

A Concise Survey of a Small Jun Ware Bowl

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Dimensions: Diameter 3 1/2 inches (9 cm), Height 2 inches (5 cm), Foot 3 cm *Description*

Jun ware ceramics were made in a variety of colors ranging from “green-blue, blue-white, sky blue, and lavender.”¹ This tea bowl is covered with a rich dark blue shade with purple splashes. The purple splashes are a reaction of copper-rich pigments added to the bluish glaze, which typically appear in hues ranging from pink or red, purple to green, and even black, depending on the amount applied and its thickness. For this vessel, a generous amount of copper was added to create the purple.² Its splashes are a dark deep-navy purple, in comparison with most other examples which exhibit more magenta-hued purples. When viewing this piece from a bird’s eye view, the curves of the dark purple glaze present themselves in a semi-swirling manner that almost meet at either end of the interior, drawing one’s gaze into it. It possesses a glass-like glaze and is smooth to the touch. When viewing at a side angle, there is a wide brush stroke on the exterior upper half of the cup. Within the exterior stroke, there are small bubble-like openings exposing the blue hue underneath. Where there is blue, there is also a subtle clear crackle in the glaze. The vessel has a thin, evenly distributed glaze that covers its entirety, possibly placing its origin somewhere between the 11th - 13th century, likely during Yuan dynasty.³ This piece likely came from Henan province because of its dramatic coloration of a blueish background with a copper application, setting it apart from wares of other provinces.⁴ Scientists believe that the typical purple-red appearance applied to Jun wares was “a mixture of copper-red, iron-blue and opalescence.”⁵ Bowls of this shape are described as a “Bubble Bowls” in Sotheby’s auction catalogs.⁶

Chinese ceramics have long been recognized for the high quality of their craftsmanship and range of decorations. Jun ware is among China's top five ceramic wares.⁷ Nicknamed “robin’s-egg

¹ Nigel Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry, and Recreation* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 119-124.

² Ibid.

³ 1. Robert D. Mowry, *Paz E Serenidade: Cerâmicas Song Da Coleção Qingjingtang = Peace and Quietude: Song Ceramics from the Qingjingtang Collection = Qing Jing Tang Cang Song Dai Ci Qi Te Zhan* (Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, I.P., Ministério da Educação e Ciência, 2014), 47.

⁴ Ellen Huang, “Chinese Ceramics: From the Paleolithic Period through the Qing Dynasty Ed. by Li Zhiyan, Virginia Bower, and He Li,” *China Review International* 19, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 291-292, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cri.2012.0038>.

⁵ Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry, and Recreation*. 119-124

⁶ “(#3109) AN OUTSTANDING AND EXCEPTIONAL HEIRLOOM JUNYAO PURPLE-SPLASHED ‘BUBBLE’ BOWL NORTHERN SONG DYNASTY |,” Sothebys.com, n.d., <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2018/arcadian-beauty-exceptional-works-from-song-dynasty-hk0821/lot.3109.html>.

⁷ Robert D. Mowry, *Peace and Quietude*, 47.

blue,” Jun ware is part of the celadon family.⁸ Jun ware was made in the late 11th to early 12th century through the early 15th century.⁹ During the 13th century, Yuan dynasty, Jun ware was famous for its signature thick blue glaze and comes in a variety of shapes and sizes.¹⁰ The daily use of Jun ware was primarily for the wealthy class of society. There are a few Jun ware pieces known that were made as a tribute for the palace, temple, or special submission.

Location

The bowl has a glaze that covers the entire ware, including the center of the exterior foot ring. This style of glaze is known to be produced by private kilns like those produced in Henan province. Jun kilns were primarily located in northern China in the regions of Yu County, Yuzhou, Henan Province, commonly referred to as Yangdi.¹¹ Junzhou was retitled Yuzhou during the Ming dynasty (1572-1620, Wanli reign).¹² Other kilns that produced Jun style wares were in Henan province: Hebi and Anyang cities. Additionally, the counties of Linru, Jia, Baifeng, Xin’an, Hui; along with Ci county, Hebei province; Hunyuan, Shanxi province, Baotou Inner Mongolia; and Jinhua, Zhejiang province were known to produce Jun ware. During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties imitation Jun wares (“Guang-Jun” and “Yi-Jun”) were produced in Shiwan in Guangdong and Yixing in Jiangsu.¹³ Jun ware dating continues to be debated as there have been few archaeological studies performed to accurately determine the chronology. Most scholars agree that the kilns were active from the 11th century to possibly early 15th century.¹⁴

Glazes produced for the Jun ware vessels during the Yuan dynasty were known for their heavy body style and thick blue glazes.¹⁵ However, this bowl contains an evenly distributed glaze that is thinner in comparison to the thick Yuan dynasty glazes. According to excavations of the Liujiamen

⁸ Lisa E. Rotondo-McCord and New Orleans Museum Of Art, *Heaven and Earth Seen within: Song Ceramics from the Robert Barron Collection* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2000), 64.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry, and Recreation*. 118-124

¹¹ Huang, “Chinese Ceramics: From the Paleolithic Period through the Qing Dynasty Ed. by Li Zhiyan, Virginia Bower, and He Li.” 281

¹² Ibid, 281.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry, and Recreation*, 118-124.

kilns, the ceramics it produced have an evenly distributed glaze with a “fragrant ash” body exposed.¹⁶ The foot ring displays the exposed ash shade, while the rim reveals a thin layer of glaze. The temperature of the kiln determines the appearance of the glazes. As the temperature increases the glaze changes from white to blue, then ultimately blue with subtle purple hues. This is a distinct feature of Jun glazes and is known as the emulsion phenomenon.¹⁷

The design of the kiln responsible for producing Jun ware is referred to as a mantou kiln. These kilns have a bun-like appearance and were in common use in the northern region by the Tang dynasty. Firing temperatures for this kiln ranged from low temperatures to high temperatures.¹⁸ Early in the production of Jun ware, there were two main types of kilns, Juntai and Liujiamen. The Juntai kiln was owned by the government. Products produced from this kiln were on a small scale and often contained numbers on the vessels. The Liujiamen kiln was privately owned.¹⁹ By the middle to the late Northern Song (960-1126), craftsmen produced glazes assembled in one color that became multicolored after firing. Jun wares underwent multiple firings to preserve the body of the piece, first low fired (1,000-1,100°C) then after it was glazed and fired again at a higher temperature (1,250-1300°C).²⁰

Jun wares from the Song dynasty (960-1279), at times can be distinguished by the application of the glaze covering the interior and exterior surfaces, leaving the rim of the foot ring exposed, as displayed in this piece.²¹ When firing, Jun wares were set inside individual fireclay saggars and fired in either wood or coal-burning kilns.²² Techniques for firing such wares include separating setters, spur supports, and multiple applications of glaze on a vessel prior to the firing process.²³

Jun wares utilize more than one type of clay to achieve their signature appearance. The types of clay used to make Jun ware vessels have a grayish or pale-cream body.²⁴ The depicted bowl displays

¹⁶ Huang, “Chinese Ceramics: From the Paleolithic Period through the Qing Dynasty Ed. by Li Zhiyan, Virginia Bower, and He Li.” 282-283

¹⁷ Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry, and Recreation*. 118-124

¹⁸ Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry, and Recreation*. 94

¹⁹ Huang, “Chinese Ceramics: From the Paleolithic Period through the Qing Dynasty Ed. by Li Zhiyan, Virginia Bower, and He Li.” 282-283

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry, and Recreation*. 94

²³ Huang, “Chinese Ceramics: From the Paleolithic Period through the Qing Dynasty Ed. by Li Zhiyan, Virginia Bower, and He Li.” 282-283

²⁴ Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry, and Recreation*. 94

a grayish body on the foot ring. Clay deposits mined from Henan and Hebei are black in their original state and turn white when fired at high temperatures, as their organic contaminants burn away.²⁵ Kaolin clays are extracted using hoses to separate them from the granite that is responsible for their creation. This clay is white prior to firing, but less flexible to maneuver.²⁶ Northern clay is associated with China's coal fields and originates from true sedimentary clays. These clays contain kaolinite and halloysite with minimal amounts of quartz, micas, and feldspars which benefit from long and high-fired temperatures as they are alumina-rich.²⁷

Bowls with descriptions matching that of the featured bowl can be found in books and catalogs. One such bowl is presented in *Chinese Ceramics- A new comprehensive survey from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco*, which depicts a lighter hue of blue glaze (see fig.1). The last three similar pieces are from Sotheby's (see fig. 2-5), displaying a similar shape and the variety of the shades of Jun ware.



Figure 1. A Jun ware bowl that is 8.9 cm (3 ½ in.) in diameter from the *Chinese Ceramics- A new comprehensive survey from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco*.

Figure 2. A Junyao Purple -Splashed Bowl from the *2017 April Song Ceramics- Sotheby's*, measuring 10.4 cm (4 in) in diameter. This piece is more greenish blue in comparison to the featured piece. However, the shape, foot, and splash share a resemblance.

²⁵ ibid

²⁶ ibid

²⁷ Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry, and Recreation*. 94



Figure 3. The Junyao Purple-splashed 'Bubble' Bowl from the Northern Song Dynasty was depicted in the *2018 May Hong Kong Arcadian Beauty Song Ceramics- Sotheby's*. It measures 9 cm (3 ½ in.) and shares a similar shape and foot with the featured piece.



Figure 4. The Edward T. Chow 'Bubble' Bowls was featured in the *2018 May Hong Kong Arcadian Beauty Song Ceramics- Sotheby's* showing the legacy of the collector and the variety of hues Jun ware can produce. The color range of these pieces matches the featured piece.



Figure 5. The Northern Song Dynasty Purple-Splashed 'Jun' Bubble Bowl was included in the *2019 May London Important Chinese Art- Sotheby's*. The diameter measured 8.5 cm (3 3/8 in.). The shape and distribution of the glaze match the feature piece.

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