

Dehua (德化瓷) Ceramics

History:

- N. Song (960-1126)
 - Porcelain of the *qingbai/yingqing* type made from N. Song onwards at kilns in the Dehua and surrounding areas of central Fujian (so we can say "first produced in 10C")
- Ming (1368-1644)
 - Dehua appears mid-Ming Dynasty
 - Earliest dated piece is in British Museum, a statue of *Caishen*, dated 1610
 - Never attained 'Imperial ware' status
 - Press-moulds for both vessels & figurines [see below: Production]
 - Domestic use primarily small religious (mainly Buddhist, some Daoist) and utilitarian objects ("temples and tombs")
 - Exports (Zhangzhou most probably port (close proximity-only 160 km away), VOC-confirmed shipment):
 - A small SEA regional market before entering the European market
 - Hatcher Cargo, 1643, 18 pieces (kendi, Arabic-inscribed incense burner)
 - Vung Tao shipwreck, 1690, 44 figurines, 551 boxes, 2500 'dishes/spoons'
 - Dutch took *blanc de Chine* (as it became known in the 18C) to Europe (popularized by Augustus the Strong? 400 pieces in his collection)
 - Spanish took *blanc de Chine* to Mexico
- Qing (1644-1911) to present
 - Production peak in the 17C
 - Some families signed names, associated with Dehua
 - Meissen copied, added colours
 - Slip-casting introduced mid-1930s (most mediocre, some exceptions)
 - Evoked little scholarly interest in China until the 1970s
 - Today still [mass] produced

Basic Info:

- *kaolin* (or porcelain stone) from mt. by Jingdezhen (JDZ) used alone, or with very little clay; crushed with water wheels (like at JDZ), then purified
- 70-75% silica oxide (so when fired, high gloss)
- 0.5% ferrous (so very low iron content)
- Fired in stepped, chambered kilns at high temperature (dehua vitrifies at 1200°)

Largest Collections:

- British Museum (P J. Donnelly Collection, 696 pieces given in 1980)
- Dresden Collection (Augustus the Strong, 400 pieces, early 18C)
- ACM Hickley Collection & others

Shapes:

- Domestic market mainly supplied "temples and tombs"
 - Utilitarian (round bowls, boxes...)
 - Religious figurines
 - Some copies of ancient bronzes
- Exportware ('exotic' figurines, made-to-order, decorative...)
 - Some modelled after lacquerware, copies of ancient bronzes ++

Production: Virtually every piece in the [Hickley collection](#) made by 1 of 2 methods:

- **Press Moulding** (clay that is pressed into piece moulds), the pieces then luted together
 - Smaller pieces are solid, larger pieces are hollow
 - Heads are hollow with solid necks, plugged into the torso
 - Most pieces made from two moulds then luted together at the sides
- **Slip-casting** (a liquid clay slip is poured into plaster piece moulds that absorb the water leaving a uniform layer of residual clay that takes on the shape of the mould)
 - pieces then luted together, set to dry until leather hard, then finished by hand
 - advantage of faster production time
- Smaller details (hands, held objects, etc.) are rolled out, modelled by hand & applied
- Hand-finished where required (said to take up to 72 steps to make a Guanyin)

Sources/References:

Ayers, John and Rose Kerr, ed. *Blanc de Chine: Porcelain from Dehua. A Catalogue of the Hickley Collection, Singapore*. With contributions from Chuimei Ho, Kenson Kwok, Eva Strober and Heidi Tan. Curzon Press: NHB/ACM, 2013.

Ayers, John. *Blanc de Chine*. London: S. Marchant & Son, 2006.

He Li. *Chinese Ceramics*. London: Thames & London/Asian Art Museum (SF), 1996.

Krahl, Regina et. al. *Bright as Silver, White as Snow*. Yumingtan, 1998.