

Ceramics of the Qing Dynasty

Illustrated with works from the Burrell Collection



Rouleau Vase, Porcelain Powder Blue with Gilding and Iron-Red enamel, Kangxi Period (38-1337)



The Ching Dynasty Flag

In 1616, as the Ming Dynasty was beginning to crumble, the Manchu leader, Nurhaci, established the State of Manchu (Later Jin Dynasty), uniting the Manchu Tribes. The Manchus were Tartars from Northeastern Central Asia. The Manchu developed a military system (the Manchu Banner

System) that gave them military superiority over the numerically superior Ming Dynasty. Nurhaci's son Hong Taiji, changed the name of his nation to Qing ('Pure'). In 1644, when Beijing was captured by Li Zicheng's peasant rebels, the Ming General Wu San-Kuei, appealed to the Manchu leader to help him recover Beijing. This he did, then proceeded to take control of China from the Ming Dynasty. The Manchus moved their capital from Mukden (modern-day Shenyang, and a walled city since the Warring States Period) to Beijing. It then took the Manchus until 1682 to finally secure all of China and have peace return to the nation. The leader at this time was Dorgon, uncle to the emperor Shun-chih, who was only seven years old. The Manchu set up a civil administration modelled on, but slightly different from the Chinese model. Each ministry (or board) was not administered by a president and vice-president, but rather by a Manchurian prince. Beneath the Manchurian prince were five assistants of which at least one was Mongol and one was Chinese. This, called by historians the Manchu-Mongol-Chinese rule, became the model for Qing government until 1911. Shun-chih took over the government in 1651.



Emperor Kangxi

In 1661, Shun-chih died of smallpox at the age of twenty and was succeeded by his third son, Kangxi, who was only eight years old. Four regents were appointed to rule for him but at the age of thirteen he assumed leadership himself to become one of the strongest and most dynamic of the Qing emperors, reigning for sixty one years. Kangxi believed that his power rested solely on the welfare and good will of the common people. In order to secure that good will, his most common political practice was to remit or reduce taxes. He strove to create new confidence in imperial government by cleaning out corruption with a severe hand. He also believed that learning was the foundation of government and became one of the most profligate sponsors of learning in Chinese imperial history. He himself would sit through hours of academic lectures every day and demanded high levels of learning from his officials. It was Kangxi who finally completed the conquest of China. During his reign, China became the supreme power in Asia, exerting influence

on and gaining the respect of the European powers. Europe developed a passion for Chinese art, in particular its ceramics, with fine porcelain being passionately collected by rich European families to the extent that porcelain was described as white Gold.



Famille verte Rouleau made at the Jingdezhen Imperial Kilns during the Kangxi period (38-892)

The Imperial kilns at Jingdezhen (also known as Ching-te-chen), established since the Yuan Dynasty, were destroyed by the rebels during the peasant uprising and were not reopened until 1682 during the Kangxi period with Ts'ang Ying-Hsuaun appointed as its director. The Jesuit Father d'Entrecolles wrote letters to Father Orry in Paris describing in detail the operation of the Imperial Kilns and how they made porcelain. The two ingredients for porcelain are Kaolin clay and the Pai-tun-tzu (called 'petuntse' by Father d'Entrecolles). The organisation of the workmen was one of the earliest examples of mass production: "The painting is distributed in the same workshop among a great number of workmen. One man does nothing but draw the first colour line beneath the rims of the pieces, another traces the flowers, while a third paints; this man is painting water or mountains and that one either birds or other animals. Human figures are generally given to the least skilled." A piece of porcelain could pass through as many as seventy hands in its production. Unfortunately, this specialisation resulted in much of the decoration being of mediocre quality, although individual pieces of great artistic merit were produced, probably by individual craftsmen. Father d'Entrecolles also noted that it took "some one hundred and eighty loads of pine fuel" to fire a kiln. "Often, everything is lost, and on opening it (the furnace), the porcelain and the cases will be found to be converted into a solid mass, as hard as rock". Jingdezhen consisted of both the Imperial Kilns and private ones and its inhabitants totalled over one million. Most of these were employed in porcelain manufacture in the three thousand or so kilns.



Yellow dishes with Kangxi Mark (38-690 & 38-691)

17th Century Famille Verte bowl with Chenghu (1465-1407) a Mark (38-782)



Underglazed Colbalt Blue and White Dish from Kangxi (1661-1722) Period with Lotus Blossom within Double Ring Mark on Base (38-1135)



Underglazed Cobalt Blue and White Dish from the Kangxi Period with Chenghua Mark (38-1215)

Marks on ceramics of the Kangxi period consist mainly of Chenghua (**38-782, 38-1215**) and Xuande (1426-1435) (to a lesser extent). Use of the Kangxi mark (**38-690 & 38-691**) was rare, so it appears on very few pieces. Alternative marks include an Artemisia leaf, a lotus blossom or an incense burner within a double ring (**38-1135**). The decoration and shape of wares of the Kangxi period have a superior quality to those of earlier periods. Kangxi reigned longer than any other Chinese Emperor and studied the various sciences and music with the Jesuits at Court and appointed them as astronomers, physicians and cartographers.



Famille Verte Dish from the Jingdezhen Kilns during the Kangxi Period (38-923)



Famille Verte Dish from the Jingdezhen Kilns during the Kangxi Period, about 1700AD (38-920)



Bottle Vase with Famille Verte Enamel Decoration of a Buddhistic Lion, Kangxi Period (38-766)



Porcelain Dish, Kangxi Period, with a Powder Blue Background and famille verte enamels decorating reserve cartouches and gilding over the powder blue (38-1321)

Famille verte uses a palette of overglazed enamels, predominantly two shades of green. The pot was glazed and fired then the enamel was painted onto the glaze and fired a second time to vitrify the enamels to the glaze. Sometimes gilt was added (**38-1321**), in which case a third firing was necessary (each firing at a lower temperature than the previous one). In addition to the greens, colours used during the Ming dynasty were used (the wu tsai or five-colour palette) which included yellow, iron-red and aubergine. In the early part of the Kangxi period, underglazed blue was often used in combination with the famille verte enamels, but this was soon replaced with blue enamel. Some of the famille verte porcelains were enamelled directly on the biscuit (the fired body with no glaze) (**38-874**), and not on top of a fired white glaze as was the normal practice. The Ming dynasty Luohan in the Burrell is a large example of enamelling on the biscuit. The technique was commonly used to decorate figures of varying sizes.



Ewer in Shape of a Lotus Pod Decorated with Enamels on Biscuit, Kangxi Period (38-874)



Porcelain Ewer, Copied from a Persian Metalwork Shape, and decorated in Underglazed Cobalt Blue and Café-au-Lait (38-1061)



Bottle Vase, Kangxi Period with Langyao (Ox-Blood) Glaze (38-719)



Vase from Kangxi Period Decorated with Underglaze Colbalt Blue against a background of overglazed yellow enamel (38-692)



Bottle Vase from 18th Century with Green Lead Silicate Glaze over crackled Greyish Glaze (38-740)

The Jingdezhen director, Ts'ang Ying, is believed to have added 'eel-skin yellow', 'spotted yellow', 'snake skin' and 'turquoise-blue' to this palette. Other colours that were available included vases with an iridescent black shiny glaze, often decorated with gold, 'peach bloom' red **(38-736)** and greens, rich imperial yellow **(38-692)**, powder blue and perhaps the riches colour of all, 'Ox

Blood' **(38-719)** (Langyao or sang de boeuf). Several colours were used to decorate monochrome wares fired at medium or low temperatures. These include yellow, turquoise, aubergine apple-green **(38-740)** (often applied over a crackled greyish-white feldspathic glaze). A range of white wares were also produced at Jingdezhen, but the main source of white porcelain were the porcelain factories at Dehua, near Foochow in the Fujian province of south-east China, located opposite the island of Taiwan.



Stoneware Vase with Incised Decoration under White Glaze, Fujian Province (38-251)



Vase with Relief dragon around neck, Kangxi Period, Dehua Ware (38-589)

Called in Europe, Blanc-de-chine, they have been in production since the Song Dynasty and are produced to the present day. Despite an excellent international reputation, it was not until the Ming Dynasty that Blanc-de-chine became well known, with large quantities arriving in Europe as Chinese export porcelain in the early 18th century and being copied at Meissen and elsewhere. White wares from the Dehua region were made for decoration and religious purposes as well as cooking, serving, eating and drinking in the home. White is the colour of filial piety in China, as well as being the colour of death and mourning in Chinese symbolism, which may account for the

number of wares produced of a devotional character. The finest pieces from Fujian Province are from the town of Dehua itself and are termed "Dehua ware" **(38-589)**, while anything that is not quite of the same exacting quality is considered "Fujian ware" **(38-251)**.



*Buddhist Lion Joss Stick Holder, Kangxi Period
Dehua Ware, Porcelain Transparent Glaze over Relief Decoration (38-598)*



17th Century Figure of a Louhan, Crackled White Glaze, Dehua Ware (38-597)



*Water Pot, Kangxi Period made in Jingdezhen Kilns
with underglazed copper red peach blossom - the wooden stand was added later (38-736)*

There were three principal outlets for Dehua products at the peak of their prosperity. There were religious pieces, usually figures of Buddhist or Taoist deities (**38-598 and 38-597**), then export goods for everyday use, like bowls, boxes, dishes, cups, plates, wine flasks, teapots and jars, and finally, pressed wares, such as inkstones, brush rests, brush washers, boxes, water droppers, porcelain seals, and paste boxes. This last group includes items for the highly select market of the Chinese scholar's table. Scholars appreciated quality and simplicity, so white or monochrome wares were greatly to their taste. The simply decorated wares of Jingdezhen, such as bee-hive water pots (**38-736**) decorated in Ox Blood, yellow, blue and white and powder blue were also to the scholars' taste.



17th Century, Teapot, Dehua Ware (38-586)

The most common utilitarian product of Dehua for Europe was the teapot. In the 17th century, tea first arrived in Europe and as it became increasingly popular, the classic teapot design quickly took shape, which its handle on the side, spout and cover on top. Since tea was very expensive to begin with, teapots were usually small, and stayed that way until well into the 18th century.

Teapots from Dehua were often created in unusual and interesting designs **(38-586)** as well as being of very fine quality.

In 1722, Kangxi died and was succeeded by his fourth son, Yongzheng. The reigns of the Yongzheng Emperor (r. 1723-1735) and his son, the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-1796), marked the height of Qing's power. During this period, the Qing Dynasty ruled over 13 million square kilometres of territory. They were also interested in the arts, which thrived during their time in power, but corruption returned and the later part of the Qianlong period saw some of the worst corruption throughout the Qing Dynasty.



Yongzheng reign, 1723 - 1735 AD
*National Museums Scotland - **(Not in the Burrell Collection)***

The famille verte decorations were undoubtedly a Chinese invention, as the famille rose **(National Museum Scotland)**, which was introduced in China around 1720, was first developed in Europe. The pink enamel is derived from gold, and was probably used first on copper metal dishes before transferring the technique to ceramics. The finest famille rose (called Fen-cai in China which means "pale colours") wares did not appear until the 1730s, during the Yongzheng period. Earlier wares combine the famille rose with the famille verte palettes, and show European influences. The introduction of famille rose roughly equates to the start of the Yongzheng period, and the appointment of Nien Hsi-yao as director of the Imperial kilns.



*Tea Dust Planter from the Smithsonian, Jingdezhen ware **(Not in the Burrell)***

The Yongzheng period is famous for its beautiful monochrome wares. Also, new glazes were introduced including 'clair de lune', 'cloisonne blue' and 'sapphire blue'. Another decoration,

called 'tea dust' (see above), which combined green enamel on a yellow-brown ground, was so revered that it was reserved for the emperor only.



Famille Noire Vase, Kangxi Period (38-708)

New palette families were developed; famille noire (**38-708**), wares with a black background, and famille jeune with a yellow background.

In 1735, Qianlong, Yongzheng's son, became emperor after the death of his father. Qianlong, like his predecessors, was a keen collector and supporter of the arts and was a keen collector of Song ceramics.



*Octagonal Plate, Qianlong Period
with European Shield of Arms and Crest of the Challenge Family (38-1014)*



*Cup and Saucer, Qianlong Period
With European Shield of Arms and Crest of Haworth Family (38-70)*

In 1736, Nien Hsi-yao was succeeded as director of the Imperial kilns by his deputy, Tang Ying who was perhaps the finest potter of the 18th century. During his time as deputy director, he produced a document describing some sixty different porcelains that were required by the court. Considerable quantities of blue and white wares were made for export and were of great value in Europe where they were called 'Nanking wares' **(38-1014 and 38-70)**.

Nien Hsi-yao ceased to be director between 1749 and 1753 for reasons unknown. The Imperial kilns continued to flourish, but a slow decline began.

The 1800s saw a slow deterioration in Chinese power and influence as natural disasters and the stagnation of administration and development in the country created internal strife and discord. The Taiping Rebellion in the mid-19th century was the first major revolt against the Manchu rulers and a possible 30-million people lost their lives. Further revolts followed and these were compounded by the inability of the administration to deal with the improving technology and new ideas of the European empires which challenged the Chinese Emperor's right to rule "all under heaven". Increased trade throughout the world also led to increasing hostility between European governments and the Qing administration. On top of internal rebellions, China was involved in wars with European powers such as the British Opium Wars of 1839 to 1842.



*Cup and Saucer, Qianlong Period
The pseudo-Chinese Design is copied from English
Transfer-Printed ware and was made for the European market*

Famille verte and blue and white wares began to go out of fashion although the famille rose palette continued to be popular, but incorporated an increasing amount of iron-red enamel that tends to clash with the pink. Fine work was produced at the Imperial kilns right through to the end of the Qing dynasty but with increasing amounts of copying of both earlier Chinese and European wares, and a decreasing amount of innovation. The ceramics produced during the reigns of Kang-Hsi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong were the greatest achievements at which the kilns of Jingdezhen reached their culmination.



Empress Dowager Cixi

In the late nineteenth century, the Empress Dowager Cixi staged a coup d'état to rest control from the regency appointed by the Emperor Xianfeng (r. 1850-1861). Concubine to the Emperor and mother of the child emperor Tongzhi, she successfully controlled the Qing government for 47 years. She was known for "ruling from behind the curtain". At the start of the twentieth century, massive unrest was growing rapidly, so when the Empress Dowager Cixi and the Guangxu emperor both died in 1908, they left a powerless and collapsing administration. After a short period of rapid changes in leader, the Wuchang Uprising the 10th October 1911 led to a new central government and the creation of the Republic of China.

by John Rattenbury from various sources