



CHINESE CLAYART NEWSLETTER

July - August 2001, Vol. 22

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CHINESE CLAYART

"Chinese Clayart" is a newsletter emailed monthly to professional ceramic artists who want to know about ceramic art in China and things related. This newsletter will be a bridge between China and Western countries for the ceramic arts. Comments and suggestions are very welcome. (Copyright 2000, The Chinese Ceramic Art Council, USA. All rights reserved)

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FEATURE ARTICLE

The Diary of the China Ceramic Cultural Trip, 2001 - - by Guangzhen "Po" Zhou

May 25th and 26th

The American Delegation arrived in Shanghai. The delegation was led by the internationally known artist Richard Notkin and the Chinese American ceramic artist and writer [Guangzhen Zhou](#). The other participants were: East Asian art historian and professor Dr. Daphne Lang Rosenzweig; the ceramic art educators and professors Carolyn Broadwell, [Barbara Brown](#), Lee Rexrode and Marvin Sweet; the studio potters Geo Lastomirsky, Ann Schliffer and Gerry Wallace; and the ceramic students Tia Mazzola and Karyn Murphy. We were in Shanghai for two days, and visited the Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai University, the Fine Art College, and Hanguang Ceramic Art Company. On a boat on the Huangpu River, I looked at the Bund of the Shanghai night skyline, which brought me many memories from the past.

May 30th, afternoon

The American delegation plus many other participants from Korea, Japan, France, Russia, and from different parts of mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan got on the buses. There were two police cars in front and another one behind, escorting our buses all the way from the hotel to the Yixing Ceramics Museum. On the streets, we saw policemen standing at the every street intersection waiting for our buses.

As the buses drove through the Yixing Ceramics Museum gate, hundreds of school kids were standing on both sides, waving flowers and welcoming us.

During the ceremony, the Mayor, and some of the Chinese and the international ceramic masters were standing on a red carpet. Richard Notkin, as the international artists' representative, made a speech after the Yixing Mayor, and was honored to cut the ribbon.

The International Ceramic Art Symposium was sponsored by the Municipality of Yixing City, and hosted by the Ceramic Art Branch of the Arts and Crafts Association of Jiangsu Province and the Chinese Ceramic Art Council, USA. The event included international clay art exhibitions, slides lectures and workshops, tours of Yixing artists' studios, and sightseeing. The participants were from the United States, Korea, Japan, France, Russia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and from different parts of mainland China and the local area. In total there were over 300 participants: ceramic artists, ceramic art experts, art historians, art critics, and art magazine editors. In the evening, the banquet was hosted by the Yixing Mayor, who sat next to Richard Notkin and myself. I can't recall how much wine we drank in that evening. "Gan Bei" (Cheers).

Over the next two days, Richard Notkin presented two slide lectures, "30 Years of Ceramic Sculpture and Teapots" and "American Contemporary Teapots." Geo Lastimosky spoke on "Combining the Voices of East and West." Marvin Sweet talked about "The Yixing Effect: Contemporary Ceramics Inspired by Chinese Tradition." Also Guangzhen Zhou showed "the American Contemporary Ceramic Art - the Main Stream Art Influence."

June 2nd

The American artists shared their slides with the Chinese audience. The art images are an international language, and the clay artists are international family members. On the evening of the closing ceremony, I was honored to sit on the stage with Mayor and the Chinese masters, handing out the prizes. Four of the American artists came on the stage to receive the honor of third prize.

June 3rd

We left for Jingdezhen. On the bus, Richard Notkin, Geo Lastimosky, and Marvin Sweet were singing a song "We'll Meet Again." "We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when. But I know we'll meet again some sunny day....."

We arrived Jingdezhen on June 4th. The tall vase production factory (vases about two or three feet in diameter and twelve feet in height) always attracts artists' eyes, where two young men together throw a large vase and four men work together to join the four sections one after another when the pieces were bone dry.

Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute is the only all-ceramic school in the China. The new building of multi-media education has very nice exhibition rooms, where a lot of ceramic art works are displayed. Also, the American artists presented a slide show there.

June 5th

We went to San-bao Village, where the American artists were interested in the water mills that drove the wooden hammers to smash the ceramic material. We took the bus from Jingdezhen to Nanchang, where Carolyn Broadwell left for home early, and eleven of us took the train to Xi'an. It was a long trip. Lee Rexrode, the professor, was so quiet, always sitting in the back of the bus and constantly peering out of the windows (in both the bus and train) with camera in hand. His biggest impressions of the trip were the people and the everyday life of the Chinese.

We arrived in Xi'an on June 7th. After visiting the Terracotta Warriors Museum, we visited the warrior reproduction factory. In the factory, Richard Notkin noticed the "water reduction" process kiln first. There is a pit on the kiln roof, and people fill it up with water every hour while the kiln is starting to cool down--this helps the pieces inside the kiln to change color from red to gray and also makes the pieces more durable.

In the factory, Geo Lastimosky selected and bought a life size warrior. (Please contact us at editor@chineseclayart.com, we are the representative of the reproduction factory in the US, if you are interested in buying a warrior.)

June 9th

We went to the ceramic village Chenlu, where people have been making carved celadon ware since the Song Dynasty. Annie Schliffer, the clay artist from Rochester New York, decided to stay there for 3 weeks.

June 10th, Sunday

When we got to Beijing, it was already about noontime. We had the bus driver take us directly to the Pan-Jia-Yuan Antique Market. We all knew there were a lot of newly-made "Dynasty Antiques" in the market, but there was always the hope of finding some good stuff to fill personal preferences among the junk.

Inspired by Prof. Zhang's lecture in Yixing, Barbara Brown started looking for the Chinese fish plates that are blue and white with red glaze and made in folk art kilns in the earlier 20th century. She bought her first fish plate at an antique store near the Jingdezhen Museum. When we were on the antique street near the mosque in Xi'an, Barbara found three more fish plates. At the Beijing antique flea market, Barbara bought two more fish plates for \$10 each, but we had seen the same piece for \$400 at one of the museum stores in Xi'an!

June 12th,

After visiting Mr. I-Chi Hsu's Hap Pottery studio, we were invited to share in a dinner of Peking duck and received small clay ducks as presents. On the last day before we left China, we visited "the Memorial Sculptural Garden of Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945)" and the Central Academy of Fine Art.

In the sculpture garden, there were 38 monumental bronze sculptures erected. Each sculpture was 4.3 in height, 2 meters in width and depth. The sculptures were done by 18 artists and it took 5 years to complete. One of the artists, professor Lu Pinchang at the Central Academy of Fine Art introduced the details of the sculptures to us. Everyone was very impressed by the figurative and realism training that the Chinese art education system provides.

In the evening, Lu Pinchang invited us to give a slide lecture in the school, and the school vice-president Fan Di'an invited us to have dinner together.

Everyone was exhausted from carrying heavy luggage, which was full of valuable ceramic art works and books. We were in China for three weeks. It was too short to observe the Chinese ceramic culture of the past and today; it was too long for Americans away from their sweet home on the other side of the Earth. According to the local time of the two destinations, we left Beijing on the afternoon of June 14, and arrived San Francisco few hours earlier on the same day.

CONFERENCE AND EVENT

The Opening Ceremony Speech of the Yixing International Ceramic Symposium - Richard Notkin
It is a great honor for me, and my fellow Western artists, to visit Yixing, the birthplace of the teapot. My art and my life have benefited profoundly from the great creations of Yixing master artists, those of the past as well as those who continue to create innovative new works. I wish to thank the Mayor of Yixing, Wu Fengfeng, for this warm welcome. I also wish to thank Mr. Xu Xiutang and Mr. Guangzhen Zhou, for their good organizing. I also thank the many organizers of "the International Ceramic Art Symposium, 2001," and "China Yixing Ceramic Museum".

I would like to share a few thoughts:

The gift of the opposing thumb allows humans the capacity for genius. We apply our most advanced technologies towards the creation, maintenance and betterment of our complex improvised world, or wield those same technologies for destruction. The fulcrum of our future lies between these extremes of creation and destruction, and mankind's collective energies and actions will determine in which direction civilization will ultimately teeter. Artists, writers, musicians - all those who create - provide and nurture the warm flame of creative spirit that keeps hope alive. Through universal likes with other artists and peoples of all nationalities, the artist is perhaps our most effective diplomat, connecting us in the remarkable spirit of human creativity. It is this spirit that sets us apart as a species.

Often, the only traces remaining of a past culture are the pots and shards excavated by archaeologists. As ceramic artists, our choice of material - fired earth - has a tenacious ability to survive, transcending time and the often turbulent cycles of civilization. We are part of a continuing and noble tradition; each work of art we create has the potential to reach into the unknown future. Thus, we become participants in perpetuating art's ultimate value: the power to forever impact upon the lives of other human beings. The ripple effect of many creative acts - our collective

creativity - eventually reaches, touches and benefits all of humanity. Our greatest responsibility, in return for the gift of the opposing thumb, is to develop infallible techniques, place ourselves at the mercy of inspiration, and be highly productive.

Thanks!

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2nd FEATURE ARTICLE

Tea and Teapots, Yixing, and Europe - Carolyn Broadwell

(continued from last issue), [LINK](#)

I'm a little teapot, short and stout;
Here is my handle, here is my spout.
When I get all steamed up, then I shout
Just tip me over, pour me out!

How did this familiar teapot form, acted out by children when they sing the above ditty, come to be as we know it today, somewhat short, with a spout, a lid and a handle? No one knows for sure, but it appears to have evolved from the ewer. It is interesting to note that the ewer form is closer to today's coffee pot than to the teapot. And, while the design of the teapot went in novel and eccentric directions, the ewer has remained essentially the same; the fanciful in coffee preparation seems to have leaned toward accessories.

When tea was first consumed, it was boiled, often with other ingredients such as ginger, leeks, or other vegetables, somewhat like soup, in an ordinary kettle. And like soup, it was probably served in wooden bowls from a very early date. At this time, it was only regarded as a medicinal drink. Evidence of ceramic vessels possibly made especially for tea appears during the Han dynasty (the first two centuries AD), but it was not until the T'ang and Song dynasties (618-907 and 960-1279) that tea drinking came into its own, and tea utensils were made especially for the purpose. The two most important vessels were the ewer and the bowl. The first Tang ewers were short, with wide mouths, for steeping the ingredients; by Song times, the ewers were taller and more elegant, with a long curving spout in order to pour a graceful curve of water into a bowl, in which powdered tea and water were whipped to a lovely froth. The color of the bowl was selected to show off the color of the tea, which when whipped showed up as pale green or white against a dark glaze. (It was at this time that tea was taken to Japan, and the Japanese tea ceremony still utilizes this method of making tea.) The bowls were shallow and wide, and preferences changed from time to time, from dark black-brown hare's fur glazes to blue and green and white porcelains for clear teas, but always they were required to be sober, graceful and elegant, and without ostentatious decoration, in keeping with the atmosphere in which tea was served and drunk.

During the brief Yuan (1280-1368) dynasty, documentary evidence exists of at least one Yixing teapot. However, it was not until later, during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), that Yixing teapots became popular. There is a story that a monk of the Jinsha (Golden Sand) Temple at Nanshan, near Yixing, after watching the local potters at work, took a lump of clay, kneaded it, hollowed it out, and made the first teapot. Although the story may or may not be true, it is known that early in the sixteenth century many utilitarian pots were being made and used using the purple clays of Yixing and that the local scholars were frequent visitors of the temple. One scholar who regularly attended the temple in order to study for Imperial examinations, was Wu Yishan, and he took with him his servant Gong Chun. When Gong Chun had no chores, he also watched the potters, as the nameless monk before him had done, and one day he also took up a lump of clay and formed a teapot. It was so successful that he later became known as the father of the teapot. There is adequate documentary evidence to support this story, so Gong Chun is not just a legend, although no teapots exist that can be surely attributed to him.

Yixing wares were not sought by the court and thus imperial taste had little to do with their development. The long period of stability of the Ming dynasty allowed a new educated class to rise, which included merchants and the literati. These men insisted on fine tea and the utensils

necessary to prepare it. They were strongly influenced by two important classical works; a book, *The Classic of Tea*, by Lu Yu, also known as the "Tea God," and written during the Tang dynasty, and a poem, *The Song of Tea*, by Lu T'ung, written in the eighth century. (*The Classic of Tea* includes descriptions of tea and its production and preparation; *The Song of Tea* is a poem of praise and enthusiasm for the beverage.) This new class disdained the porcelains of Jingdezhen as vulgar and gaudy, while the simple stonewares of Yixing were thought to reflect the scholars own personalities in their elegant straightforward honesty. The popularity of the Yixing teapots spread to neighboring provinces, then eventually to Southeast Asia, and thus through the export trade, to Europe.

One of the earliest and best known teapot makers was Shi Dabin (approx. 1567-1661) who was a friend of the scholar Chen Meigong. Scholars were important patrons of the teapot makers, and exerted an important influence on their development. Shi Dabin's friend is said to have advocated making smaller teapots, because smaller pots better retained flavor and bouquet, and each scholar in his circle could use his own teapot during their gatherings. (It should be noted that a teapot classified as small during the Ming period would today be called medium size.) It is also known that scholars were enlisted to help with the inscriptions on teapots, and many of the artist-potters became as skilled with the bamboo or steel knives used to inscribe their teapots as the scholars were with their brushes.

Teapots were made in various ingenious shapes, such as forms from nature, copies of archaic bronzes, or geometrical designs, all signed by the potter, and often inscribed by scholars. The potter's wheel was not and still is not used in Yixing. Today teapots are made using hand forming techniques such as slabs, paddling, pinching and piece molds, and sometimes a combination of these techniques. There are conflicting reports about the techniques used by Ming potters, but most of these techniques were known at that time. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries press molds were used for export teapots. None of these teapots can be found in China.

Identification of the individual potter is unique to Yixing; elsewhere in China, very few potters names are known. The early Ming potters identified their pots, but it was not until the late Ming (1368-1644) that the use of a seal was seen, often alongside a carved signature. Also, at this time, inscriptions began to appear not only on the base, but on the body of the pot. However, with the spreading popularity of the teapots, general quality deteriorated as mass production methods were employed to meet the demands of an increasing market, and the quality of the teapots never again achieved the virtuosity of the Ming potters.

When tea was exported to Europe in the seventeenth century it was accompanied by the utensils necessary for its preparation. The Dutch were the first importers of both tea and teapots, and by the 1670s there were several potters in Holland copying Yixing teapots. The best known were Lambertus Cleffins, Ary de Milde and John Philip and David Elers. The Elers brothers soon took their skills to Staffordshire, England, where in great secrecy and amidst legal conflicts, they produced wares of a very fine red clay, obviously Yixing inspired. The most important influence of the Yixing teapots however, was in Meissen. There, under the patronage of Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony, Johann Friedrich Bottger set about finding the secret of producing true porcelain. On his way to the discovery of porcelain, however, he succeeded in making an extraordinarily fine red ware, considerably harder than Yixing ware, which was much sought after. There is evidence that he learned from Ary de Milde, and that one of de Milde's pots was brought to Meissen for Bottger to copy.

These various red wares were produced in Holland, England and Germany during the second half of the seventeenth and the first years of the eighteenth centuries, but they were expensive and only available to the nobility and well-to-do. They often bore pseudo Chinese markings. Gradually, more colorful porcelain wares, mass produced especially for export from China, became abundant and less expensive, and interest in the understated unglazed Yixing teapots diminished, until potters ceased making them.

Recently there has been a renewed interest in Yixing teapots, at least partially through the efforts of Dr. K. S. Lo of Hong Kong, a collector of Yixing teapots and other Chinese tea wares. In the

early 1980's Dr. Lo donated his collection to the Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware, in Hong Kong. His extensive writings in English, as well as those of Terese Tse Bartholomew of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, have done much to increase interest in Yixing teapots in the west over the last few years.

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THE END.

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