

*China Folk Arts Series*



# CHINESE CERAMICS

CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

Compiled by Mao Mao



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## Preface

Beginning from the Neolithic Banpo Culture<sup>®</sup>, China's ceramic industry has a history of over 6,000 years.

The earliest Neolithic earthenware with very few adornments mainly falls into three categories: storing, boiling and drinking vessels. By the late Neolithic Age, carving decorative patterns on the surface of earthenware became a common practice, and the burnished black pottery of the Longshan Culture<sup>®</sup>, which is as thin as eggshell, represents the highest technological level of baking earthenware at that time.

The earliest glazed pottery appeared during the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1100 BC). Three achievements had been made in this period. Firstly, the combustion chamber, originally on one side, was built directly below the oven where earthen items were placed, thus heating the oven to a temperature of 1,180° C. Secondly, as a result of the raised temperature, the white pottery made of kaolin and decorated with exquisite geometric and *tao-tie*<sup>®</sup> designs were successfully baked. Finally, the invention of lime glaze had greatly improved the pottery's impervious, antifouling property.

However, challenged by the newly emerging bronze ware and lacquerware, the pace of change in the primitive ceramic industry had slowed down since the 16th century BC. It had a new lease of life during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) with the high-temperature firing of celadon ware, which marked the appearance of the real porcelain in China.

During the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties (220-589) the white glazed porcelain was successfully baked by controlling the firing duration and temperature, and reducing the iron content of the raw material.

The ceramic industry was booming in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and a number of famous kilns mushroomed all over the country, including the Xing<sup>®</sup>, Dingzhou<sup>®</sup>, Yue<sup>®</sup>, Gongxian<sup>®</sup>, and Yaozhou<sup>®</sup> kilns.

Particularly, the tri-colored glazed porcelain made in the Yaozhou kiln and the transparent white porcelain made in the Xing and Dingzhou kilns had a name for excellent workmanship both at home and abroad.

China's ceramic industry met its heyday in the prosperous Song Dynasty (960-1279). The "Five Famous Kilns"<sup>❶</sup> as well as the Cizhou<sup>❷</sup>, Yaozhou, Longquan<sup>❸</sup>, Jianyang<sup>❹</sup> and Jingdezhen<sup>❺</sup> kilns all had produced valuable porcelain ware with a quality that the artisans of the later ages could hardly expect to attain.

The technology of baking blue-and-white (*qing-hua*) and underglaze red chinaware (*you-li-hong*), which first appeared in the Mongol-ruled Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368), acquired further development in the following Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) that witnessed another flourishing period of porcelain making.

With the introduction of the enamel, the chinaware of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) had taken on an entirely new look, thus becoming the favorites of today's ceramic collectors.

All in all, the evolution of the ceramic manufacturing methods is a mirror reflecting the development of science and technology in China. Ever since the opening of the Silk Road in the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 25) China-made porcelain ware had been exported abroad and found favor with foreigners. Even today they are very popular items on the international auction market.

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❶ Located near Xi'an of northwest China's Shaanxi Province.

❷ Named after Longshan of east China's Shandong Province where remains of the black pottery were first unearthed in 1928.

❸ A mythical ferocious animal.

❹ In north China's Hebei Province, producing white porcelain.

❺ In Hebei, producing white porcelain.

❻ In southeast China's Zhejiang Province, producing celadon.

❼ In today's Gongxian County of central China's Henan Province, producing white porcelain.

❽ In today's Tongchuan City of northwest China's Shaanxi Province, producing tri-colored glazed porcelain.

❾ Namely, the Dingzhou, Ruzhou (in today's Linru County of Henan Province), *Guan* (the imperial court porcelain kiln, originally located in today's Kaifeng of Henan in the Northern Song, and moved to today's Hangzhou of Zhejiang in the Southern Song), *Ge* (site unknown, its porcelain ware is noted for crackled glaze), and Junzhou (in today's Yuxian County of Henan Province) kilns.

❿ In today's Cixian County of Hebei Province, producing black and white porcelain.

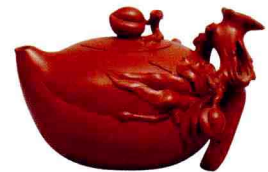
⓫ In today's Longquan City of Zhejiang Province, boasting a 1,600-year history of producing porcelain.

⓬ In today's Jianyang City of southeast China's Fujian Province, noted for its darkish porcelain.

⓭ A town in east China's Jiangxi Province, one of China's leading porcelain-manufacturing centers.

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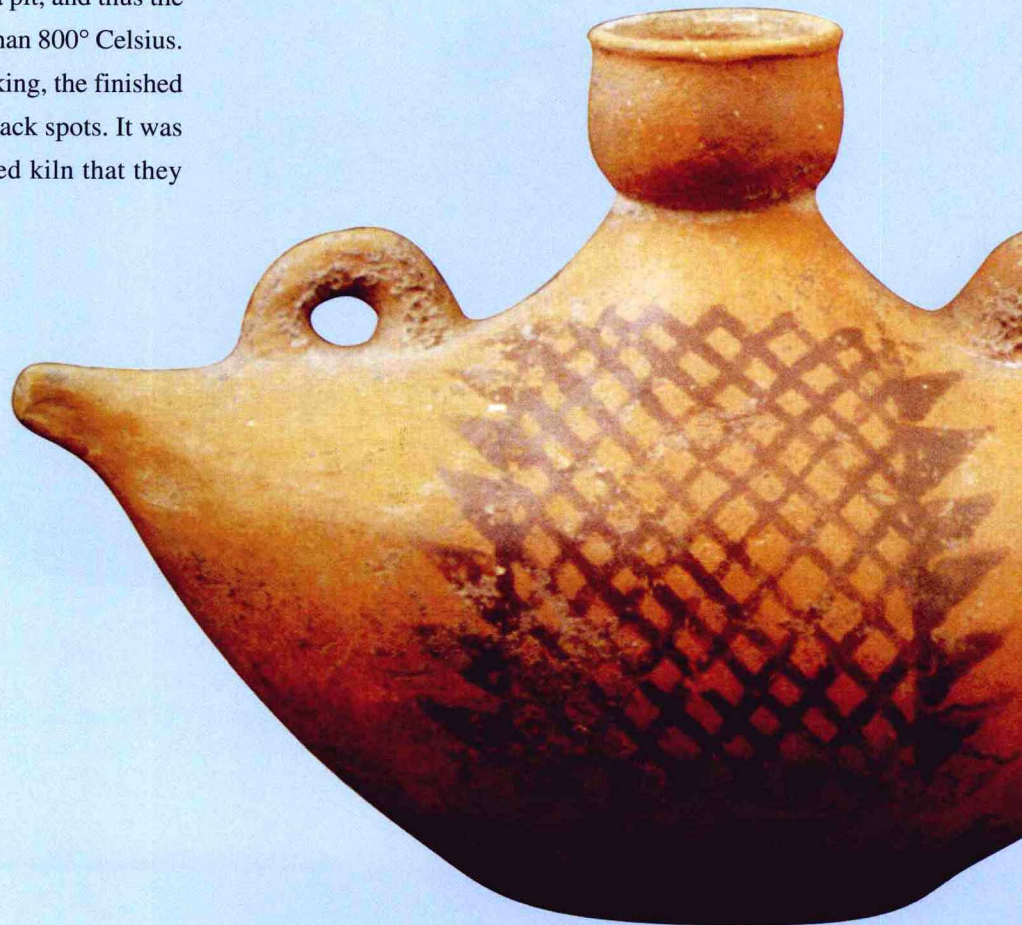
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## Neolithic Pottery

The earliest pottery was fired in the open air, either directly on a bonfire or in a pit, and thus the firing temperature was no more than 800° Celsius. As a result of oxidation and smoking, the finished products often turned red with black spots. It was after the invention of an enclosed kiln that they became gray in color.





Boat-shaped pottery pot painted with net designs, unearthed at Banpo site of the Yangshao Culture\* (c. 5000-3000 BC).

\*The Yangshao Culture, prototypical Chinese culture of the Neolithic period, relics of which were first found in Yangshao Village, Mianchi County, Henan Province in 1921.







Pottery jar painted with net designs of the  
Majiayao Culture (c. 3300-2050 BC).





Pottery basin painted with dancing figures, unearthed at Majiayao site of the Majiayao Culture\* (c. 3300-2050 BC).

\*The Majiayao Culture, a Neolithic culture characterized by painted pottery as the preceding Yangshao, named after Majiayao Village, Lintao County, northwest China's Gansu Province, where remains were first found in 1923.



Pottery pot painted with whirling designs of the Majiayao Culture (c. 3300-2050 BC).







Painted pottery jar, unearthed at Miaodigou site of the Yangshao Culture (c. 5000-3000 BC).

Figurine-shaped painted pottery pot of  
the Neolithic Age (c. 6000-2000 BC).



Pottery pot of the Majiayao Cul-  
ture (c. 3300-2050 BC), painted with  
frog-like designs.





Painted pottery pot of the Liangzhu Culture\* (c. 3300-2200 BC).

\*The Liangzhu Culture, a Neolithic culture in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River characterized by black pottery and abundant jade articles, named after Liangzhu Town, Yuhang City, Zhejiang Province, where relics were first found in 1936.





Painted pottery *dou* (stemmed cup) of the Dawenkou Culture\* (c. 4300-2500 BC).

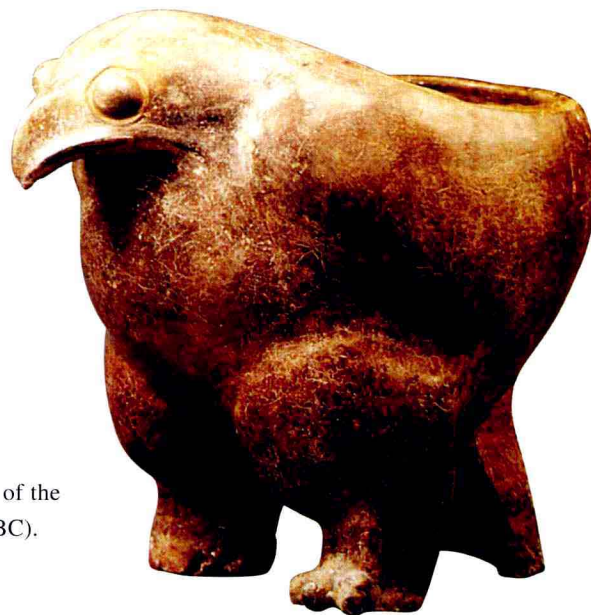
\*The Dawenkou Culture, a late Neolithic culture spread mainly in the lower reaches of the Yellow River, named after Dawenkou, Tai'an City, Shandong Province, where remains were first found.





Pierced pottery pot covered with black coating of the Majiabang Culture\* (c. 4750-3700 BC).

\*The Majiabang Culture, a Neolithic culture spread in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, named after Majiabang, Jiaxing City, Zhejiang Province, where relics were first found.



Hawk-shaped pottery tripod of the Yangshao Culture (c. 5000-3000 BC).



White pottery *gui* (ancient cooking vessel with three hollow legs) of the Longshan Culture (c. 2500-2000 BC).

