Clark Thompson, 24.80.537

Frontispiece: Figure 36, a delicate white porcelain bowl decorated in the palette of famille rose enamels. This technique was the outstanding achievement of the Yung-cheng period. Bequest of Rosina H. Hopkin, Alfred W. Hoyt Collection, 65.86.12



SHANG DYNASTY (1523?-1028? B.C.)

The Shang dynasty was the earliest historic Chinese civilization, a dynamic people who added many outstanding sociological and technological innovations to their Neolithic cultural inheritance. By the late Shang period a sophisticated system of writing had been developed, ivory carving was a fine art, and jade carving flourished. The period was also important in the development of Chinese ceramics: two related major innovations in the Shang potter's art founded a ceramic patrimony that is drawn upon to this day. The first was stoneware, pottery that has been fired at a high temperature and is dense, hard, and impervious to liquid; the second was the use of high-fired glazes on these stonewares. (A glaze, in essence a glassy coating on the surface of a ceramic, serves the twofold function of helping to seal the clay body and decorating the object.) The outstanding feature of the urbanized Shang society, however, was its bronze metallurgy. Most of the earliest Shang bronzes were fashioned after already familiar pottery shapes; but soon they assumed an identity of their own with numerous new forms and decorations in a strictly metallic idiom. By the later part of the dynasty bronzes reached a stage of technical development difficult to surpass.

2. As Shang bronzes became more splendid, they tended to overshadow other contemporary artistic achievements, and Shang pottery became the imitator of this superb metalwork. This tsun, or ritual wine vessel, is a particularly fine example of a group of gray earthenwares that reflect the influence of the bronzes. Its shape is similar to bronze forms; and the small relief flanges and bosses applied to the horizontal bands of incised decoration echo those much grander ones found on the magnificent ritual bronzes of the day.

Probably from An-yang, Honan Province, late Shang dynasty, about 14th-11th centuries B.C. Earthenware, height 10 inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund. 50.61.5



CHOU DYNASTY (1027?-256 B.C.)

The Chou, who had lived in Shensi Province on the fringes of Shang civilization during the later part of that era, conquered the Shang, possibly in 1027 B.C., and established the longest of all Chinese dynasties. The potent years of the Chou rulers—known as Western Chou—lasted only until 771 B.C., when their capital, Hao, near modern Sian in Shensi Province, was destroyed. The dynasty was re-established at Lo-yang in Honan Province, but its authority thereafter was minimal. (Because of the location of the new capital, this later period is called Eastern Chou.)

After they subjugated the Shang, the Chou maintained the basic Shang culture and elaborated upon it: bronze metallurgy was still a prime industry; the writing system continued to evolve; new implements were introduced into the difficult art of jade carving. As in the Shang period, much Chou pottery reflected the greater importance of bronzes and other more valuable materials.



3 (left). The finer gray earthenwares are particularly apt to show bronze influences; indeed, there seem to be few shapes among these vessels for which counterparts in bronze or, to a lesser extent, lacquer cannot be found. In ornamenting these wares, too, Chou potters copied designs found on the more precious objects, frequently painting them with polychrome pigments, often over a coating of slip. This bowl, with its fluted sides, tall flaring foot, and lid that can also be used as a bowl, faithfully follows a contemporary bronze shape. Unfortunately, only a small amount of the decoration remains. Chou pigments, applied after firing, were rather fragile, and in many cases they are badly damaged or have almost completely disappeared.

Northern China, Eastern Chou dynasty, 770-256 B.C. Earthenware, height 9¼ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 50.61.9

4 (right). This beautifully shaped jar, although retaining only remnants of its glaze, is still a splendid piece, its powerful and well-balanced form offset by bands of forceful carving. There is ample evidence of the use of high-fired glazes during the Western Chou period, and recent finds in southern Kiangsu and northern Chekiang provinces show that the technique continued into the Eastern Chou era as well. Many of these later Chou vessels were fashioned in essentially ceramic forms, while others rather closely imitated Eastern Chou bronzes. Although their mottled brownish yellow or yellowish green glazes are fairly unsophisticated, these ceramics are of singular importance: they can be regarded as the precursors of the tradition of high-fired green-glazed stonewares known as Yüeh wares, which was introduced by the beginning of the Six Dynasties and continued without interruption into the 11th or early 12th century.

Probably from Chekiang or Kiangsu Province, Eastern Chou dynasty, late Warring States period, about 3rd century B.C. Stoneware, height 7¼ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 50.61.10





CH'IN DYNASTY (221 B.C.-206 B.C.)
HAN DYNASTY (206 B.C.- A.D. 220)



The first Chinese empire was founded in 221 B.C., when the state of Ch'in finally unified the country. The Ch'in empire was short-lived, however, and eventually a new dynasty, the Han, was established at Ch'ang-an (modern Sian) in Shensi Province. (The Han is traditionally described as the Former, or Western Han – interrupted by a brief period when the throne was seized by an interloper – and the Later, or Eastern Han, after the dynasty was in effect restored with its capital at Lo-yang, in Honan Province.) The Han was one of China's most glorious epochs, in which, as a strong, unified country, it experienced a period of tremendous power and prestige, making wide territorial conquests and expanding in an unprecedented fashion in diplomatic and cultural fields. Via the overland trade routes of Central Asia and the sea lanes from southern China to the West, the Han sent their precious silks to the Western world and received in return a wealth of ideas and products from lands as far away as the Roman Empire.

5 (above). The superior status of metal wares, particularly bronzes, which had made such a deep imprint on Chinese ceramics since Shang times, can still be observed in Han pottery. However, a new interest in naturalism swept through all phases of Han art and also touched the potter's craft. Ornamentation of ceramics was no longer strictly limited to that derived from metalwork but included a refreshing new vocabulary of naturalistic motifs. This handsome jar, of a bronze-inspired shape, combines a pair of animal masks and rings taken from bronze prototypes with a relief band of running and fighting animals. It is an example of the technique of lead glazing on earthenware, which probably began toward the end of the Chou dynasty. These glazes, dark green or, more rarely, brown in tone, were fired at low temperatures. Han green lead glazes were extremely vulnerable, and most of them, after long exposure to moisture in the tomb, have decomposed to the extent of acquiring a beautiful silvery iridescence.

Northern China, Han dynasty, 206 B.C. – A.D. 220. Earthenware, height 14½ inches. Gift of Mrs. Samuel T. Peters, 26.292.83

6 (left). The cover of this minutely detailed incense burner shows a stylized landscape in which men and beasts—running figures, boars, birds, horses, a deer, and water buffalo, a veritable Noah's Ark—cavort among craggy mountain peaks. A sinuous dragon with long pointed nose and curving forked tail undulates upside down on the bowl.

Objects—known as ming-ch'i—made specifically for burial with the dead assumed an important role in early China. Some Han pottery ming-ch'i were glazed in green (see Figure 5) or amber brown. Others such as this gray earthenware incense burner were either undecorated or painted with unfired pigments, which, unfortunately, were usually impermanent. (Only a little red and white remains on this piece.)

Northern China, Han dynasty, 206 B.C. – A.D. 220. Earthenware, height 8¾ inches. Gift of Florance Waterbury, 65.74.2

SIX DYNASTIES (220-589)

With the fall of the Han, China was launched into 350 years of political disunity, a period known as the Six Dynasties, after six successive dynasties that had their capitals at Nanking between 222 and 589. Despite political unrest, this was a time of substantial technological and cultural growth. One of the most profound influences on the fabric of Chinese life was Buddhism, which probably had been introduced during the Han dynasty. Serving as an important link between China and South and Central Asia, it brought numerous foreign influences from great Western cultures to China. As it became widely accepted, Buddhism made its own distinctive mark on all facets of Chinese art.

Although the Six Dynasties was formerly regarded as a rather unimportant interval as far as Chinese ceramics were concerned, recent finds have produced evidence that this was a time of impressive development and invention, when in many respects Chinese ceramics came into their own.

7 (left). Many ming-ch'i excavated from Six Dynasties tombs are representations of people and animals. This delightful unglazed model of a tricorn is a sturdy beast with three horns on his head and neck, and four "button" vertebrae down his back. He stands firmly on cloven hoofs, head down, ready to charge. A portrait of pent-up power only ten inches high, he might possibly be an imaginative reconstruction of a Triceratops, perhaps inspired by some newly discovered skeletal remains.

The figure is of a type found in Honan Province. Chin dynasty, 265-420. Earthenware, length 17¼ inches. Bequest of Florance Waterbury, in memory of John I. Waterbury, 68.149.15



8 (right). This magnificently sculpted crouching animal, his head raised, ears laid back, and haunches tense, epitomizes the great affection and charm with which the Chinese have always represented animals. His pale olive glaze is an early example of a major category of high-fired green glazes generally called "celadons" in the West.

An extremely important group of celadon-glazed stonewares was produced in numerous kilns in northern Chekiang and southern Kiangsu provinces from at least as early as the beginning of the Six Dynasties into the Sung era; these ceramics are called "Yüeh" wares, probably after an administrative capital in the area once known as Yüeh Chou.

Recent tomb finds suggest that another tradition of green-glazed stonewares was established in northern China during the Six Dynasties, probably by the mid-6th century. Analysis of the composition of this vessel indicates that it may be assigned with some confidence to this little-known group of northern wares.

Possibly from northern China, late Northern dynasties – Sui dynasty, about second half of the 6th – early 7th century. Porcelaneous stoneware, length 11⅞ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 60.75.2



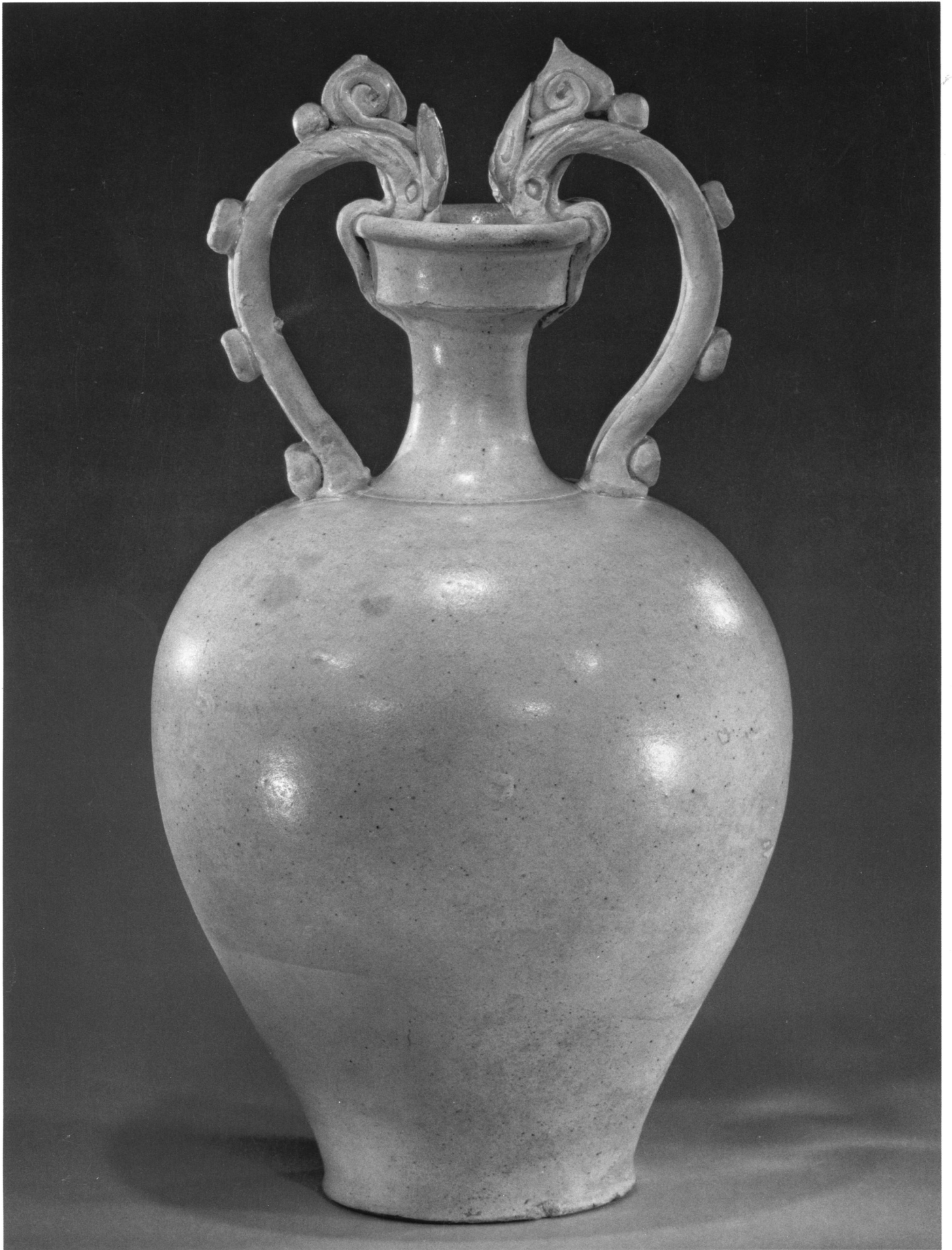
SUI DYNASTY (581-618)

Brief though it was, the Sui dynasty was important, for its founder, a Northern Chou general, accomplished the estimable feat of reuniting China. Under Sui rule a strong centralized government was re-established, capitals were rebuilt, the Great Wall was reconstructed, and China's political and military influence was felt well beyond its borders. Sui ceramics, building on the foundations of the late Six Dynasties, frequently showed many affinities to wares of that era, yet Sui shapes and styles heralded the coming of the T'ang dynasty as well.

9. *This exquisitely graceful amphora is almost lyrical in configuration, with its flowing heart-shaped lines echoed in handles rising to terminate in dragons' heads. It is one of a group of white wares manufactured by the late 6th century that represents a step toward "true" porcelain.*

Westerners have always prized the merits of porcelain, which in our terms is hard, white, and translucent, impervious to liquid, and resonant when struck. A large number of white wares, such as this amphora, that do not conform precisely to all of these criteria are frequently described as "porcelaneous stoneware." The progression from these porcelaneous stonewares to "true" porcelain, essentially a matter of refinement, was probably a gradual one, and, in all likelihood, "true" porcelain was perfected during the T'ang dynasty.

Probably from northern China, Sui dynasty, 581-618. Porcelaneous stoneware, height 13½ inches. Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.217



T'ANG DYNASTY (618-906)



The T'ang dynasty was one of the most brilliant in Chinese history. The empire was strong and prosperous, and, as the country flourished, its culture touched hitherto unknown peaks. T'ang China's influence was widespread, reaching from the borders of Korea well into Central Asia. Enjoying extensive trade with far distant countries, China drew from all the artistic sources with which it came into contact, and assimilated and Sinicized these exotic styles in an inimitable manner. The climate of prosperity, which pervaded every aspect of T'ang life, is abundantly evident in T'ang pottery. These wares are charged with vitality, their decoration jubilant, their forms fairly bursting with enthusiasm.

10 (left). The impact of T'ang internationalism also is evident in its pottery, where native styles were combined with imported Western elements: shapes and decorative motifs from Persia, India, Greece, and Syria became part of the ceramic repertoire. This cup, with elaborate low-relief ornament, shows the strong influence of Persian metalwork, a frequent source of inspiration for T'ang artisans, especially in the early part of the era. Drawing from a Persian prototype, the Chinese potter based his shape on the rhyton drinking horn and added beaded medallions, a palmette, and semi-palmettes, all familiar patterns in the Western metalwork. In typically Chinese fashion, however, he has counterbalanced the alien features with a distinctly home-grown dragon.

T'ang dynasty, about 7th—early 8th century. Porcelaneous stoneware, height 3¼ inches. Rogers Fund, 24.180.1



11 (right). T'ang potters exploited the wide color range of low-fired lead glazes to the fullest, producing tones from straw yellow through amber to dark brown, rich grassy greens, and dark vibrant blues. These lead glazes are particularly effective when combined in the type of decoration known as san-ts'ai, "three-color," glazes—although the hues are not strictly limited to that number. The opulent polychromes are found in many elaborate patterns, such as the popular T'ang motif on this plate, a goose flying among clouds with radiating cloud volutes and broad lotus leaves. Here the design was impressed into the clay while it was still damp, and these recessed lines served to confine the colored glazes.

Northern China, T'ang dynasty, about 8th century. Earthenware, diameter 11⅞ inches. Rogers Fund, 14.66





12 (left). By the beginning of the 8th century, the sculptural quality of Chinese tomb figures was at its zenith: they were modeled with unprecedented naturalism and animation. The potter has imparted life to this imposing heavenly guardian, capturing the essence of a mood and a gesture with superlative fidelity. There is an eloquent warning in that forbidding expression, and his commanding stance proclaims authority. His finely rendered features have been identified as those of a Khotanese, another example of the cosmopolitanism of T'ang China. Here the "three-color" glazes are seen to their fullest advantage, unrestrained by guidelines and allowed to flow in the heat of the kiln.

The showy magnificence of tomb figures with "three-color" glazes has made them one of the hallmarks of the T'ang dynasty. Literally hundreds of figures—soldiers, servants, musicians, tomb guardians, horses, camels—and models of all manner of articles used in everyday life were placed in tombs to cater to the needs of the dead. Made in all sizes—some are only inches high, some are several feet—and in a wide range of qualities, they corresponded in importance to the status enjoyed by the deceased.

Northern China, T'ang dynasty, late 7th—first half of the 8th century. Earthenware, height 35 inches. Rogers Fund, 11.83.1

13 (right). Among the most dramatic T'ang stonewares are those with fairly thick, opaque dark brown or black glazes, which seem to add extra power to already energetic shapes. Sometimes, as on this stunning flask, the dark glazes are suffused with bold splashes of contrasting color, including shades of cream, gray, blue, and lavender. These patches of color generally appear to have been applied at random and permitted to run at will over the glaze. The unusual shape of this exceptionally fine flask was probably based on a leather prototype. As on the original, a cord can be passed up the sides and through two loops; the back is flat, enabling the flask to lie securely when carried.

Possibly from the Huang-tao kilns, Honan Province, T'ang dynasty, about 9th century. Stoneware, height 11½ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John R. Menke, 1972.274



FIVE DYNASTIES (907-960)

The era from 907 to 960 saw five successive short-lived “dynasties” in northern China, while in the south, ten independent “kingdoms” held sway. (For convenience, these turbulent years are usually referred to as the Five Dynasties.) Despite civil unrest, the ceramic industry apparently managed to maintain some semblance of normalcy, for many fine examples of various wares can be dated to this time.

14. *The celadon-glazed wares that had been the pride of the Yüeh kilns for centuries reached their high point during the Five Dynasties, when Yüeh potters produced some of the finest ceramics in the history of the region. An important part of their output, known as pi-se yao, “prohibited-” or “private-color ware,” was reserved for the exclusive use of the princes of Wu-Yüeh, who controlled the area. This special ware is probably represented by one of the great treasures of the Museum’s collection, the bowl with a splendidly carved design of three high-spirited dragons under a lustrous, translucent soft green glaze. The fluid action and agile grace displayed by these dragons as they race across a background of lapping waves are a tribute to the peerless technique of the carver, who, by pressing a stylus against damp clay, has virtually created perpetual motion. (One dragon’s tail is tucked under his hind leg, a curious Yüeh “trademark.”)*

Probably from kilns in the vicinity of Shang-lin Hu, Chekiang Province, Five Dynasties, 10th century. Porcelaneous stoneware, diameter 10 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches. Rogers Fund, 18.56.36





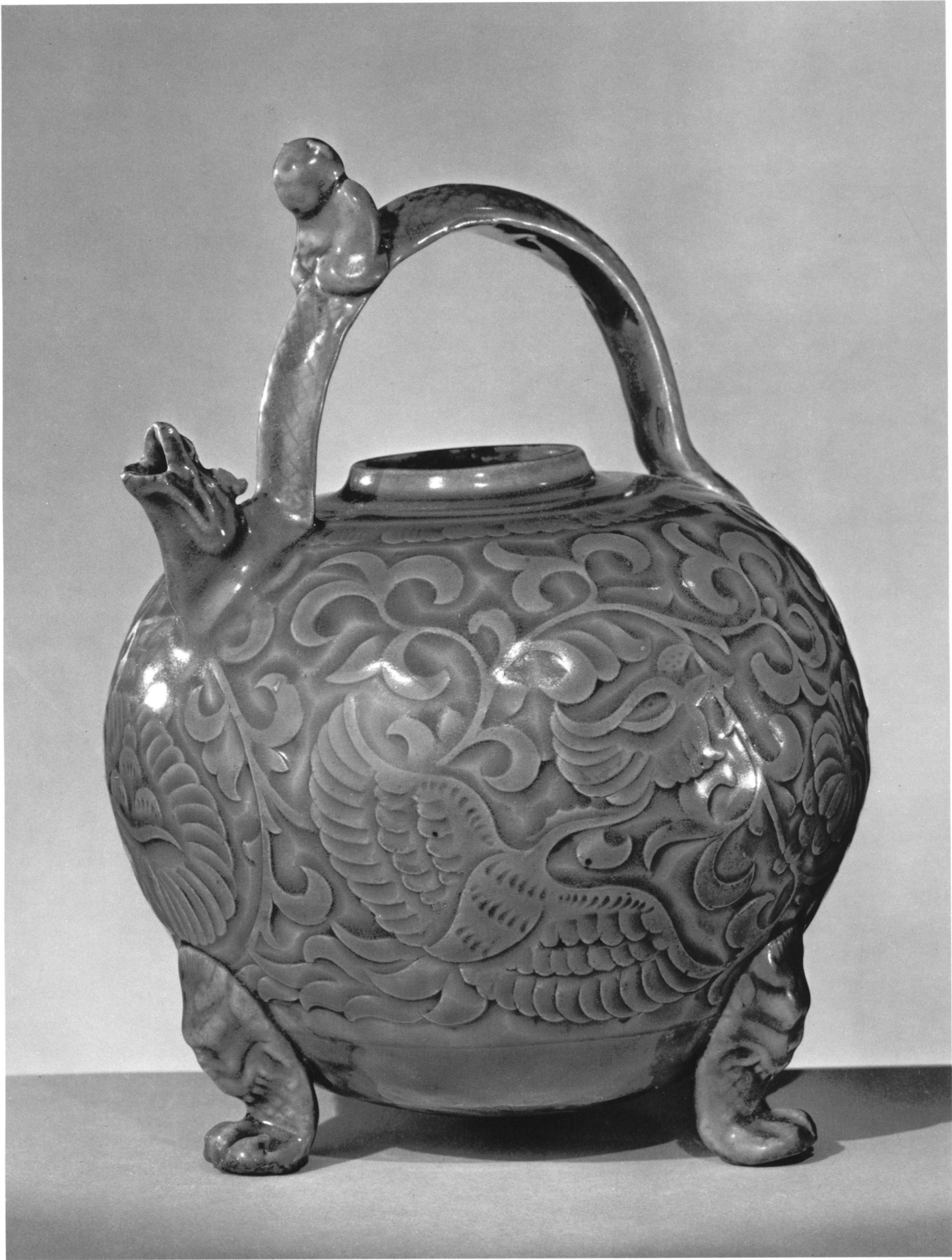
NORTHERN SUNG, CHIN, AND SOUTHERN SUNG DYNASTIES (960-1279)

The Sung dynasty consisted of two phases: the Northern Sung era, from 960 to 1127, when the main provinces of China were consolidated; and the period after 1127, when the Jurchen conquered the Northern Sung. The Jurchen, as the Chin dynasty, then ruled most of the northern Chinese provinces until 1234, while the son of a former Northern Sung emperor continued the Sung dynasty in central and southern China.

Sung culture was essentially an introverted one. This was a time of relative peace and tranquility (albeit purchased with extremely heavy tributes), but menacing neighbors at most of China's borders kept the country fairly isolated from the West and the stimulus of cultural interchange. Therefore the Sung looked inward for artistic inspiration and found it to a large extent in nature, which is mirrored in almost every facet of Sung creativity.

15. The highly aesthetic, placid, and introspective atmosphere of both the Northern and Southern Sung dynasties is reflected in the quiet elegance of those ceramics in the classic court taste. Forms are simple and basically uncomplicated, while designs, when used, seldom intrude but are content to be investigated at the viewer's leisure. There is literary evidence that the white porcelains known as Ting wares were among those supplied to the Northern Sung court, and the beauty of this basin illustrates why Ting porcelains would have enjoyed imperial favor. Delicately potted and enrobed in a mellow ivory white glaze, it has a free-flowing, finely carved design of lotus and sagittaria sprays that epitomizes the Sung penchant for unobtrusive decoration. Ting wares were usually fired on their unglazed mouth rims, probably to prevent warping, and the rims were very often capped, as here, with metal.

Probably from the Chien-tz'u Ts'un kilns, Hopei Province, Northern Sung dynasty, 11th-12th century. Porcelain, diameter 9¾ inches. Gift of Mrs. Samuel T. Peters, 26.292.98





16 (opposite). This magnificent ewer demonstrates the special talent of Sung potters for stressing shape and glaze, relegating ornament—no matter how complex—to the lesser role of complementing rather than dominating the object. The body is brilliantly carved with two phoenixes flying amidst a ground of scrolls with conventionalized flowers and sickle-shaped leaves. The bold design is emphasized by the thin, translucent, deep olive green glaze, which accumulates in the recessed areas, intensifying in tone and accenting the pattern. Standing on three scowling-mask legs that terminate in paws, the ewer is topped off by a high arched handle in the form of a serpent-like dragon, whose head forms the spout; a small figure crouches on his back. This ewer exemplifies the group of wares generically known as Northern celadons, which was produced at several kiln complexes in northern China during the Northern Sung, Chin, and Yüan periods.

Probably from the Huang-pao Chen (Yao Chou) kilns, Shensi Province, Northern Sung dynasty, 11th-12th century. Porcelaneous stoneware, height 8¼ inches. Gift of Mrs. Samuel T. Peters, 26.292.73

17 (left). This rare vase, decorated in the sgraffito manner, with khaki-colored slip carved to reveal underlying white slip, is dominated by a skillfully executed peony scroll. The design has been carefully plotted so that the scroll starts at the bottom of the vase and continues uninterrupted, twining first to the right around the lower section and then reversing its direction as it winds around the top. The vase is from a large family of wares made in numerous kilns—principally in northern China—known by the all-encompassing name of Tz'u Chou. Considered by some to be the folk pottery of China, Tz'u Chou wares were produced in large quantities during the Northern Sung and Chin dynasties (and, indeed, they continue to be made to this day). Departing from the polished tastes of the Sung court, they evidence the preference of the popular market for stronger-colored, bolder decoration executed in a variety of ways.

Tz'u Chou ware, Northern Sung dynasty, 11th-12th century. Porcelaneous stoneware, height 13⅞ inches. (The neck is a later restoration.) Gift of Mrs. Samuel T. Peters, 26.292.61





18 (opposite). Painting on Tz'u Chou wares is generally executed in brown or black on a ground of white or, more rarely, green. The drawing frequently shows great flair and confidence, as it does on this delightful little black and white pillow. Here a small boy rides a bamboo hobbyhorse, probably in an imaginary race, and looks over his shoulder to spot the competition. The continuous band of stylized leaf-scroll on the sides exhibits the same spontaneity of brush stroke as the freely painted main design.

Possibly from the Tung-ai-k'ou kilns, Tz'u Hsien, Hopei Province, late Northern Sung – Chin dynasty, 12th-13th century. Inscribed on the base: Chang ta chia chen, "Pillow of the great Chang family." Stoneware, length 11¼ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 60.73.2

19 (upper left). Some northern brown- or black-glazed stonewares, to a large extent from the same kilns that produced Tz'u Chou wares, require no more than plain glazes to dramatize strong yet simple shapes. Occasionally, bold decorative effects were added, often appearing as rust-colored splashes against a lustrous black ground, a combination used on this fine bowl. Here the potter has controlled his medium in an impressive manner, managing the matte rust spots so that they diminish in size but increase in density as they move toward the rim. Against this reddish brown "milky way," he has splashed five large dramatic bursts of rust variegated with silvery gray patches.

Northern ware, Northern Sung – Chin dynasty, about 11th-12th century. Stoneware, diameter 7¾ inches. Dodge Fund, 60.81.3

20 (lower left). Few ceramics arouse such admiration among connoisseurs as the Southern Sung Lung-ch'üan celadons with their elegant, simple, and well-proportioned forms sheathed in thick, smooth, lustrous green glazes that feel like polished jade. As we see on this superb vase, decoration is underplayed; at most it is a sculpted element, such as these handles in the form of fish, which provide a subtle counterpoint of ornament to the stark, somewhat angular lines of the piece.

The large group of Lung-ch'üan celadons, named after the district in southwestern Chekiang Province that was the focal point of their production, played an important role in China's ceramic history from as early as the Five Dynasties until well into the Ming era. By the time the Sung dynasty was established in the south in the 12th century and the capital, Lin-an (modern Hangchow), had become the hub of Sung China's cultural activities, the Lung-ch'üan kilns had a long-standing tradition of celadon wares. Under the Southern Sung this inheritance was carried to its sublime realization.

Possibly from the Ta-yao kilns, Lung-ch'üan Hsien, Chekiang Province, Southern Sung dynasty, 12th-13th century. Porcelaneous stoneware, height 6¾ inches. Bequest of Mary Stillman Harkness, 50.145.



21 (below). Ch'ing-pai, "bluish" or "greenish white," aptly describes the thin, faintly blue, translucent glaze that takes on a deeper tone where it collects in the recessed designs of this splendidly decorated pillow. A virtuoso piece, it has as its base a beautifully modeled reclining lady in a long flowing robe, who rests her elaborately coiffed head lightly on her hand. The richly ornamented surface of the oval headrest displays a vigorously incised and combed design of two boys crawling among peonies. Ch'ing-pai porcelains vary greatly in quality, ranging from exquisite, delicate objects potted to a remarkable thinness to much sturdier works of relatively little artistic merit. Indigenous to southern China, they may have originated as early as the T'ang dynasty and were produced at least until the mid-14th century.

Probably from kilns in the vicinity of Ching-te Chen, Kiangsi Province, Southern Sung dynasty, 12th-13th century. A partially obliterated inscription on the plinth could read: Yeh chia chih(?) fu, possibly, "Master of the house of Yeh." Porcelain, length 9 inches. Gift of Mrs. Samuel T. Peters, 26.292.82

22 (right). Epitomizing the special serenity of Sung pottery, this superb dish is the essence of understatement, with a glaze like pale grayish blue polished marble, as pleasing to the hand as it is to the eye. The dish is of a class known as Kuan, "official," wares, which were manufactured in at least two groups of kilns in Lin-an after the firm establishment of the new Southern Sung capital there in 1135. Kuan wares are noted for the extreme thinness of their body: the vessels are sometimes so finely potted that the body is thinner than the enveloping glaze. Kuan glazes bring to mind the muted tones of nature—light buff or shades of brown, pale blue or light greenish blues, and bluish or greenish grays. They are frequently cobwebbed with a profuse crackle—generally brownish, as here, or blackish—which, while seemingly artless, is in fact a deliberately induced, highly sophisticated type of decoration.

From the Lin-an (Hangchow) kilns, Chekiang Province, Southern Sung dynasty, 12th-13th century. Porcelaneous stoneware, diameter $8\frac{1}{16}$ inches. Fletcher Fund, 24.172.1





YUAN DYNASTY (1279-1368)

During the 13th century the Mongols swept down from the north and, in a somewhat lengthy process, conquered China. Under the new regime, China entered a period very different from the introverted Sung era. Now part of a vast empire extending from Korea to South Russia and Persia, it had considerable commerce with foreign nations, which brought a new infusion of ideas, innovations, and cultural influences into Chinese life. The subtle nuances of Sung ceramics were probably lost on the Mongols and the Western merchants whose patronage played an important part in Yüan ceramics. Therefore Chinese potters addressed themselves to making wares to satisfy the Mongol and export taste for more obvious ornamentation. Numerous design elements found in Yüan wares may be traced to another dynasty of nomadic origin, the Chin, which, in turn, drew much of its style from the T'ang. Near Eastern metalwork also served as a source of new decorative motifs and shapes.



23 (left). *This rare pair of incense burners illustrates the increasing elaboration of ch'ing-pai porcelains during the Yüan dynasty. The fully modeled, animated lions crowning the lids are beautifully articulated, mouths open wide, bulging eyes punctuated with dabs of brown, and manes flowing in two rows of tight curls. With a front paw the lions protect a ball, and, in a somewhat inelegant gesture, raise a hind leg, as though they were about to scratch their heads. The potter did not hesitate to incorporate several types of enrichment on the same object: the bases are bedecked with floral motifs mold-impressed on lotus-petal panels, underscored by a row of carved overlapping lotus petals.*

Probably from kilns in the vicinity of Ching-te Chen, Kiangsi Province, Yüan dynasty, about early 14th century. Porcelain, heights 8¾ inches. Fletcher Fund, 34.113.2, 3

24 (right). *The early Yüan dynasty was a fertile period for experiment and innovation, when, probably encouraged by a need to create something more striking for the Mongols and foreign trade, potters added a spate of new kinds of decoration to their repertoire. Of paramount importance was the fresh technique of painting in cobalt oxide under the glaze to produce blue designs against a white ground, one of the most significant developments in Chinese ceramic history. By the time this blue and white vase was made, painters had mastered the new medium, and some of the most dynamic porcelains ever were being produced. Ornamented with considerable enthusiasm, this vase commands attention: the drawing is sure and spontaneous, and the typically strong blue emphasizes a virtuosity of brushwork. The cover, probably original, has a hollow conical projection inside that fits into the mouth of the vase.*

Probably from kilns in the vicinity of Ching-te Chen, Kiangsi Province, late Yüan—early Ming dynasty, about third quarter of the 14th century. Porcelain, height with cover 17½ inches. Rogers Fund, 26.271.1







德年製

MING DYNASTY (1368-1644)

After a period of insurrection, the Mongols were overthrown by a Chinese rebel leader, who established the native Ming dynasty in 1368. The first Ming capital was the city of Nanking; in 1421 the Ming court moved to Peking, constructed on the site of the old Mongol capital, Khanbaliq, or Ta-tu. Much of the glorious city erected at that time still stands to be admired today.

The porcelains of the Ming dynasty have attained such recognition in the West that "Ming" has become almost generic for anything ceramic fabricated in China before the 20th century. While, unhappily, many of the pieces called "Ming" have no possible claim to that attribution, the porcelains that *were* produced during the period are among the most beautiful and exciting to emerge from China's kilns. Because the kilns at Ching-te Chen and the surrounding area in Kiangsi Province became paramount during the Ming era, overshadowing all other manufacturing centers, our attention focuses primarily on wares from these kilns from this time on.

25 (preceding pages). *This splendid large red and white early Ming bowl is painted under the glaze in copper oxide, a technique probably introduced during the early Yüan period along with its counterpart, underglaze blue, which is painted in cobalt oxide. The copper oxide was not as successful a medium, however, for it was difficult to control, often yielding a muddy or gray hue. In the late 14th century, when this bowl was made, Chinese potters were still having difficulties with underglaze red; therefore the good deep red color of this piece makes it exceptional. The decoration of the bowl is typical of the very early Ming years, when a profusion of motifs was worked into a composition of strictly disciplined formality.*

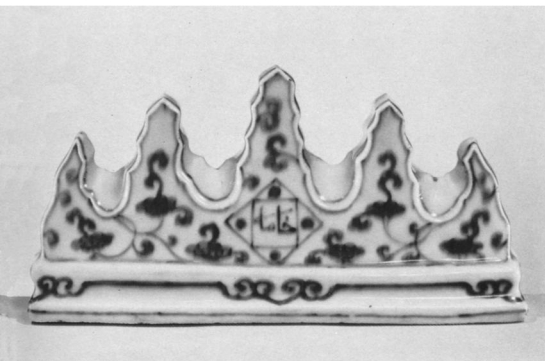
Ching-te Chen ware, Ming dynasty, late 14th century. Porcelain, diameter 15¾ inches. Rogers Fund, 18.56.35

26 (preceding pages and detail). *In many respects the blue and white porcelains of the early 15th century illustrate these wares at their apogee. They combine the freedom and energy of a newly ripened art form with the sophistication of concept and mastery of execution that come with maturity. The highest traditions of early Ming dynasty brushwork are represented in the very model of a bristling dragon on this marvelous jar. His dorsal fins are like the teeth of a buzz saw, his claws have an underlying bone structure worthy of Michelangelo, and he moves around the jar with total power yet consummate grace. Flanked by the heads of fearsome monsters is an inscription with the reign title of the incumbent emperor, Hsüan-te. Reign marks became popular during the Hsüan-te era (1426-1435) and were used continuously after that time. (However, inasmuch as they were frequently copied, they should always be regarded with caution.)*

Ching-te Chen ware, Ming dynasty, Hsüan-te mark and period, 1426-1435. Porcelain, height 19 inches. Gift of Robert E. Tod, 37.191.1







27 (opposite). This stately vase, of a shape known as mei-p'ing, is admirably suited to hold a single perfect spray of prunus blossoms. Its flowing contours convey a feeling of strength, enhanced by the enveloping dark, mottled blue glaze. The vase bears elegant designs of a cloud-collar border, aquatic plants, and a band of elaborate lotus-petal panels in light turquoise, white, and very pale yellow glazes, which contrast handsomely with the dark background. This is a choice example of a group of sturdily potted porcelaneous stonewares decorated in the cloisonné technique, in which slender threads of clay are applied to define the motifs and control the colored glazes.

Possibly Ching-te Chen ware, Ming dynasty, late 15th century. Porcelaneous stoneware, height 14½ inches. Bequest of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 61.200.52



28 (upper left). This brush rest in the form of five mountain peaks bears a Persian inscription on either side, which, put together, reads: Khamah dan, "pen rest." It is one of a group of blue and white porcelains popularly called "Mohammedan" wares, which were produced during the Cheng-te era (1506-1521). These wares are distinguished by the Persian or Arabic inscriptions that are almost invariably part of the decoration of arabesques, conventionalized floral scrolls, and stiff formal borders. This characteristic ornament is found on an assortment of objects, including some in shapes apparently new during the 16th century. The majority of "Mohammedan" wares are accessories for the scholar's writing table, and it is assumed that most of them were made for the Muslim eunuchs who exercised great power over the Cheng-te emperor.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ming dynasty, Cheng-te mark and period, 1506-1521. Porcelain, length 8¾ inches. Rogers Fund, 18.56.14

29 (lower left). The curvaceous shape of this special small vase was inspired by a gourd. With an unerring sense of fitness, the artist has furnished it with a design that achieves total harmony of ornament and form. The formalized floral scrolls, blossoms, and borders were painted in blue under the glaze and silhouetted with yellow enamel painted over it, creating the effect of blue patterns on a yellow ground. This decorative device, probably employed as early as the Hsüan-te reign, was popular throughout the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ming dynasty, Chia-ching mark and period, 1522-1566. Porcelain, height 6 inches. Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 91.1.379



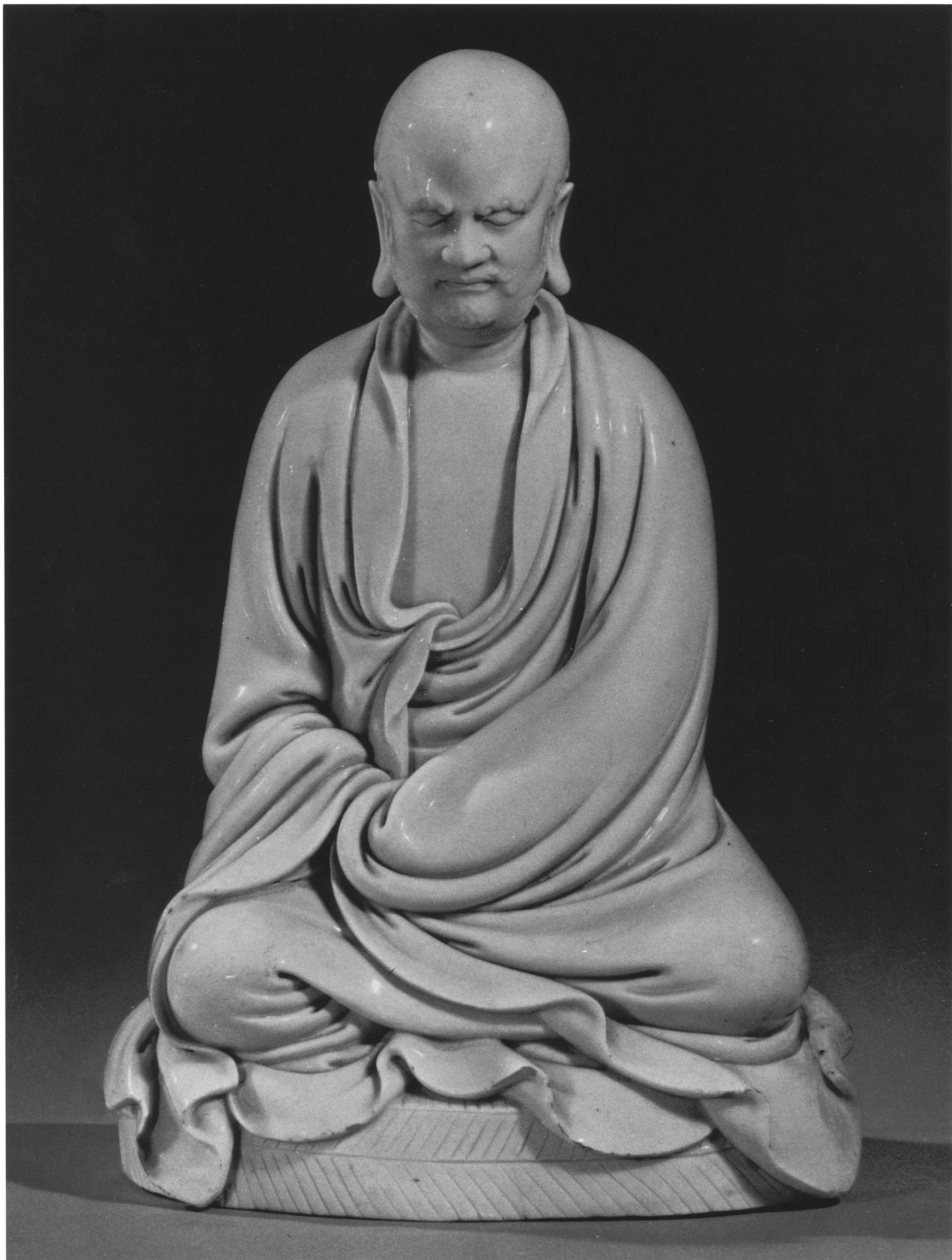
30 (left). Depicted in lively detail on this particularly fine brush holder is a panorama including steep mountains, swirling clouds, a cascading waterfall, a man fishing, warriors in a landscape, and a sage with his attendant in a garden. The painting is skillfully executed in a lovely shade of deep blue that inspired the metaphor “violets in milk.” The brush holder is an example of the blue and white porcelains generally known as “Transition” wares, readily identified by certain eccentricities in the drawing—for instance, V-shaped hooks to indicate foliage—and by distinctive landscapes, many of which were probably taken from contemporary woodblock prints. While numerous pieces such as this brush holder were most likely made for the Chinese, the majority of the “Transition” wares were intended for Europe, primarily the Dutch market.

Ching-te Chen ware, late Ming dynasty, about second quarter of the 17th century. Porcelain, height $7\frac{7}{8}$ inches. Purchased by subscription, 79.2.366



31 (right). A special type of porcelain known in the West as *blanc de chine* is distinguished by its extremely fine-grained vitreous white body, embraced by a thick satiny glaze ranging in tone from milky white through warm ivory to a faint rosy hue. There is a wide variety of *blanc de chine* vessels, including numerous objects for the writing table, but perhaps the most glamorous of these wares are the figures—frequently representing Buddhist or Taoist deities—fabricated at the Te-hua kilns of Fukien Province. These ceramic sculptures vary considerably in quality, but at their best they exhibit a brilliance of modeling that raises them to the rank of true masterpieces. There is perhaps no better example than this superb figure of Bodhidharma, the Indian patriarch said to be the founder of Zen Buddhism in China. His totally serene expression and the incredibly fluid draping of his robes celebrate the skill of the master craftsman.

Te-hua ware, late Ming dynasty, 17th century. Porcelain, height $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Gift of Mrs. Winthrop W. Aldrich, Mrs. Arnold Whitridge, and Mrs. Sheldon Whitehouse, 63.176



CH'ING DYNASTY (1644-1912)



In 1644, after repeated forays into Chinese territory, a confederation of Jurchen tribes from southern Manchuria, who had earlier adopted the name Manchu, overcame Peking and brought their Ch'ing dynasty to China. The porcelains of the Ch'ing dynasty provide a dazzling grand finale to the cavalcade of Chinese ceramics that began thousands of years before. In the earlier part of the dynasty, under the patronage of the Manchu regime, the ceramic industry created some of the most splendid pottery ever crafted by man. An extremely wide range of wares was produced, from extravagantly decorated objects that were exported in enormous quantities to quite different porcelains manufactured mainly for imperial use and little known in the West until recent times.

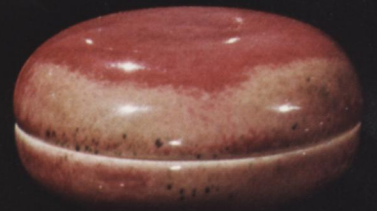
China's contacts with Europe had a very important influence on Ch'ing pottery. The 18th century in particular saw considerable cross-pollination of ideas. A craze for "things Chinese" swept Europe, and a corresponding Chinese fondness for foreign novelties resulted in the adoption of European methods of decoration and elements of design into Chinese ceramics.

32 (detail and at right). The stellar polychrome decoration of the K'ang-hsi period (1662-1722), the famille verte palette of enamels, takes its name from the several distinctive shades of green almost invariably present in the color scheme. These brightly colored and translucent famille verte enamels were applied fairly thickly over darker outlines and details. When used over the glaze, they stand radiant and clear against the white ground that forms an integral part of the total composition. The jewel-like quality of the enamels on this elegant beaker-shaped vase and the vibrantly alive drawing of a favorite K'ang-hsi motif, birds fluttering among flowering branches, make it a prime representative of its class.

Painting on porcelain with colored enamels was successfully developed during the Ming dynasty. (Enamels—in essence, bits of glass colored with metallic oxides—are applied to ceramics that have already been fired. After the piece has been decorated, it is given a second firing at a relatively low temperature to fuse the enamels.) This decorative technique was used with such authority during the Ch'ing period that polychrome porcelains outshone all others of the time.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ch'ing dynasty, late 17th—early 18th century, probably K'ang-hsi period. Porcelain, height 18 inches. Bequest of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 61.200.66







33 (right). Seated on a gilded silver throne, his filigreed hat set with pearls, jade, and kingfisher feathers, this figure is truly gorgeous. One of a pair, he is possibly the God of Wealth in Civil Aspect (the other is possibly the God of Wealth in Military Aspect); he wears elaborately fashioned robes, sumptuously embroidered with a panoply of flowers and auspicious symbols. The figure is decorated with *famille verte* enamels, but here, rather than using them over a glaze—which would tend to fill in and blunt the sharp modeling of the features and contours of the garments—the painter has applied them directly onto the unglazed, prefired (or biscuited) porcelain body.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ch'ing dynasty, late 17th—early 18th century, probably K'ang-hsi period. Porcelain, height 23 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches. Bequest of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 61.200.11

34 (cover). The monochrome porcelains of the Ch'ing dynasty are a fitting counterpart to the effulgent splendor of that era's polychrome wares, substituting for the latter's more obvious charms the aesthetic pleasures of elegant shapes and exquisite glazes in which one appreciates a fundamental sense of the material itself. This beautifully potted vase illustrates one of the most popular of all Ch'ing dynasty single-color wares, the intense, brilliant red glazes known as *lang-yao*, *sang de boeuf*, or "oxblood."

A peerless example of its type, the spectacular glaze on this vase gives the impression of gazing through a limpid surface layer, slightly crazed and strewn with countless fine bubbles, to the color that lies underneath. The color starts in a greenish gray tone at the top, and, as it descends, quickly turns to red in shades changing from light, with hints of green, to deep crimson, with an occasional overtone of dark reddish brown. The remarkable control of the thick glaze, checked evenly above the foot, is considered to be a hallmark of genuine K'ang-hsi *sang de boeuf* porcelains, which have been copied extensively—with varying degrees of success—to this day.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ch'ing dynasty, late 17th—early 18th century, probably K'ang-hsi period. Porcelain, height 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches. Bequest of Mary Clark Thompson, 24.80.537

35 (preceding pages). The effect is quite subdued in the famous K'ang-hsi peachbloom glazes. Soft and velvety, they vary in color from piece to piece but are essentially pale pinkish red in tone, often shading to darker values; the glazes are sometimes plain, frequently mottled, and, in a particularly appealing version, show tender flushes of moss green. The finest peachbloom wares comprise an elite series—in all likelihood consisting of no more than eight specific shapes—of small elegant vessels



designed for use at the scholar's writing table. The refinement seen in the potting, shapes, and glaze of this group indicates that it probably dates to the final portion of the K'ang-hsi reign. Not many collections can boast of having more than a few of these classic peachbloom types, and the Museum is fortunate to own seven of the eight, together with what is presumably a variation of the remaining one, the water coupe in the middle row at the left.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ch'ing dynasty, K'ang-hsi marks, probably late in the period, 1662-1722. Porcelain, height of tallest vase 8¼ inches. Back row: Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 14.40.381; Gift of Edwin C. Vogel, 65.225.3; Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 14.40.362. Middle row: Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.331; Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 14.40.369. Front row: Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.352; Gift of Edwin C. Vogel, 65.225.5; Bequest of Mary Stillman Harkness, 50.145.286

36 (frontispiece and at right). The signal accomplishment of the Yung-cheng period (1723-1735) was porcelain decorated in famille rose enamels. This palette of opaque and semi-opaque enamels differs from previous overglaze polychrome enamels in two respects. First is the addition of rose pink—derived from colloidal gold—in a wide spectrum of tones from the palest blush of pink to a deep ruby. Perhaps even more important is the use of opaque white enamel, which was mixed with the colors to modify them, enabling the painter to achieve subtleties of shades and to model his drawing much the same as in painting in oils. It appears that the famille rose enamels were adopted from European painted enamels on gold and copper introduced by Jesuit missionaries. Most of the finest famille rose porcelains of the Yung-cheng period, made in the imperial kilns at Ching-te Chen for the exclusive use of the emperor and his court, are the quintessence of delicacy and restraint. The enameling on these wares is exquisite, and decoration is generally sparse, allowing the beautiful white porcelain to play an important part in the design. A particular whimsy sometimes found on this type is seen on this impeccable bowl, where the design flows from the outside over the rim to be completed inside.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ch'ing dynasty, Yung-cheng mark and period, 1723-1735. Porcelain, diameter 4⁷/₁₆ inches. Bequest of Rosina H. Hoppin, Alfred W. Hoyt Collection, 65.86.12





37 (left). The royal fancies of the Yung-cheng period were not confined rigidly to porcelains embellished with the famille rose enamels. This meticulously crafted vessel, painted in underglaze red, was undoubtedly a ceramic tidbit intended for the delectation of a member of the court. Its simple ovoid shape, with three raised rings punctuating the juncture of neck and shoulder, is derived from one of the K'ang-hsi peachbloom forms. Here the artisan, with caressing strokes of his brush, has created an elaborate portrait of a five-claw imperial dragon chasing an elusive flaming pearl through the clouds.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ch'ing dynasty, Yung-cheng mark and period, 1723-1735. Porcelain, height 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Bequest of Michael Friedsam, The Friedsam Collection, 32.100.434

38 (right). Completely modest in its statement, this charming dish with its simple motif of a bird perched on a flowering magnolia branch, exhibits such an elegantly sparse composition that it doubtless follows the style set by the court. The dish belongs to a large family of porcelains which are often potted to a so-called eggshell thinness. So many of these pieces are covered on the back with monochrome enamel ranging from pink to ruby in tone that the name "ruby-back" is sometimes given to the entire group. On the inside they frequently show the full spectrum of famille rose colors, but they may also be painted in a single color, such as sepia or blue, or in combinations of black, red, and gold. Ruby-back porcelains cover a broad range of tastes: some are as restrained in decoration as this dish; others are quite elaborate, with a variety of central motifs surrounded by as many as seven intricate concentric borders.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ch'ing dynasty, about 1730-1750. Porcelain, crimson pink glaze on the reverse, diameter 8 inches. Purchased by subscription, 79.2.693





39 (detail and at right). An uncommonly fine 18th-century celadon, this large vase has a simple profile that gives full scope to dynamic relief decoration. Its majestic dragon hurtling through a cloud-strewn sky is the embodiment of kinetic energy. The masterful articulation of this dragon, the smaller one confronting him, and the background of clouds, rocks, and waves has been emphasized by the deepened tone of the pale green glaze in the hollows of the designs. It is fitting that our final example of Chinese pottery should be one with a celadon glaze, for this is the ceramic convention that reaches farthest back into China's past and impresses us most with the sense of tradition that has pervaded the potter's art through the ages.

Ching-te Chen ware, Ch'ing dynasty, about mid-18th century. Porcelain, height 20³/₄ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh J. Grant, 1974.223





Inside back cover: Detail of Figure 12, a heavenly guardian decorated in the “three-color” glazes characteristic of many T’ang dynasty pieces. Rogers Fund, 11.83.1

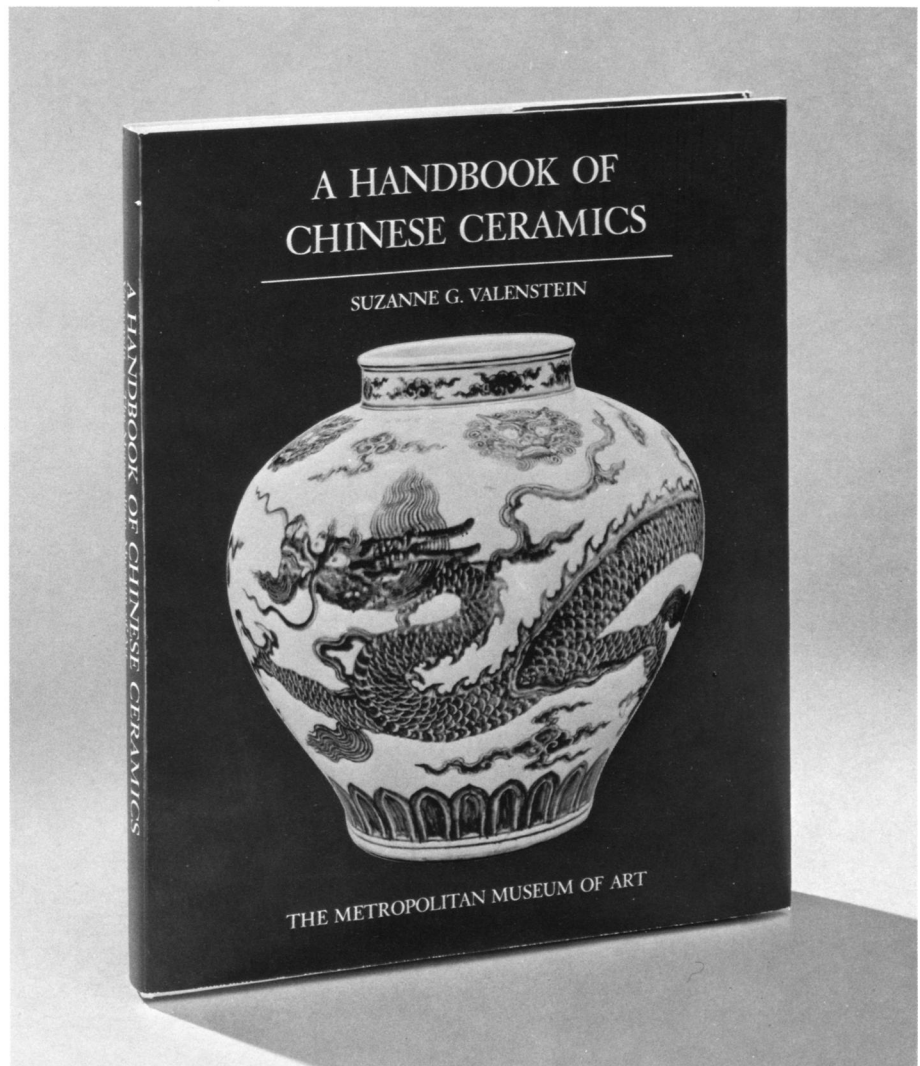
Back cover: Figure 32, an opulent beaker-shaped vase in the famille verte palette of enamels, a highlight of the K’ang-hsi period. Bequest of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 61.200.66

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*One of the rare pair of incense
burners illustrated in Figure 23.
Fletcher Fund, 34.113.2*



