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**Collection
of
Ancient
Chinese
Cultural
Relics**

Vol. VIII

The Ming Dynasty
1368 - 1644

Guozhen Wang



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The Ming Dynasty

1368-1644



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English iteration is with ATF Press

Vol. VIII The Ming Dynasty

Translated by Guozhen Wang

ISBN: 978-1-925371-54-3 soft
978-1-925371-55-0 hardback
978-1-925371-56-7 epub
978-1-925371-57-4 pdf

Published by:



An imprint of the ATF Ltd.
PO Box 504
Hindmarsh, SA 5007
ABN 90 116 359 963
www.atfpress.com
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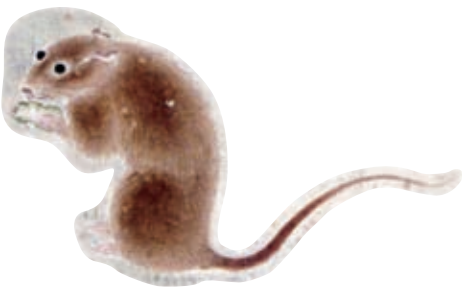
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The Ming Dynasty

1368-1644

Preface

At the end of the Yuan Dynasty, a series of crises broke out after years of accumulated unrest, and uprisings against the regime erupted everywhere. The Yuan Dynasty was on the edge of collapse. Many separatist regimes emerged all over the country. Eventually the Han and Dazhou regimes were overthrown by an insurrectionary army led by Zhu Yuanzhang, who proclaimed himself Emperor in Nanjing in 1368 and he gave his new dynasty the name “Ming”. The capital Dadu was conquered by the Ming army and Emperor Shundi of the Yuan Dynasty fled to the north, which officially marked the end of the Yuan Dynasty. Later, the Ming Dynasty defeated a number of other separatist regimes one after another and unified the country. Over the following nearly three hundred years, the dynasty would witness reunification and reconstruction in the early years, followed by economic and cultural prosperity in the Jiajing and Wanli eras, and political corruption, internal disorder and foreign invasion in the later period. The Ming Dynasty would represent a zenith of feudal society in Chinese history.

Along with the expansion of territory and the development of society and culture, the Ming Dynasty gained access to rich jade resources and jade ware became more diversified. The main trend of jade production focused on three main areas: exquisite

items for daily use, ornaments that were innovations on ancient styles, and ornamental furnishings. Moreover, sacrificial objects which had lingered on the verge of oblivion for centuries, came back into vogue under the influence of the regalist political system of the Ming Dynasty. At the same time, jade ware, which had emerged in the Song Dynasty and which was modeled both in terms of style and design after the bronze ware of ancient times, was still very much in vogue. It reflected the tendency towards idolizing what was ancient. Manufacturing fake antiques became a lucrative enterprise, as civilians tried to get a share of the jade manufacturing industry from the authorities. This was an inevitable trend in the course of the development of a commodity economy.

The Ming Dynasty witnessed very significant development in terms of porcelain making – building on the foundation of the Song and Yuan Dynasties. Jingdezhen Kiln which was built around the period of the Five Dynasties became the domestic center for porcelain making, dominating this industry both in terms of production capacity and technology. After the imperial kiln was established in Jingdezhen, the most skillful craftsmen were assembled there while high-class raw materials and fuel for the fires were also monopolized and dispatched there. With this logistical and official support, a great deal of fine and exquisite porcelain was produced. Underglaze blue and white porcelain was well-developed and became the mainstream of porcelain production. On the other hand, overglazed color techniques, either mono-colored or multi-colored, experienced rapid development, which resulted in the production of many famous porcelain types including underglaze blue with overglaze red during the Xuande reign, doucai porcelain of Chenghua, and Wucai during the Jiajing and Wanli eras. Color-glazed porcelain became more



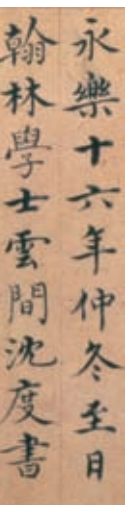
diversified, covering everything from the lovely white glaze in the Yongle era, to the sacrificial-red and sacrificial-blue glaze during the Yongle and Xuande eras, to the light yellow glaze in the Hongzhi era, to the peacock green glaze in the Zhengde era, and to the cucumber green glaze in the Jiajing era among others. These colorful porcelain items are amongst the most glittering artistic achievements of Ming Dynasty culture.

Calligraphy in this period basically continued the traditional style of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, but there did evolve a new vogue of striving to capture the bearing and mien of characters with many genres flourishing at this time. According to different features in different times, there were three stages in the development of calligraphy. In the early period, the mainstream was the secretarial style represented by the “Three Songs”(the calligraphers Song Ke, Song Sui and Song Guang) and the “Two Shens”(Shen Du and Shen Can); the middle term was dominated by the “Three Calligraphers of the Wu School” (Zhu Yunming, Weng Zhengming and Wang Chong); and the later period was the time of the “Four Masters in the later Ming Dynasty” (Zhang Ruiming, Dong Qichang, Xing Dong and Mi Wanzhong). With the polarization of two styles – classicism and romanticism - the calligraphy of the Ming Dynasty was marked by both retro-nostalgia and wildness.

Paintings of the Ming Dynasty continued the evolution which had begun in the Yuan Dynasty. It also went through three different stages. The early period was led by “imperial-court decorative painting” and the “Zhe school”, which followed the style of Ma Yuan and Xia Gui in the Southern Song Dynasty. The middle period saw the rise of the “Four Painters of the Wu School” (including Shen Zhou, Weng Zhengming, Tang Yin and Qiu Ying), who developed and expanded the paintings of literary men. The later period witnessed the vigorous development of Xieyi (freehand brushwork in traditional Chinese painting), flower and bird paintings. At the same time, landscape painting

became more focused on the temperament and the inherent interest of a painting. Paintings in this period can be presented in distinct stages and the styles alternated one with another. The paintings of literary men converge into a powerful current with many different schools. Landscape, flower and bird paintings were in vogue while figure painting was on the wane. Wash drawing techniques kept on innovating and made further improvement on the expressive forceful use of ink and brush. More creative artists set their sights on expressing their personal interest and finding a rhythm as they wielded their brush.

The making of gold and silver ware in this period integrated thousands of years of craft experience. Items produced, either crowns or ornaments, were all exquisite and had a primitive simplicity, as a result of the retro trend begun in the Song Dynasty. Enamel ware was praised highly by the imperial family. Rendered in various colors in regular models, those enamel objects with delicate decorations reflected a consummate technological level. Lacquerware production was in its heyday and the items produced by official workshops became the mainstream. Many techniques such as carving, filling, tracing and inlaying were applied skillfully. Numerous and complicated designs embodied people's rising expectations of life. More unique art works made by carving bamboo, wood, tooth and horn were held in great esteem by educated and literary people, as those products were simple and elegant, appealing especially to scholars. Embroidery also experienced comprehensive development and reached new heights with many innovations in areas like baldachin and Zhuanghua (a kind of brocade) fabric, and in K'o-ssy and embroidering techniques. Among these, the improvement in embroidery was truly outstanding, and owed a lot to both official and folk craftsmen. Court embroidery and Guxiu embroidery in the Ming Dynasty, which is also known as "painted embroidery", exerted a great influence on embroidery workmanship in the Qing Dynasty and even into modern times.



Jade Ware

Surviving jade objects crafted in the Ming Dynasty were either handed down from generation to generation or else were unearthed from tombs of that period. Among the latter, tombs of the nobility provide the main source. In general, jade objects can be categorized into imperial and folk ware. According to their function, they could be classified as sacrificial vessels, items for daily use, stationery, and jade in an ancient style made to be appreciated. They covered all aspects of life such as politics, economy, culture, religion, ideology, morality and daily life, and reflected the tastes of people of all classes.

With few exceptions, jade of the Ming Dynasty was decorated with patterns. Apart from simple patterns of curved or straight lines and geometric figures, the common decorations were based on themes that included: astronomy and geography - sun, moon, stars, clouds, thunder and lightning (also called fretting), mountains, rocks, rivers and waves; plants - pine, bamboo, plum, peach, lucid ganoderma, lotus, narcissus, camellia, mum, Chinese parasol, leech and pomegranate; mythical creatures - dragon, chi (a legendary hornless dragon), phoenix and bixie; real animals - crane, eagle, haidongqing (a kind of falcon), magpie, mandarin duck, ox, elephant, monkey, deer, lion, fish, butterfly, crab, bat, cicada, dog, sheep, horse and goose; figures or immortals - Taoist priests, boys, elders, beautiful women, wengzhong (sacrificial statues), flying Apsaras, the god of longevity, the Eight Immortals, Avalokitesvara, arhat, Maitreya, and the twelve Chinese zodiac signs; buildings and furniture - pavilions, terraces and open halls, cottages, houses, rhinoceros horn, ruyi (an S-shaped ornamental object), An Ba Xian (refers to a traditional pattern of eight objects belonging to the Eight Immortals), tables, chairs, cups, bowls, qin (a seven-stringed plucked instrument), chess, books and paintings. In



addition, some inscriptions, poems, ci (a type of classical Chinese poetry), seals and bronzes inscriptions can be found on jade ware. Judging by the existing evidence, the decoration is dominated by simple landscapes, figures, flowers, grass, woods, birds, animals, fish or insects. But such pictures usually have specific meanings, either good fortune and best wishes, giving some instructional meaning, upholding morals, or expressing reverence for imperial authority and the gods.

Materials were carefully selected. Most of the precious jade ware was made of nephrite mined from Hetian. Those jade objects unearthed from Ming Dynasty tombs such as Dingling Mausoleum in Beijing, the Tomb of Prince Lu of the Ming Dynasty in Shandong, the Tomb of Wang Xingzu in Nanjing, were nearly all made of Hetian jade. Jade from other places were usually used for less important objects. Great advances were achieved in craftsmanship. The side wall of three-dimensional objects was generally very thin - some were even as thin as 0.2 centimeter. Sheet pendants were also made with thin sheet jade. Techniques like sheet piercing, multi-layer piercing and round piercing were all adopted and the work produced was more exquisite than ever. Faint embossment patterns which take up so much time and energy were widely applied.





1. Gray Jade Tablet with Mountain Design Traced in Gold

Ming

Length: 27.3 cm Width: 6.5 cm Thickness: 1 cm

Unearthed from Dingling Mausoleum in Changping District, Beijing in 1958

Preserved in the Dingling Mausoleum Museum

This is a flat ceremonial object with the upper half in a pointed triangular shape and the lower half a straight oblong. In the front are four group of traced golden mountain designs. Of these, the two mountains on the top and bottom are bigger while the middle two are smaller. Placed at four opposite sides: the top, bottom, left and right - each symbolizes one of the four famous mountains in each direction. The implied meaning of the design is that the whole country is under control and all sides of the land are peaceful.

2. Jade Jinbu

Ming

Length: 61 cm

Unearthed from Dingling Mausoleum in Changping District, Beijing in 1958

Preserved in the Dingling Museum

This is a pair of ornaments. The top end is an arched bar handle in the shape of a lotus leaf, on which red and blue gems are inlaid. The handle has a ring-shaped catch on the top in the middle and another four underneath. Each of the lower four catches is linked by yellow thread to a string of jade decorations. The four decorative strings are put in the same order, forming ten rows each with the same patterns. The fourth row is a bar-shaped pendant with four holes each for four threads. It was designed this way in order to avoid four long strings getting intertwined with each other.





3. Jade Statue of the God of Longevity

Ming

Length: 11.4 cm

Maximum Width: 9 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is an ornament made of green nephrite with brown spots which are due to erosion. It was polished by circular, openwork and intaglio line carving. With a bald head and long beard, the god of longevity has a benevolent countenance. He wears a robe with wide sleeves and a waist band, and he holds a cane with a dragon-head-shaped handle and he sits on the back of a deer, which is turning its head. On the bottom is a drilled hole which allows other objects to be inserted.

4. Jade Belt Plaque with Dragon Design

Ming

Largest Length: 8.9 cm

Unearthed in Nancheng County, Jiangxi in 1958

Preserved in the Jiangxi Provincial Museum

This is an ornament made of bluish yellow nephrite. The belt plaque consists of 19 pieces in the shape of a peach, a tablet with arched top, and a rectangle respectively. Each front side is decorated with shallow relief patterns. Apart from four flat long pieces with cloud patterns, the rest are covered with designs of dragons and clouds, with bird designs in between. The back side of every piece has two or four holes drilled to allow for stitching to the leather belt.





5. Jade Belt Plaques with Pierced Ganoderma Lucidum Pattern
Ming

Length: 7.6 cm Width: 3.2 cm Thickness: 1.8 cm

Unearthed from Tomb of Zhu Tan, Prince of Lu in the Ming Dynasty, in Zouxian County, Shandong in 1971

Preserved in the Shandong Museum

This is an ornament made of white nephrite. The whole set has 20 pieces in flat oblong shape of different forms and sizes, all decorated with gold brim. Each piece is pierced with a ganoderma lucidum pattern.



6. Jade Belt Plaques Buckle with Curled Hornless Dragon Design

Ming

Length: 12 cm Width: 5.5 cm

Unearthed from Ming Dynasty Tomb at Nanguan in Daming County, Hebei in 1962

Preserved in the Hebei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics

This is an ornament made of white nephrite. It consists of two bi-shaped rings and a flat shrink-ring. The two bi-shaped rings are round with an openwork-carved hole in the middle, and a high relief of curled hornless dragon on the front. The inner side of each ring has a pierced ear with a rolling branch design. Two ears are interlinked by a flat ring with an animal mask pattern, allowing the two bi-shaped rings to become an organic whole.



7. Jade Pot with a Design of the Eight Immortals

Ming

Height: 27 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a wine vessel made of bluish white nephrite. It has an oval mouth, contracted neck, broad belly, ringed foot, animal-headed spout which uses the animal's mouth as an outlet, and a handle in the shape of a variation on the hornless dragon, on which is inlaid a bixie (a kind of mystical animal in ancient Chinese legend). Moreover, it has an oval lid which is embedded with an image of the god of longevity riding on a deer. The neck has inscribed poems in cursive script on both sides over a cut-off background, and each poem ends with the seal-shaped inscriptions - “长春” (lasting youth) and “永寿” (longevity for ever) respectively. The belly is decorated with shallow relief patterns of the Eight Immortals, which are embellished with designs of pine, crane and polyporus lucidus. Near the brim is a circle of fretting in the shape of the character “山” (mountains).



8. Quadrate Jade Pot with Pattern of Playing Children

Ming

Height: 12.3 cm Mouth Diameter: 3.8-6.1 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a cyan wine vessel consisting of a lid and a pot. The lid is rectangular with a solid lion-shaped knob, and the front side is decorated with fretting. The pot is rhombic with a hornless-dragon-shaped handle, curled spout and rectangular support. The exterior surface is decorated mainly with images of playing children with added fretting, flower and fruit designs, all of which are in relief over a cut-off background. The interior of the lid has a rectangular bulge with the carved inscription “子刚”(Zigang, the name of the craftsman).

Lu Zigang, a native of Taicang, Jiangsu, was a highly skilled jade craftsman in the reign of Emperor Jiajing and Wanli of the Ming Dynasty. Those jade pieces polished by him usually have his signature inscribed on the corner or a scholarly poem on the exterior surface of the object. Surviving jade pieces made by him are rarely seen.





9. Jade Jue with a Golden Saucer

Ming

Jade Jue Height: 11.5 cm

Unearthed from Dingling Mausoleum in Changping District, Beijing in 1958

Preserved in the Dingling Museum

This is a set of wine vessels. Made of white nephrite, the jade Jue (an ancient wine vessel with three legs and a looped handle) is in the shape of a shoe-shaped gold ingot with a pair of symmetrical ridges on the top, a round bottom and three cylindrical legs. One side of the Jue has a hollowed image of a hornless dragon. Both the spout and back end of the Jue are decorated with a dragon design and there are two characters on each side, which read “万” (ten thousands meaning for ever) “寿” (longevity). Under the Jue is a round golden saucer inlaid with gems. The middle of the saucer is a column with three holes for inserting the three legs of the Jue. The saucer bears the image of two dragons playing with a ball, with sea, cliff, cloud and overlapping mountain patterns in between. This is the only extant Jade Jue in an ancient style known to have survived to today.

10. Pierced Flower-shaped Jade Cup

Ming

Height: 3.2 cm Mouth Diameter: 7.3 cm

Unearthed from Tomb of Zhu Tan, Prince of Lu in the Ming Dynasty, in Zouxian County, Shandong in 1971

Preserved in the Shandong Museum

This is a wine vessel made of white nephrite with yellowish brown spots which are due to erosion. The cup is in the shape of a spray of full-blossomed flowers with pierced pattern and intaglio lines, which were left behind by an emery wheel used for cutting or polishing jade. There are stamen in the inside bottom, and pierced branches and leaves on the outside at the bottom and on one side, which are handily used as the cup handle and saucer respectively.



11. Pierced Flower-shaped Jade Cup

Ming

Height: 6.5 cm Maximum Width: 9.8 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a wine vessel made of white nephrite with yellowish brown tufts and spots which are due to erosion. The cup is a combination of openwork and intaglio in the shape of flowers, leaves and stems. The main body is a full-blown blossom, and the outer surface is decorated with stem branches which are used as a handle. Around the handle are many small flowers and sprays of branches with leaves.

12. Cylindrical Cup with Hornless Dragon Pattern

Ming

Height: 15 cm Width: 10.5 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a cyan wine vessel in the shape of an oblate three-jointed bamboo with a slanted mouth. The lower joint is at the bottom, and is dotted with circle designs, which seem as if they were left by chipping off the bamboo root. The middle joint is decorated with hollowed bamboo branches and leaves. One side is pierced with a spray of plum blossom used as a handle, while the other side is a pierced crouching chihu (a mythical tiger), poised to pounce.





13. Jade Nuptial Wine Cup

Ming

Height: 7.5 cm Maximum Width: 13 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a wine vessel made of cyan nephrite. The object consists of two three-legged cylindrical cups which are bundled up in parallel by way of a rope-shaped pattern. The insides of the two cups are empty, which means they could have been used for storage. The exterior front and back sides are decorated with a hornless dragon and phoenix designs respectively. On the robe knot is a square seal inscription “万寿” (longevity) in clerical script. The body of the object has an inscription in relief, including the signature “祝允明” (Zhu Yunming) and an unnamed poem, both in clerical script. Besides, there are two other inscriptions - “合卺杯” (nuptial wine cup) and “子刚制” (Made by Lu Zigang).



14. Round Jade Ding with Three Legs

Ming

Height: 28.9 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a piece of furnishing made of cyan nephrite which looks old and has a strong glassy luster. It is round with a straight mouth, three legs, and two raised handles. The mouth has an outward slanted brim surrounded by a circle of intaglio designs in the shape of the character “山”. On the belly are three groups of animal mask designs in relief over a fretted background. In each group, the beast is opening its mouth towards a leg, as if readying itself to swallow it. All legs are upright with decorations of various cicada patterns. The bottom dents inward into three equal parts with ridges. The Ding has a narra cover with a knob in the shape of a mandarin duck holding a lotus in its mouth.



15. Square Jade Gu

Ming

Height: 23.8 cm Mouth Diameter: 8.4-8.7 cm Foot Diameter: 6×6.4 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a piece of furnishing made of cyan nephrite with a few yellow spots which are due to erosion. In the shape of a square horn with the upper half bigger than the lower, it is divided into three joints, of which the upper and lower parts are cavities. They differ in size, and are separated from the middle one. The exterior surface has eight ridges decorated with fretting. Other decorations include fretting on the brim, a kui (a one-legged legendary monster) and leaf designs on the interval between the ridges of the upper part, the animal mask design on the intervals of the middle part, and the “人” (people) shaped patterns on both the bottom brim and the two dividing lines.





16. Jade Yi with Leechee Design

Ming

Height: 6 cm Length: 14.5 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a wine vessel made of cyan nephrite with prunus traces all over after years of erosion. It is an irregular oval shape with a protruding spout denting downwards, an elliptical support and a mouth, which has its two sides rolled inwards. On one side is a pierced handle in the shape of a dragon, which has its mouth and front feet bent over the brim with its rear feet on the belly. Around the brim is a circle of engraved fretting. On the belly is a leeches spray pattern, which is a combination of faint embossment and intaglio work.





17. Jade Zun

Ming

Height: 10.5 cm Mouth Diameter: 6.8 cm

Unearthed in Beijing in 1962

Preserved in the Capital Museum

This is a wine vessel made of bluish white nephrite. The cover has a round fluted knob surrounded by a pattern of three crouching lions, which are separated by fretting and animal mask designs. The vessel has a straight cylindrical shape with a flat bottom supported by three animal-head-shaped legs. It is a cavity and can be used for storage. On one side is a ring-shaped handle. The exterior is decorated with various dragon-phoenix patterns over a background of prone cicada designs in the style of the Song Dynasty. Under the handle, there is an inscription “子刚” (Zigang, name of the craftsman) in seal script in relief over a cut-off background. Among extant jade objects, this is the only one found to have been made by Lu Zigang to date.



18. Jade Censer in the Shape of Luduan (a legendary animal)

Ming

Height: 10.5 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is an appliance for burning incense. It is made of cyan nephrite with brown spots. It consists of a cover and a censer. The cover is in the shape of a luduan's head with single horn and a circle of short mane on the neck. The luduan is raising its head, opening its mouth and baring its teeth. As the animal's body, the censer is in the shape of a ball with four upright feet and a tail curling up against the back. The front feet are decorated with a kui dragon design in relief while the rear two feet have images of a phoenix with a cloud pattern in between. The censer is concave and could have been used to store spices with the aroma coming out from the mouth of the luduan.





19. Jade Water Dropper in Animal Shape

Ming

Height: 5 cm Length: 10 cm

Donated by Zhong Machi village, Nan Dayuan, Baoding, Hebei in 1958

Preserved in the Hebei Provincial Museum

This is a piece of stationery made of cyan nephrite. As a three-dimensional statue, it is in the shape of a crouching bixie (a kind of mystical animal in ancient Chinese legend), which is turning and looking back. The bixie has a horn, a protruding forehead, a broad brow and big eyes. In the middle of his back is a round pond with a cover. The cover is made in the shape of a hornless dragon in relief, with four clenched paws, wings on the shoulders and four legs with intaglio scales, a curled-up tail and flying hairs. On the belly are four characters cut in relief, which read “受天之祿” (salary from the Heaven).



20. Jade Lotus-leaf-shaped Brush Washer

Ming

Height: 8.5 cm Length: 17.6 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a piece of stationery made of cyan nephrite with brown spots in some parts after years of erosion. It is in the shape of a rolling lotus leaf with raised veins on both interior and exterior surfaces. In the inside bottom, there is a crouching frog in high relief. The exterior is carved with lotus branches, leaves and flowers patterns. One of the branches is made into a handle, and is very well-designed.

21. Jade Chime Stone with Designs of Human Figures and Dragon
Ming

Length: 20.4 cm Width: 20.1 cm Thickness: 0.9 cm

Preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing

This is a musical instrument made of bluish white nephrite with some parts eroded into light brown spots. It is in the shape of a flat rectangle with different designs on the two sides. One side has the pattern of two dragons playing with a ball, while the other is a god of longevity accompanied by two elders on either side, a boy on the lower part, and a crane and deer on the edge.



Pottery

Since the Ming Dynasty, nearly all ceramics in daily use were replaced by porcelain. Therefore, earthenware items for everyday use were rarely seen. As burial objects, pottery figurines were not used by common people, but were still discovered in large numbers in the tombs of eminent kings, princes and aristocrats, who kept up the customs of previous generations. At that time, noteworthy ceramics included Fahua ware produced in Jinnan, Shanxi and red stoneware produced in Yixing.

Fahua refers to a kind of low-temperature colored glaze for decorated pottery. It was first found applied on Cizhou ware made in the Song and Jin Dynasties. By the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, it was developed on the basis of the Liuli (colored glaze) firing technique. Fahua ware can be divided into two types – ceramic-based and porcelain-based. The earliest ceramic-based Fahua ware was mainly produced in Shanxi. The process involved piling up silty color on the ceramic body, drawing the outline of patterns and then glazing and firing using mirabilite as the flux. The colors include yellow, white, blue, green and purple. The Fahua was usually used for items for daily use and for offering sacrifices in temples. Fahua ware was well regarded for its bright color, which is simple but elegant, and its vivid and terse figures. Later in the reign of Emperor Xuande in the Ming Dynasty, porcelain-based Fahua ware was modeled on the Fahua ceramics produced by the Jingdezhen kiln.

Pottery from Yixing was first produced in the Song Dynasty. In the one hundred odd years from the Southern Song to the Yuan Dynasty, the pottery industry in this area kept on producing but there was little further development. However, during the Ming Dynasty, the industry thrived and Yixing became a ceramic making center. The boccario enjoyed tremendous

