

Song tea bowls

茶
cha
tea

青瓷
qingci
green-glazed ware

白瓷
baici
white-glazed ware

Tea originated in China. It was cultivated in pre-historic times and was first used as a herbal drink for medicinal purpose. Lu Yu 陸羽 (733–804), a scholar-official, wrote the *Tea Classics* (*Chajing* 茶經) in AD 780. It was the first book written about tea in the world. On the flavour of tea, he wrote: 'If it is bitter or strong when sipped but sweet when swallowed, it is called *cha* (茶)'.¹

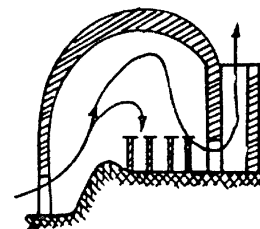
He also distinguished tea from other beverages: 'To quench our thirst, we drink boiled water. To expel anxiety and melancholy, we drink wine. To clear our heads, we drink tea'.

Lu Yu preferred green tea bowls over white bowls because the green glazed tea bowl 青瓷茶碗 resembled jade and ice, and brought out the colour of the green tea. Whereas the white tea bowl resembled silver and snow, and the green tea appears red.

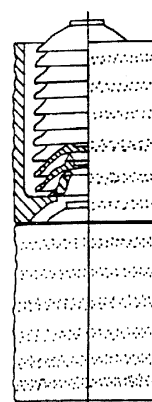
The green tea bowl (fig. a) and the white tea bowl (fig. b) illustrate the qualities mentioned by Lu Yu in his *Tea Classics*. The green tea bowl was made in Longquan, Zhejiang province, south-east China, during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279).¹ The white tea bowl 白瓷茶碗 was made in Dingzhou, Hebei province, north China, during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127).² The shape of the tea bowls is elegant and the glaze unctuous; the green bowl has a translucent, subtle green glaze and the white bowl has a rich ivory glaze adorned with a golden rim. Both porcelaneous bowls also appeal to the senses of touch and hearing. Their smooth texture has a calming effect and when struck, the bowls emit a bell-like resonance. However, it is the aesthetic beauty of the tea inside the bowl rather than the bowl itself that concerned Lu Yu.



Dragon kiln



Beehive kiln



Stepped sagger in a kiln

Stepped sagger is an earthenware or stoneware box for encasing ceramics in the kiln, to protect the ceramics and to ensure even temperature during firing.

(Illustrated in S. J. Vainker, *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain, From Prehistory to the Present*, The Trustees of the British Museum Press, London, 1991, p. 223.)

(fig. a)
CHINESE
Tea bowl 茶碗
Southern Song 南宋 dynasty 1127–1279,
Longquan 龍泉, Zhejiang 浙江 province,
south-east China
porcelaneous stoneware
(Longquan ware 青瓷)
5.2 x 13.0 cm diameter
Gift of H. W. Kent, 1938 (3699-D3)

(fig. b)
CHINESE
Tea bowl 茶碗
Northern Song 北宋 dynasty
11th – early 12th century,
Hebei 河北 province, north China
porcelain, gold (Ding ware 定瓷)
4.8 x 11.9 cm diameter
Gift of H. W. Kent, 1938 (3700-D3)

¹ High-fired ware was invented in China as early as the 16th century BC. It reached artistic perfection in the Song dynasty (960–1279). Longquan 龍泉 in Zhejiang 浙江 province, south-east China, became the centre of green-glazed ware (qingci 青瓷) in the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127) and reached its peak in the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279). Stoneware and porcelain is a non-porous ceramic made from clay containing concentrations of silica that fuse when the clay is fired at high temperatures. The light grey body and green glaze in Longquan ware is produced by iron oxide fired in a kiln with reduced (oxygen-poor) atmosphere. The so-called dragon kiln fuelled by firewood is the major kiln type of south China. It is long and sinuous and stretches up hillsides. During the Song dynasty (960–1279), a vast kiln complex in the prefecture of Longquan in southern Zhejiang province eclipsed all the other production centres of green-glazed stoneware in south-eastern China. The thick, lustrous glazes and strong, classic shapes of Longquan wares were popular at home and in the booming export trade by sea to other parts of Asia and the Middle East. High-fired ceramics – stoneware and porcelain – are among China's great gifts to the world. The popular green-glazed Longquan ware is called celadon in the west. The European term 'celadon' applied to green wares may have derived from the colour of the costume of Celadon, a character in *L'Astree*, a seventeenth century French romance. It is probably more a corruption of Saladin, Sultan of Egypt, who sent forty celadons to Nur-ed-din, Sultan of Damascus, in AD 1171.

² This thin white bowl is decorated with a finely incised pattern that is evocative of the petals of a lotus flower underneath the glaze. Fired upside down within a stepped sagger in the kiln, the rim was left unglazed and after firing bound with a gold band. Technical perfection is achieved in the fine potting of the thin, hard white body, the small delicate foot and the metal rim. By eliminating iron oxides, which gave colour to the body and glaze of the green ware, northern kilns developed a high-fired, clear-glazed white ware in the seventh century. In contrast to the dragon kiln in south China, kilns in north China resembled a beehive and were fuelled by coal. Ding 定瓷 was the first classic ware to receive official patronage of the Song court, achieving the status of palace ware by the eleventh century.



(fig. a)



(fig. b)