Masterpieces of Chinese Ceramics of the Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasties in the Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka

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Images are courtesy of the Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka

1 Basin with peony design (two views)
Northern Song dynasty, 11th–12th century
Cizhou ware: stoneware with incised decoration through white slip and transparent glaze
Diameter 36.8 cm
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10716

THE MUSEUM of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka was founded by the City of Osaka in November 1982 to provide a permanent home for the Ataka Collection—965 masterpieces of mostly Korean and Chinese ceramics—which had been donated to the City of Osaka by the twenty-one companies of the Sumitomo Group. The Ataka Collection includes 793 Korean ceramics and 144 Chinese ceramics, of which forty-seven date from the Song dynasty (960–1279). The quality and rarity of the Chinese ceramics in the Ataka Collection is unsurpassed and it is astonishing that they were mostly assembled within the short period of only nine years between 1966 and 1975.1 The collector, Ataka Eiichi (1901–1994), not only possessed extraordinary aesthetic sensibility and judgment, which is consistently expressed in the unique presence and individuality of each object in his collection, but also the determination to pursue tenaciously those ceramics that spoke most deeply to him. Ataka is known to have decorated his bedroom with photographs of ceramics he desired to acquire and would gaze at them nightly, deliberating various strategies, until he succeeded in acquiring them—a process that in some instances took over ten years.2 This clearly shows that it was his unique aesthetic sensibility, combined with discipline, devotion, tenacity and single-mindedness, which enabled him to attract masterpieces that would result in one of the finest and most unique collections of Chinese and Korean ceramics ever assembled—a beautiful work of art in its own right. This article will focus on twenty masterpieces of Chinese ceramics of the Song, Jin (1115–1234) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties from the Ataka Collection.
Of all the different wares made during the Song, Jin and Yuan dynasties, none was more innovative in terms of techniques and decorative styles than Cizhou ware, creating an astonishing variety of expression imbued with freshness, spontaneity and freedom in line with the “non-official” character of this ware. Cizhou wares were made at a large number of kilns in northern China, particularly in Hebei, Henan, Shaanxi, Shanxi and Shandong provinces. The only characteristic common to all Cizhou wares is the application of a white slip on the grey clay body, on top of which a transparent glaze was applied. The Ataka Collection features a number of exceptional masterpieces of Cizhou ware that convey the powerful creativity of expression seen in the very best examples of this ware. The magnificent large basin (1)—with a flat base, steeply rising walls and everted rim—is one of the finest extant examples of its type. The basin was first covered with white slip and boldly incised with a large peony spray encircled by a ring of narrow petals in the centre and with blossoms and a meander band on the walls, all on a ground of combed hatching; afterwards it was covered with a transparent glaze and fired. Basins of similar shape and construction have been excavated at the Guantai kiln site in Ji county, Hebei province. The style of the peony spray in the centre—the blossom flanked by two elongated leaves—the ring of narrow leaves and the combed ground with hatching are also characteristic of Cizhou ware made at the Guantai kilns. This suggests that this boldly carved basin was made at this kiln at the end of the 11th or the beginning of the 12th century, when this type of decorative style with combed hatching enjoyed its greatest popularity.

A more complex and sophisticated Cizhou technique of slip decoration can be seen on the exquisite meiping (plum vase or plum bottle) (2). The vase was first covered with white slip, on top of which a black slip was applied. The design was incised through the black slip and the ground area carefully cut away to reveal the white slip beneath—a technique known as sgraffito. The remaining white slipped ground was covered with another layer of white slip and a transparent glaze before the vase was fired. However, the method of decoration used on this meiping differs from the usual black-glazed sgraffito decoration on white slip in that the incised line decoration is unglazed and that there are also unglazed spots on the white slipped ground. The vase is boldly decorated with two large peony blossoms—one upright and one pendent—on scrolling stems with foliage. The shoulder is decorated with broad, overlapping petals, while the base is embellished with a border of narrow overlapping petals. Shards of stylistically related meiping with black and white sgraffito decoration, featuring the narrow overlapping petal border around the base, have been excavated at the Guantai kiln site in Hebei province from the stratum dating to the first half of the 12th century. This suggests a similar provenance and date for this meiping. The elegant shape filled with tension, together with the powerfully carved decoration of the two scrolling peonies expressing a sense of fluidity, dynamism and naturalism, characterises this meiping as an outstanding masterpiece among black and white sgraffito vases of this type.

An even more complex and difficult Cizhou decorative technique was used on the exquisite green-glazed vase (3), with a high splayed foot, ovoid body and long wide

2 Meiping with scrolling peony design
Northern Song dynasty, 11th–12th century
Cizhou ware: stoneware with carved sgraffito decoration
in black slip over white slip and transparent glaze
Height 31.6 cm, diameter 19.8 cm
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10695

3 Beijing daxue kaogu xuexi (Department of Archaeology, Beijing University), et al., Guantai Cizhou Yuanzhai/The Cizhou Kiln Site at Guantai, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997, pl. 29:6; p. 562, fig. 1, no. 2, for an example dated 1108.
4 Ibid., pl. 42:1.
5 Ibid., colour pl. 21:2.
6 The only other black and white sgraffito decorated meiping with the same distinctive band of overlapping petals around the shoulder, but a different style of peony blossoms and scrolling leaves, is in the Gotô Museum, Tokyo, see Osaka shiritsu bijutsukan (Osaka Municipal Museum), Shin to Karo no Kôten: Chigoku Jukaiya ki Taki wo Sakai/Charm of Black and White Ware: Transition of Cizhou Type Wares, Osaka: Osaka Municipal Museum, 2002, p. 85, no. 53.
trumpet-shaped neck with a rolled lip. The vase was first covered in a layer of white and then in another layer of black slip. The outline and details of the decoration were finely incised through the black slip and the ground area was carefully carved away in *sgraffito* technique, leaving a black design on a white ground. The entire vase was then covered with a transparent glaze and fired at a high temperature. The result was a vase with black *sgraffito* design on a white ground, like the *meiping* already discussed (2). However, in an additional step, this vase was covered with a green lead glaze and fired again at a low temperature, which resulted in the striking decorative effect of black *sgraffito* design on a green ground—the colour contrast between black and green creating a fresh and dazzling expression. The finely and intricately incised peony spray design with elongated leaves is fluently executed, resulting in a naturalistic depiction of the flower. The style of the

3 Vase with peony spray design
Jin dynasty, 12th century
Cizhou ware: stoneware with carved *sgraffito* decoration in black slip over white slip and covered with green glaze
Height 35 cm, diameter 17.4 cm
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10756
Important Cultural Property

4 Meiping with four characters and leaf sprays
Jin dynasty, 12th century
Cizhou ware: stoneware with incised decoration through white slip and painted decoration in iron brown under transparent glaze
Height 37.9 cm, diameter 15.9 cm
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10754
carved peony spray with elegant, elongated leaves and the band of narrow overlapping petals around the base suggest a possible provenance at the Guantai kilns in Hebei province, where shards of green lead-glazed Cizhou wares have also been excavated. Its large size, elegant shape and exquisitely incised decoration mark this vase as an unrivalled masterpiece of this complex, laborious and rarely employed Cizhou decorative technique.

The large meiping (4), with its slender ovoid body and conical mouth unique to Cizhou ware, superbly combines both incised and painted decoration. A wide central decorative band is divided into four sections, each incised with the Chinese character for “wind, flower, snow and moon” on a ground of combed hatching. The shoulder and base are decorated with deftly painted leaf sprays in iron brown. The dynamism and fluency of both the painted leaf sprays and the calligraphic quality of the incised characters in combination with the slender shape give this meiping a powerful yet elegant expression—characteristic of many of the finest Cizhou wares.

Ding ware is celebrated for its fine white porcelain stoneware body, thin potting and a transparent, ivory-tinged glaze. Because of the exquisite quality of its shapes and designs, Ding ware was ranked as one of the “five great wares of the Song dynasty”. It was made in Quyang county in Hebei province, where the Japanese scholar Koyama Fujio (1900–1975) discovered the Ding kilns at Jiaxu village in 1941. Although they were not imperial kilns in a strict sense, the Ding kilns supplied substantial quantities of their exquisite products to the imperial court between the late 10th and the late 12th century. The Ataka Collection has four outstanding masterpieces of Ding ware, which eloquently demonstrate the stylistic development of this delicate ware.

The elegant ovoid body of an early Northern Song dynasty (960–1127) Ding vase (5), despite the neck having been cut, feels complete in itself. The upper half is decorated with boldly carved scrolling peonies—large blossoms in full bloom and elongated leaves with intricately incised details depicting the veins of the leaves. The softly rendered carving style in high relief is only seen on a few extant examples of early Northern Song Ding ware. It is stylistically most closely related to a distinctive group of Cizhou wares made at the Dengfeng kilns in Henan province from the end of the 10th to the beginning of the 11th century. This raises interesting questions regarding the relationship between Cizhou and Ding kilns and their potters during the early Northern Song dynasty, which might account for the stylistic similarities. The lower part of the vase is decorated with pointed, overlapping lotus petals similar to those on a Ding ware kuandbiā, excavated from the underground chamber of the pagoda at Jingzhongyuan, dated 995, in Dingzhou city, Hebei province. It suggests a date in the late 10th or early 11th century for this rare and unique masterpiece of early Northern Song dynasty carved Ding ware.

The large basin (6) shows a later development of incised Ding ware at its peak in the late Northern Song period of the second half of the 11th to the early 12th century. Both interior and exterior are masterfully incised in characteristic double line technique with a fluently executed design of lotus scrolls, conveying a subtle sense of movement. The warm, ivory-tinged glaze covering the entire basin, including the base, has pooled to a deeper colour in the recesses of the incisions. The delicate decoration perfectly complements the elegant shape of this basin, with its thinly potted six-lobed walls, carefully bevelled foot and finely rolled lip. The basin was fired upside down and the unglazed mouth

5 Vase with scrolling peony design
Northern Song dynasty, late 10th–early 11th century
Ding ware: white stoneware with carved decoration under ivory-coloured glaze
Height 32 cm, diameter 23 cm
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10869

7 Beijing daxue kaogu xuexi, et al., Guantai Cizhou yaozhi, colour pl. 30:2.
8 Li Jingzhoun, Zhongguo Dengfeng yao (Chinese Dengfeng Ware), Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2011, pp. 31 and 36; for two Dingfeng ware ewers in the Hakutsuru Museum, Kobe and the Tokyo National Museum respectively, see: Osaka shiritsu bijutsukan, Shiro to karu to Kyōto: Chigo no Jishūgō kei Tōki no Sekai, p. 74, nos 30 and 32.
rim was bound with a copper band, adding a beautiful contrast to the ivory-coloured glaze. Despite its large size, the basin is of extremely light weight and its perfectly potted shape did not warp in the firing, making it an outstanding masterpiece of incised Ding ware at its peak at the end of the Northern Song period.

From the end of the 11th or the beginning of the 12th century, Ding potters began increasingly to make use of moulded decoration, which flourished in the Jin dynasty, as can be seen in the exquisitely moulded dish (7) in the Ataka Collection. The shape of this flat dish, with barbed rim, is clearly derived from contemporary gold or silver ware. The interior of the dish is decorated with two auspicious birds in flight carrying flower sprays in their beaks and additional flower sprays, including lotus flowers in the lower part. The sectioned walls are decorated with individual flower sprays and the rim is embellished with scrolling cloud design. The unglazed rim is bound with a dark copper band, providing a beautiful contrast to the ivory-coloured glaze. The elegant shape and intricately moulded design characterise this dish as an exceptionally fine example of Jin dynasty moulded Ding ware.

The truncated meiping (tulip jar), with wide shoulder and a small mouth with rolled lip (8), is an outstanding masterpiece of an extremely difficult technique that seems to have been only rarely employed by the Ding potter. The fine, dense clay body of the bottle was covered with a layer of iron brown pigment. The outline and details of the decora-
tion were finely incised and the ground was carefully cut away to leave the design in iron brown. This is a technique closely related to that used on Gizhou ware such as the black and white *graffito* decorated *meiping* (2). However, unlike the Gizhou *meiping*, this Ding bottle lacks the layer of white slip, and the areas that appear white on this bottle show the actual colour of the clay body. The scrolling peony design is a technical tour de force of the highest order and shows the highly accomplished skill of a master craftsman. The dynamic scrolling peony design is framed around the shoulder and base by a band of double-layered lotus petals. The elegant shape and superb execution of the design make this Ding bottle the finest extant example of this rarely employed and difficult technique.

Like Ding ware, the finest celadon-glazed Yaozhou wares were supplied to the imperial court. Yaozhou ware was made in Tongchuan county in Shaanxi province and the Huangpu kiln complex was the most important centre for the production of this ware. Compared to the Ding ware *tuliping* (8), the magnificent Yaozhou *tuliping* (9) is of more angular shape with a more pronounced mouth with wider lip, giving it a sharper expression. It is also interesting to compare the differences in style and execution of the same design of a scrolling peony framed by a band of double-layered lotus petals on the shoulder and base on both bottles. The design on the Yaozhou bottle is much more deeply carved with great variation in the angle of the knife used by the craftsman, which lends the design a strong sense of dynamism and three-dimensionality. This is further enhanced by the lustrous, olive-green celadon glaze pooling to a deeper colour in the recesses of the carved decoration and the finely combed details on the peony blossom. This appears to be the only extant Yaozhou ware *tuliping* of this type and its unique shape, masterfully carved design and exquisite olive-green glaze have all contributed to its iconic status as one of the most famous Song ceramics in the Ataka Collection.

The exceptionally large and magnificent incense burner (10), copying a bronze prototype, shows that by the Jin...
Bowl
Jin dynasty, 12th–13th century
Jun ware: stoneware with opalescent blue glaze
Height 8.9 cm, diameter 19.5 cm
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10692

dynasty, Yaozhou potters had mastered the technique of applied moulded decoration. The incense burner was made of different parts: separately moulded relief decoration of archaic, stylised phoénixes and flanges were applied on the vessel; and three separately moulded legs decorated with intricate lion masks were attached. Additionally, mould impressed decoration of stylised leaves was applied to the neck and base as well as a key-fret border to the shoulder. The incense burner is covered with a lustrous, even olive-green glaze. The stout form, conveying a sense of weight, as well as the crispness of the applied moulded decoration successfully copy the bronze prototype. This appears to be the largest and finest Yaozhou incense burner recorded.

Another northern stoneware with celadon glaze is Jun ware, which was made at a large number of kilns in Henan province, particularly at Limru and Yuxian—the name “Jun” was derived from the type site of Junbai in Yuxian. Although there are green-glazed Jun wares, the majority of this ware has a beautiful opalescent blue glaze, as seen in the large conical bowl (11) with steep walls and elegantly flared mouth rim. Where the glaze has thinned around the mouth rim, it has turned into a yellowish-brown colour which, together with the reddish-brown fired clay body of the foot, provides a beautiful contrast to the milky-blue glaze and lends structure to the bowl. Conical Jun ware bowls are exceedingly rare, and this exquisite bowl from the Ataka Collection appears to be the largest extant example.

Ru ware was produced at Qingliangxi in Henan province for a very short period of time at the end of the Northern Song dynasty for use at the imperial court. Today, only seventy-odd extant pieces are known worldwide. The elegant Narcissus basin (12) of elliptical shape with four legs from the Ataka Collection is the largest and finest example of Ru ware in Japan. The entire basin, including the base, is covered with a brilliantly coloured, finely crackled greyish-blue glaze. There are six spur marks on the base. The walls of the basin would have been originally higher and have been reduced and bound with a copper band. This is evident from the comparison with a basin of similar shape and construction excavated from the Ru ware kiln site at Qingliangxi in Baofeng county, Henan province. Apart from this example, there are only four other extant Ru ware basins of this type in the National Palace Museum in Taipei.

Guan ware, literally “official ware”, was produced during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) at two different kilns, Xiuneishi and Jiaotanxia, near the Southern Song capital of Lin’an (present-day Hangzhou), as a replacement for Ru ware which had been discontinued. Early Guan ware was made in a style reproducing the elegant understated elegance of Ru ware, as can be seen in the exquisite Guan ware vase (13) of octagonal shape with a high foot and long neck with dish-shaped mouth. The octagonal form and ridges on the neck and shoulder suggest that this vase was made in imitation of a bronze prototype. The exposed grey clay body on the foot has burnt to a reddish-black colour during firing, often referred to as the “iron foot”. The entire vase is covered with a thickly applied, white-grey-blue glaze with wide crackle. The elegant, delicate shape as well as the subtle, grey-blue glaze epitomise the exquisite refinement of Southern Song dynasty Guan ware. A stylistically similar vase was excavated at the Laohudong kiln site at Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, which produced Xiuneishi Guan ware, and suggests the same provenance for this exceptional octagonal vase from the Ataka Collection.

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10 Osaka shiritsu toyo' toji bijutsukan (Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka), Maboroshi no Meiyō Nanbei Shinmashikonyū: Kōkka Hakudot yūi Hakkutsusaika ten/Southern Song Xiuneishi Guan Ware: Archaeological Findings from the Kiln Site at Laohudong, Hangzhou, Osaka: Museum of Oriental Ceramics, 2010, pp. 68–69, no. 05.
12 Narcissus basin
Northern Song dynasty, late 11th–early 12th century
Ru ware: stoneware with finely crackled grey-blue glaze
Height 5.6 cm, diameter 22 x 15.5 cm
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10638

13 Octagonal vase
Southern Song dynasty, 12th century
Guan ware: stoneware with thick greyish blue glaze
Height 21 cm, diameter 13.5 cm
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10643

14 Jar with multiple spouts and floral sprays
Northern Song dynasty, 11th century
Longquan ware: stoneware with incised decoration under celadon glaze
Height 29.7 cm, width 17.2 cm
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10864
Longquan ware was made at a vast number of kilns in southern Zhejiang province around the city of Longquan, which gives the ware its name. Longquan ware reached its greatest technical and aesthetic perfection during the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties. There are four magnificent Longquan wares in the Ataka Collection, which demonstrate the development of this ware from the Northern Song to the Yuan dynasty. The earliest example, dating from the early Northern Song dynasty of the early 11th century, is an exquisite jar with an elaborately shaped lid (14). The jar has a high slightly splayed foot, an ovoid body with five angular tube-shaped spouts on the shoulder and a boldly incised design of peony sprays. The lid is elaborately decorated with deeply carved, overlapping lotus petals and a knob in the shape of a stem with a bud attached. The vessel and lid are covered with a lustrous light grey-green celadon glaze. Although closely related to celadons of the Yue kilns in northern Zhejiang province, the high foot, glaze colour and firing marks on the base are all characteristic of early Northern Song dynasty Longquan jars, excavated from Longquan kiln sites in Zhejiang province.  

15 Vase with phoenix handles  
Southern Song dynasty, 12th century  
Longquan ware: stoneware with celadon glaze  
Height 28.8 cm, diameter 12.8 cm  
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10383  
Important Cultural Property

16 Vase named "Kasugai"  
China, Southern Song dynasty, 13th century  
Longquan ware: stoneware with celadon glaze  
Height 22.8 cm, diameter 13.4 cm  
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10662

15 Zhu Boqian, Longquan yao qingzi/Celadons from Longquan Kilns, Taipei: Yishu jia chubanshe, 1998, p. 77, pl. 36; and p. 81, pl. 40.
However, the elegant shape, elaborately carved lid and lustrous glaze characterise this jar as one of the finest extant masterpieces of early Northern Song dynasty Longquan ware.

During the Southern Song dynasty, Longquan ware reached its greatest technical and aesthetic perfection as eloquently expressed in the exquisite mallet-shaped vase with phoenix handles (15). Compared to other examples of this type, this vase is exceptional for its perfect proportions and the soft, angular outline of its profile. This is further enhanced by the exquisite, lustrous bluish-green glaze, covering the entire vase including the base with the exception of the footring, which has burnt to an orange-brown colour during firing. This exceptionally beautiful vase has long been treasured in Japan, and was handed down through several generations of the Aoyama family in Tamba province before entering the Ataka Collection.

The long necked vase (16), with a high foot and a celadon glaze of deeper green hue, is another exquisite Longquan celadon epitomising the finest characteristics of this ware at its apogee during the Southern Song dynasty. The neck of the vase was cracked and repaired with three metal clamps (kasugai), hence the name of the vase, “Kasugai”. The strong aesthetic contrast between the rough, rusty metal clamps and the smooth, refined celadon glaze was deeply appreciated in Japan for its “imperfect beauty”, especially by tea masters.

Another type of Longquan celadon, which was greatly appreciated in Japan, is the so-called “spotted celadon” (tobi seiji). This appears to have been made at the Longquan kilns for only a brief period during the 14th century. The elegant pear-shaped bottle (yuhechunping) (17) in the Ataka Collection is one of the greatest extant masterpieces of this rare type of Longquan ware. The bottle is exceptional for its perfect proportions, elegant S-shaped outline and the delicately potted mouth. The entire bottle, including the base, is covered with a deep blue-green glaze on which brown iron spots are randomly scattered—some of them resembling butterflies in flight. It is interesting to note that the iron spots were applied first and then covered with a celadon glaze and fired to achieve this dynamic and highly innovative pattern. The glaze was scratched away around the footring revealing the clay body, which burnt to a reddish brown during firing—a striking contrast to the bluish green glaze colour. This is undoubtedly the most exquisite extant Longquan yuhechunping with iron spots. It was handed down in the Konoike family before entering the Ataka Collection.

During the Song dynasty, the finest Qingbai wares were made at kilns around Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province. Due to their translucent quality they are the earliest Chinese ceramics that can be defined as porcelain. Their aesthetic qualities are characterised by subtlety and delicacy of shape and glaze colour as well as extremely thin potting as can be seen in the exquisite eight-lobed ewer (18) from the Ataka Collection. This ewer is exceptional for its size, elegant and delicately potted shape, perfectly balanced proportions and lustrous white glaze with a faint blue tint, which pools to a deeper colour in the lobed and incised recesses. The eight-lobed body, long slender neck, elegantly curved spout and high handle lend this ewer an exceptionally elegant expression and suggest that it was made in imitation of a gold or silver prototype. The ewer is covered with a lustrous pale blue glaze, including the base, which has four spur marks. It is one of the largest and finest Qingbai ewers known today.

Jizhou ware was produced at kilns around Yonghe, a market town near Ji'an in central Jiangxi province. During the Southern Song dynasty, the Jizhou potters pioneered many innovative and technically difficult decorative techniques, which resulted in striking and dramatic visual effects, as can be seen in the magnificent leaf-decorated
Jizhou bowl (kosoko tenmoku) (19) from the Ataka Collection. The bowl, with its narrow foot, steeply rising and thinly potted walls, is of exceptionally elegant conical shape. The dense ivory-white clay body appears to have been covered with a layer of dark brown glaze, on top of which a layer of even darker colour was applied, resulting in a flickering of subtly different colours according to the reflection of the light. The large real leaf, placed in the interior, has fired to a light yellowish brown colour around the rim and on the delicate veins, creating an attractive contrast to the mottled purplish yellow colour of the rest of the leaf. Recent research has found faint traces of gold leaf decoration of plum blossoms opposite from the leaf. The sharply defined leaf with exquisite colour contrasts, characterise it as an exceptional masterpiece amongst extant Jizhou leaf-decorated bowls. The bowl was handed down in the Maeda family of Kaga before entering the Ataka Collection.

Jian ware tea bowls were made at kilns at Shuiji, near Jianyang, in northern Fujian province. The magnificent Jian ware tea bowl with oil-spot glaze (20), known in Japan as yutoki tenmoku, is one of the greatest extant masterpieces of this type. The bowl of perfectly proportioned shape, with a high foot, steeply rounded walls and an elegant indentation below the rim, is covered with a lustrous black glaze with iridescent silver, gold and bluish spots. The glaze

18 Melon-shaped ewer  
Northern Song dynasty, 11th century  
Qingbai ware: white porcelain with pale blue glaze  
Height 26 cm  
Gift of Sumitomo Group (Ataka Collection), 10697

stops well above the foot in a thick, uneven line, giving a vivid sense of flux of the glaze. This striking glaze effect, requiring great technical skill, was due to the crystallisation of excess iron oxide on the glaze surface, creating an effect like oil drops floating on water. The mouth rim of the bowl is fitted with a gold rim, creating a beautiful contrast to the black glaze and lending the bowl structure. This precious tea bowl has been greatly treasured in Japan for centuries. It is known to have been brought to Japan during the Kamakura period (1185–1333) and was successively in the possession of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), Nishihongan-ji in Kyoto, the Mitsui family and the Sakai family of Wakasa province—reflecting the exceptional status given to this exquisite and unique yuteki tenmoku.

The ceramic masterpieces of the Song, Jin and Yuan dynasties in the Ataka Collection reflect the taste of a connoisseur with a unique sensibility for the aesthetic qualities of shape, glaze colour and decoration, as well as a deep commitment to his own aesthetic judgment.

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