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Porcelain

Ceramics made of porcelain was a Chinese invention that reached perfection during the Song and Ming dynasties. The Chinese had made pottery for centuries, but during the Tang Dynasty Chinese artists learned that a mineral, feldspar, could be added to white clay to make white porcelain. When the special clay, called *kaolin*, is fired at a high temperature it becomes translucent (partially see-through), water resistant, and extremely hard. During the Song and Ming dynasties, porcelain artistry reached new heights as hundreds of thousands of workers crafted the clay into porcelain statues and art objects that were the envy of many foreigners. Some porcelain statues and vases remained white, while others were decorated with patterns or painted. Chinese artists had been making ceramics from porcelain for 1400 years before Europeans finally developed the art in the eighteenth century.