Painting and Ceramics from the Southern Song dynasty differed from the north and focused primarily on small and intimate scenes.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE [ edit ]

- Distinguish the characteristics of the painting and ceramics of the Southern Song style from its counterpart in the North.

KEY POINTS [ edit ]

- Trends in painting styles among the gentry notably shifted from the Northern (960–1127) to Southern Song (1127–1279) periods, influenced in part by the gradual embrace of the Neo-Confucian political ideology at court.

- Chinese painting during the Song Dynasty reached a new level of sophistication with further development of landscape painting. The shan shui style painting—"shan" meaning mountain, and "shui" meaning river—became prominent features in Chinese landscape art.

- Southern Song officials were more interested in reforming society from the bottom up and on a much smaller scale. Hence, their paintings often focused on smaller, visually closer, and more intimate scenes, while the background was often depicted as bereft of detail as a realm without substance.

TERMS [ edit ]

- **shan shui style**
  ("mountain-water") A style of Chinese painting that depicts scenery or natural landscapes such as mountains, rivers, and waterfalls, using brush and ink rather than more conventional paints.

- **Neo-Confucianism**
  A moral, ethical, and metaphysical Chinese philosophy influenced by Confucianism; originated with Han Yu and Li Ao (772-841) in the Tang Dynasty, and became prominent during the Song and Ming dynasties.

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FULL TEXT [ edit ]
Overview: the Song Dynasty

The Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD) was a culturally rich and sophisticated age for China. During this time great advancements were made in the visual arts, music, literature, and philosophy. Officials of the ruling bureaucracy reached new heights of education in Chinese society, while general Chinese culture was enhanced by widespread printing, growing literacy, and various arts.

Appreciation of the arts among the gentry flourished during the Song Dynasty, especially in painting. Trends in painting styles among the gentry notably shifted from the Northern (960–1127) to Southern Song (1127–1279) periods, influenced in part by the gradual embrace of the Neo-Confucian political ideology at court.

Chinese painting during the Song Dynasty reached a new level of sophistication with further development of landscape painting. The shan shui style painting—"shan" meaning mountain, and "shui" meaning river—became prominent features in Chinese landscape art. The emphasis laid upon landscape painting in the Song period was grounded in Chinese philosophy; Taoism stressed that humans were but tiny specks among the vast and greater cosmos, while Neo-Confucianist writers often pursued the discovery of patterns and principles that they believed caused all social and natural phenomena. The making of glazed and translucent porcelain and celadon wares with complex use of enamels was also developed further during the Song period. Longquan celadon wares were particularly popular in the Song period. Black and red lacquerwares of the Song period featured beautifully carved artwork of miniature nature scenes, landscapes, or simple decorative motifs. However, even though intricate bronze-casting, ceramics and lacquerware,
jade carving, sculpture, architecture, and the painting of portraits and closely viewed objects like birds on branches were held in high esteem by the Song Chinese, landscape painting was paramount. By the beginning of the Song Dynasty a distinctive landscape style had emerged. Artists mastered the formula of creating intricate and realistic scenes placed in the foreground, while the background retained qualities of vast and infinite space. Distant mountain peaks rise out of high clouds and mist, while streaming rivers run from afar into the foreground.
Art from the south

Song Dynasty ding ware porcelain bottle, 11th century

The making of glazed and translucent porcelain and celadon wares with complex use of enamels was developed further during the Song period.
There was a significant difference in painting trends between the Northern Song period (960–1127) and Southern Song period (1127–1279). The paintings of Northern Song officials were influenced by their political ideals of bringing order to the world and tackling the largest issues affecting their society; hence, their paintings often depicted huge, sweeping landscapes. On the other hand, Southern Song officials were more interested in reforming society from the bottom up and on a much smaller scale, a method they believed had a better chance for eventual success. Their paintings often focused on smaller, visually closer and more intimate scenes, while the background was often depicted as bereft of detail as a realm without substance or concern for the artist or viewer. This change in attitude from one era to the next stemmed largely from the rising influence of Neo-Confucian philosophy. Adherents to Neo-Confucianism focused on reforming society from the bottom up, not the top down, which can be seen in their efforts to promote small private academies during the Southern Song instead of the large state-controlled academies seen in the Northern Song era.
Ma Lin, Listening to the Wind (1246)
Southern Song officials were interested in reforming society from the bottom up and on a small scale. Hence, their paintings often focused on small, visually closer, and more intimate scenes, while the background was often depicted as bereft of detail as a realm without substance or concern for the artist or viewer.