THE COLORS OF CHINESE CERAMICS

The Roberto T. Villanueva Foundation Collection is one of the most comprehensive collections of Chinese and Southeast Asian tradeware found in the Philippines, dating from the ninth to the 19th century. It includes a wide variety of ware—from classic monochrome or single-colored ware to the very popular blue-and-white ware, recovered from across the archipelago.

There are many techniques that can be used in applying colors to ceramics. Pigments from iron, copper, cobalt, and other materials can be added to the glaze, resulting in a uniform color throughout the vessel. The oldest of the monochromatic glazes is celadon, or green glazed ware.

WHAT? Vessels with varying degrees of green glaze, depending on the firing atmosphere and temperature in the kiln.
WHERE? Zhejiang Province, China
WHEN? As early as 100 AD and for 2,000 more years

SPECIAL FEATURES: In the Philippines, we find two groups of Chinese celadon: Yue ware (10th–12th century) and Longquan ware (11th–16th century).

The Longquan pieces are the strength of the Villanueva collection. The glaze here is thick and a light bluish-green.

“Good things come in pairs.”

This is a 10th-century barrel-shaped jar with a softly lobed body and two handles. Being the oldest celadon jar in the Villanueva collection, this object is classified as Yue-type. Surface ornamentation is kept to a minimum. The glaze is thin and has an olive-brown color.

Celadon barrel-shaped jar with two lugs
Yue Kiln, Zhejiang
10th Century
Roberto T. Villanueva Foundation Collection

Celadon dish with twin fish design
Longquan Kiln, Zhejiang
Ca. 14th century
Roberto T. Villanueva Foundation Collection

Celadon globular with carved lotus petals
Wenzhou Kiln, Zhejiang
Ca. 11th - 12th century
Roberto T. Villanueva Foundation Collection
WHITE WARE

WHAT? Vessels with white bodies and white or clear glaze

WHERE? From Henan and Jiangxi Province, China

WHEN? Started in the sixth century

SPECIAL FEATURES

Qingbai, or literally “blue-white” ware is considered to be one of the most delicate types of white ware, with a slight bluish tinge caused by traces of iron in the glaze.

These buffalo riders are part of an interesting group of figurines. They are iron-spotted qingbai. They are painted with drops of iron-oxide to create dark spots on the surface.
BLUE-AND-WHITE WARE

WHAT? Vessels with white bodies of various underglaze designs painted in cobalt blue pigment, ranging from flora and fauna to human activity and mythical creatures.

WHERE? Fujian and Jiangxi Provinces, China.

WHEN? Started in the 13th century.

*Kraak* ware got its name from the Portuguese *carrack*, trade ships that carried these vessels in large quantities from China. They follow distinct patterns—a central decoration with radiating panels of designs extending to the rim.

Aside from colored glazes, patterns can also be painted onto the vessel, with a clear glaze added after. This technique is called underglaze.

WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL?

Blue-and-white ware ceramics started as an innovation during the foreign-run Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) and became one of the most lasting traditions.

Blue-and-white double gourd water dropper with lotus pond on upper bulb and chrysanthemum design on lower bulb
Jingdezhen, Jiangxi
14th century
Roberto T. Villanueva Foundation Collection

What is a double-gourd?

Many designs and shapes of ceramics are inspired by nature. The gourd family of vegetables includes pumpkins, squashes, and even cucumbers! A double-bodied gourd was considered lucky and a sign of fertility, and became a popular vessel shape for ceramics during the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279).

Blue-and-white twin duck water dropper
Jingdezhen, Jiangxi
Late 15th-early 16th century
Roberto T. Villanueva Foundation Collection

Japanese blue-and-white imitation of *kraak* ware with paneled floral design
Japan
Roberto T. Villanueva Foundation Collection
COLOR IT!