

CHINESE CERAMICS

In terms of Chinese ceramics, the city of Swatow is associated with a particular class of ware which seems to have been exported to overseas markets in South-East Asia, Indonesia and Japan mainly from the port of Swatow in Guangdong province.

Probably mostly made at kilns north of Swatow, in the extreme north of the province, the ware appeared during the 16th century; but the precise dating of pieces is uncertain, nor can it be stated categorically when production ceased.

The safest date attribution is probably

16th/17th century, and certainly stylistically they can be related to designs of the latter Wanli period through to the early Transitional.

By far the greater part of the products were large heavily potted dishes of coarse-grained porcelain, and in most cases

categorised by the deposits of grit picked up off the bottom of the kiln. The dishes vary in size but on the whole are of fairly massive proportions, and the style of decoration is generally in keeping; very bold, and painted with great spontaneity and dash. The subjects vary enormously and the enamelled examples seem to be more esoteric than those in blue and white, which are mostly based on blue and white designs of the latter part of the 16th century.

The enamels used were always bright in tone and comprised overglaze red, green and turquoise blue, a black enamel sometimes being employed for detail and outlining.

The dish illustrated is unusual for two reasons. Firstly, apart from the narrow double band of red around the well, the decoration is entirely in turquoise blue of a particularly brilliant hue; and the other outstanding feature is the extraordinary condition of the enamels, showing practically no signs of scratching or degradation. This is rare in the extreme, as almost invariably the surfaces of the pieces—having been made for use—have suffered a great deal over the centuries.



Chinese porcelain large dish decorated in turquoise enamel. Swatow ware, 17th century AD, diameter 39 cm.

EXERCISE

1. Locate Swatow on a map of China.
2. In which province is Swatow?
3. Explain the distinction of Swatow ceramics.
4. How long has this city been making this distinctive ceramic?
5. What type of enamels were used?
6. What is depicted on this dish?
7. Visit the Art Gallery of New South Wales and visit their Asian ceramic exhibit.