

Chinese



Porcelain

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“Prudence is the mother of porcelain.”

— William Wander

Table of contents

[Chinese Dynasties Chronology.](#)

[Introduction](#)

[I. Han Dynasty \(206 B.C.E.-221\).](#)

[II. Three Kingdoms Period \(220-265\) and](#)

[Subsequent Dynasties](#)

[III. Tang Dynasty \(618-907\).](#)

[IV. Song \(960-1279\) and Yuan \(1279-1368\).](#)

[Dynasties](#)

[V. Ming Dynasty \(1368-1644\).](#)

[VI. Kangxi Period \(1644-1722\), Qing Dynasty.](#)

[VII. Yongzheng and Qianglong Period \(1723-1795\),](#)

[Qing Dynasty.](#)

[List of Illustrations](#)



Chinese Dynasties Chronology

2205-1767 B.C.E.:	Xia Dynasty
1767-1122 B.C.E.:	Shang Dynasty
1122-256 B.C.E.:	Zhou Dynasty
771-475 B.C.E.:	Spring and Autumn Period
475-221 B.C.E.:	Warring States Period
221-207 B.C.E.:	Qin Dynasty
206 B.C.E.-221:	Han Dynasty
220-265:	Three Kingdoms Period
265-420:	First Jin Dynasty
302-439:	Sixteen Kingdoms Period
420-589:	Southern and Northern Dynasties
581-618:	Sui Dynasty
618-907:	Tang Dynasty
690-705:	Second Zhou Dynasty
907-960:	Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period
907-1115:	Liao Dynasty or Khitan Empire
1036-1227:	Western Xia Dynasty or Tangut Empire
1115-1234:	Second Jin Dynasty of Northern

	China
960-1279:	Song Dynasty
1279-1368:	Yuan Dynasty or Mongol Empire
1368-1644:	Ming Dynasty
1644-1911:	Qing Dynasty or Manchu Dynasty
1911-1945:	Republic of China
1949-today:	People's Republic of China





Introduction

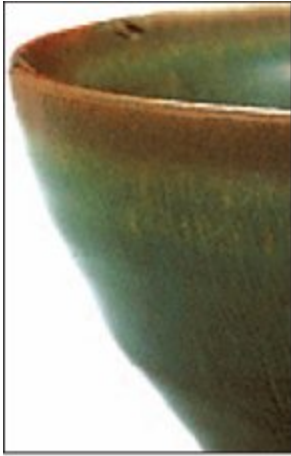
Porcelain was certainly invented in China. This is acknowledged in England by the adoption of the word “china” as equivalent to porcelain. Even in Persia, the only country to which an independent invention of the material has been attributed by some writers and where Chinese porcelain has been known and imitated for centuries, the word *chini* carries a similar connotation.



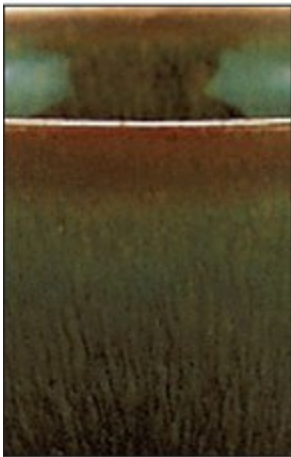
Octogonal Rhyton Supported by an
Animal Head

Tang Dynasty, 7th century
Moulded porcelain, height: 9 cm
The British Museum, London





For the creation of a scientific classification of ceramic products, it may be necessary to define here the distinctive characteristics of porcelain. Porcelain ought to have a white, translucent, hard paste, to be scratched by steel, homogeneous, resonant and vitrified, exhibiting, when broken, a conchoidal fracture of fine grain and brilliant aspect.



Tea Bowl

Song Dynasty, 960-1279
Porcelain covered in speckled
brown,
also known as “hare’s fur”
decoration,
maximum diameter: 11.5 cm
National Palace Museum, Taipei





These qualities inherent in porcelain make it impermeable to water and enable it to resist the action of frost even when uncoated with glaze. Among the characteristics of the paste given above, translucency and vitrification define porcelain best.



Pillow in the Shape of a Child

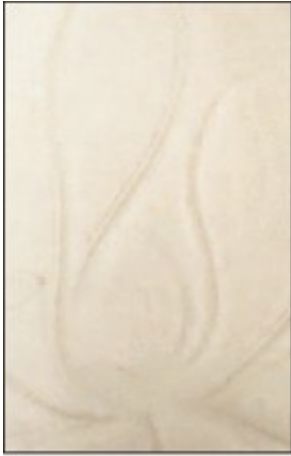
Northern Song Dynasty, 960-1127

Monochromatic porcelain,

31 x 31.2 x 18.8 cm

National Palace Museum, Taipei





If either of these two qualities is absent, the material is considered a different kind of pottery. If the paste possesses all the other properties with the exception of translucency, it is stoneware; if the paste is not vitrified, it belongs to the category of terracotta or of faïence.



Vase

Song Dynasty, 960-1279
Ivory white porcelain, height:
25.2 cm
National Palace Museum, Taipei





The Chinese define porcelain under the name of *tz'u*, a character first found in books of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-221 C.E.), as a hard, compact, fine-grained pottery (*t'ao*); they distinguish it by the clear, musical note that it gives out on percussion and by testing that it cannot be scratched by a knife. They do not insist on the whiteness of the paste or on its translucency, so some pieces may fail in these two points when the fabric is coarse.



Handled Gourd-Shaped Bottle with Floral Pattern

Northern Song Dynasty, 960-1127

White monochromatic porcelain stoneware with chased and engraved enamel decoration, height: 23.5 cm

Musée national des Arts asiatiques
- Guimet, Paris





However, it would be difficult to separate these elements from porcelain's character. Porcelain may be divided into two classes: hard paste, containing only natural elements in the composition of the body and the glaze, and soft paste, where the body is an artificial combination of various materials fused by the action of the fire, in which a compound called frit has been used as a substitute for natural rock.



Cup

Northern Song Dynasty, 960-1127

White porcelain stoneware with
underglaze engraved
enamel decoration, maximum
diameter: 23 cm

Musée national des Arts asiatiques
- Guimet, Paris





All Chinese porcelain is of the hard paste variety. The body consists essentially of two elements: the white clay kaolin, the unctuous and infusible element that gives plasticity to the paste, and the feldspathic stone petuntse, which is fusible at a high temperature and gives transparency to the porcelain.



Ju Ware Narcissus Planter

Northern Song Dynasty, 960-1127

Monochromatic porcelain,

23 x 16.4 x 6.9 cm

National Palace Museum, Taipei





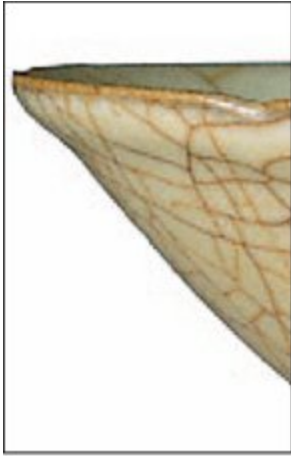
Of the two Chinese names that have become classical since they were adopted by the West, “kaolin” is the name of a locality near Jingdezhen where the best porcelain earth is mined and “petuntse”, literally “white briquettes”, refers to the shape in which the finely pulverised porcelain stone is brought to the potteries, after it has been submitted to the preliminary processes of pounding and decantation.



Teapot with Pouring Spout

Song Dynasty, 960-1279
Monochromatic porcelain, height:
20.2 cm
The British Museum, London





The feldspathic stone from the province of Jiangsu is a white, compact rock with a slightly greyish tinge, occurring in large fragments covered with manganese oxide in dendrites and featuring imbedded crystals of quartz in a mass that fuses completely into a white enamel under the blowpipe.



Bowl

Southern Song Dynasty, 1127-1279

Porcelain, maximum diameter:
14.7 cm

National Palace Museum, Taipei