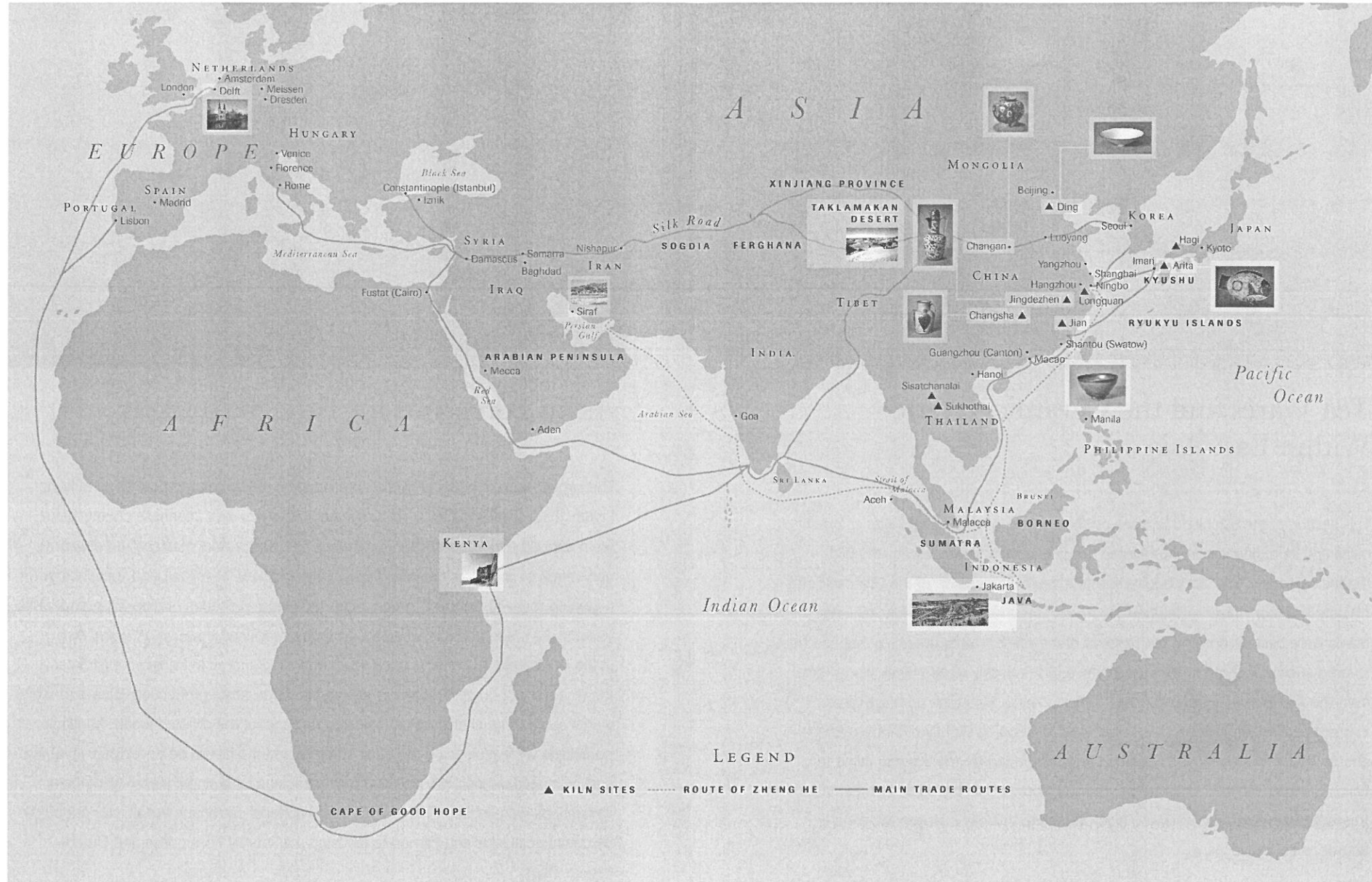


Mapping Trade Along the Silk Road



Silk Road to Clipper Ship is originated and circulated by the **University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA)**. The works in the exhibition are all from UMMA collections. The Museum would like to thank Laurie Barnes, guest curator for an earlier version of this exhibition, for her many valuable insights into the objects and issues presented here.

Kalamazoo Institute of Arts
Kalamazoo, Michigan
September 7–November 25, 2007

Reeves Center, Washington and Lee University
Lexington, Virginia
January 12–April 4, 2008

Kresge Art Museum, Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan
May 3–July 25, 2008

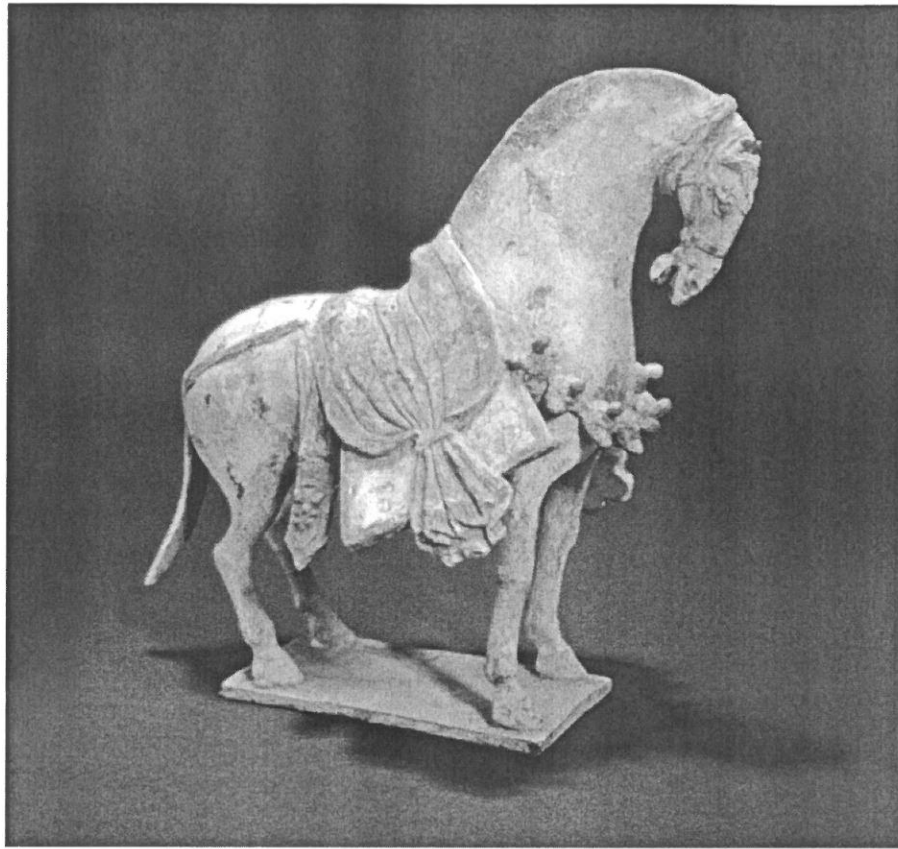
COVER IMAGE: **Blue-and-white ewer with silver fittings**, China, early 15th century, porcelain with underglaze blue painting, UMMA, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John A. Pope for the James Marshall Plumer Memorial Collection, 1968/1.50

Silk Road to Clipper Ship

*Trade, Changing
Markets, and East
Asian Ceramics*



Throughout recorded history, the technical and material superiority of Chinese ceramics has made them prized commodities, within China and throughout the world. Many critics mistakenly believe that China's magnificent ceramic tradition developed in splendid isolation, but there is no question that foreign trade—as well as competition among regional kilns—played a recurring and important role in shaping the history of this art form. Or, to look at it another way, one can easily argue that ceramics, more than any other commodity, shaped the history of China's trade. In early modern times, the same can be said of Japan. The works in this exhibition have been chosen to illustrate three historical phases in East Asian ceramic production, framed in terms of potters' response to opportunities and challenges raised by trade and changing markets.



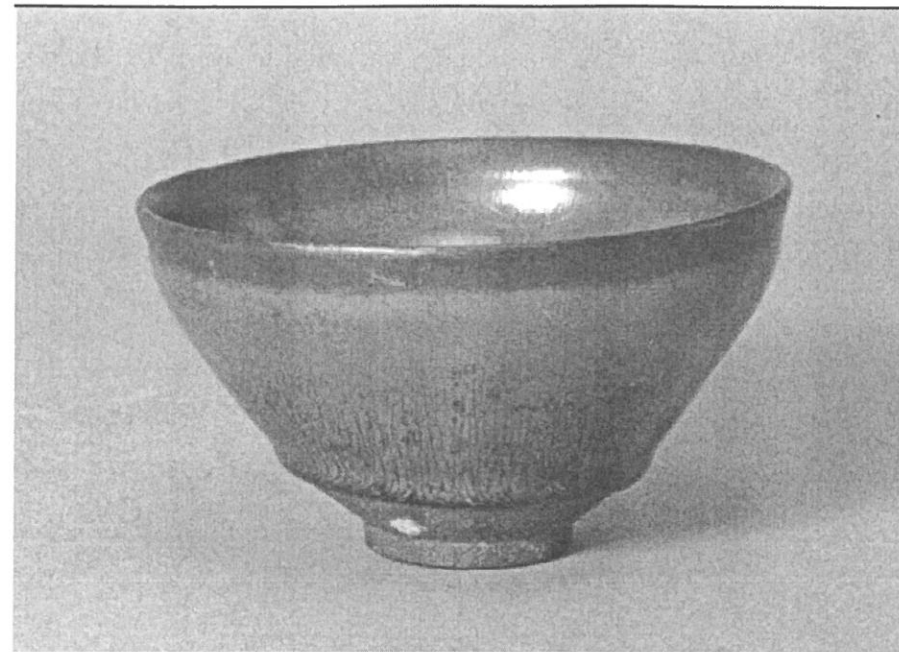
Exchanges Along the Silk Road

The first section of the exhibition explores the exchange of ideas and goods between China and Iran and the Mediterranean on the overland route that came to be known as the Silk Road, from the first through the tenth centuries of the Common Era.

The expansionist Chinese Han empire (206 BCE–220 CE) had established military outposts stretching far to the west, in a search for allies against northern tribes. Across the Taklamakan desert, the Han armies found the swift horses of Ferghana, the best possible weapon against the pony-riding invaders. These long-legged steeds became a favorite subject in Chinese ceramic sculpture, as did other “exotic” imports, such as Central Asian merchants, performers, or luxury metalwork objects. The immediate impact of the Silk Road trade on Chinese art was to introduce new subjects to the artists’ repertoire. Over time, exposure to new materials—such as cobalt from Iran—and more cosmopolitan markets fostered a climate of technical experimentation, most readily seen in the development of new glaze effects.

At the opposite end of the trade route, Rome and Persia eagerly sought out Chinese ceramics, which were far more durable and beautiful than the pottery available locally. Although Iranian potters occasionally attempted to imitate Chinese wares, their products suffered from inferior clay and kiln technology.

Caparisoned horse, China, about 525–530, earthenware with traces of polychrome pigments, UMMA, Gift of Dr. D.K. Lieu, 1950/2.12

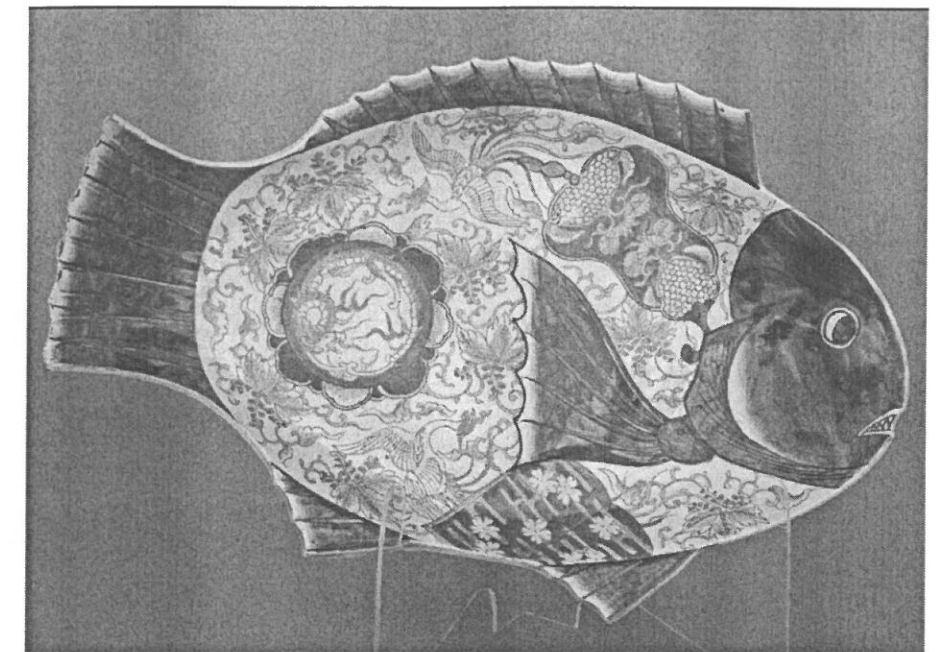


Tea Wares and the Ceramics Trade Within East Asia

This section of the exhibition focuses on the beginnings of a certain type of black glaze and its lasting importance for tea bowls and other wares associated with the tea ceremony. The story begins with the aesthetic decision of the Chinese Song dynasty emperor Huizong (reigned 1100–1126), who declared that black-glazed bowls were best for drinking tea (instead of the refined white porcelain that had been favored at court), giving instant prominence to the thickly glazed black stonewares from the Jian kilns in southeast China. Other Chinese kilns took up black glazes in a competition for imperial patronage, each developing slightly different glazing effects. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Japanese monks who came to China to study Zen encountered the Jian ware bowls, and brought them home as treasured souvenirs. The Jianware type persists to this day in Japan, where it is known as *temmoku* ware.

Another individual who greatly influenced the history of tea wares was the Japanese tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591), who advocated the use of simple materials and found objects. He is credited with nurturing the creation of *Raku* ware, and among his disciples were warlords who adopted Korean farmers’ rice bowls for drinking tea.

Jian ware tea bowl, China, 12th–13th century, stoneware with “hare’s fur” glaze, UMMA, The James Marshall Plumer Memorial Collection, 1964/2.8



Asian Porcelains for Foreign Markets

The largest section of the exhibition presents the vividly colored porcelains of Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) dynasty China and their Japanese counterparts. From about the fourteenth century onward, Chinese potters mastered an extraordinary range of colors for ceramic glazes, from “chicken fat yellow” and “peachbloom”—a mottled rose—to “teadust” green, deep reds, and all shades of blue. Blue-and-white wares were made possible when the Mongols reopened trade with Central Asia in the late thirteenth century, once again providing access to Iranian cobalt; later, the discovery of domestic sources allowed for large-scale production. Blue-and-white wares came to be cherished and imitated throughout the civilized world. Multicolored porcelains were technically the most complex and the last to be developed, involving several stages of hand-painting and multiple firings for a single piece. All of these innovations were initially funded by Chinese imperial patronage but quickly adopted by commercial kilns and carried to far-flung markets by Portuguese and Dutch clipper ships.

Most of the Chinese porcelains shown here are from the Jingdezhen kilns in southeastern China. Jingdezhen was destroyed with the fall of the Ming dynasty in the mid-seventeenth century, providing an opportunity for the Japanese to seize its place as the international source of blue-and-white and enameled ware. Known as Imari ware, after the Japanese seaport, the Japanese ceramics quickly won admirers in Europe and North America, and sustained a place in the market even after Jingdezhen recovered.

Imari fish plate with phoenix and hollyhock designs, Japan, mid-19th century, porcelain with underglaze blue and overglaze enamel designs, UMMA, Gift of the William T. and Dora G. Hunter Collection, 2002/2.13