

## EIGHT TRANSITIONAL TREASURES



# *Eight Transitional Treasures*

30th Anniversary  
Exhibition



BERWALD ORIENTAL ART  
LONDON

# Introduction

## *Chronology of emperors*

### **Ming dynasty**

Jiajing  
1521 – 1567  
Wanli  
1572 – 1620  
Tianqi  
1621 – 1627  
Chongzhen  
1628 – 1644

### **Qing dynasty**

Shunzhi  
1644 – 1661  
Kangxi  
1662 – 1722

THIS EXHIBITION encompasses a fifty-year period that saw the decline and eventual fall of the Ming dynasty and ended with the establishment of the new Manchurian Qing dynasty. Lasting roughly from 1620 to the mid 1670s, this period marks a remarkable change in the style and subject matter of Chinese porcelain manufacture. Far from suffering a decline during this turbulent time, the imperial kilns experienced a period of astounding creativity and artistic brilliance. The Ming court, whose massive orders had until now totally dominated porcelain production, could no longer sustain their customary extravagance and a new clientele of wealthy merchants took their place. It was the tastes and aspirations of this new clientele, particularly their love of landscapes, which prompted this period of breath-taking innovation in porcelain making, which remains unique in Chinese history.

Porcelain had been a major industry in China since before the Song dynasty (960–1279) and in the late Ming production was at its height. Court orders were so numerous that the imperial kilns had to farm out orders to smaller private kilns, a practice that became known as ‘ordered by the government, fired by the people’. In accordance with this vast imperial appetite for porcelain, the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province were a gigantic and highly structured operation. Apart from the potters and painters, the kilns directly or indirectly employed an enormous workforce of stokers, carpenters, wood suppliers, quarry workers and clay refiners, not to mention the multitudes needed to manage and carry out the logistics of transportation.

Faced with increasing Manchurian aggression and civil unrest, the late Ming emperors found themselves forced to withdraw resources from porcelain manufacture to reinvest them in the army. These last Ming emperors had spent the previous century eroding the foundations of their once formidable dynasty. The Jiajing emperor (1521–1567), a devout Daoist, squandered untold fortunes on distilling the elixir of immortality while his people suffered from ruinously high

# [Chinese]

本展涵蓋明末清初半世紀，見證明代衰亡，滿清立國。自約1620年起至1670年代中期間，中華製瓷工藝之風格及題材經歷嬗變，非比尋常。雖時局動盪，然官窯並無衰落之象，反而推陳翻新，臻藝菁華。明朝宮廷燒製大批瓷器，壟斷生產，至明末衰落，無力繼承奢風，瓷器工藝改為富商巨賈而製。後者鍾情山水景物，熱衷瓷器鑑賞，成就製瓷技術創新突破，於中華史上獨一無二。

自宋（西元960-1279年）前起，製瓷均乃中國之重要工業，至晚明為極盛。宮廷需求熱切，御窯廠供不應求，故寄燒於規模較小之民窯，有謂「官搭民燒」。江西景德鎮御窯製作規模龐大，架構精密，除瓷匠與畫師外，司爐、木匠、木材商人、礦工、陶土加工師等從業者眾，或直接受聘，或從中得利，經營、運輸等人數極多，更不在話下。

滿族侵擾不斷，步步進逼，晚明王帝被逼縮減製瓷，投資軍事。大明江山，顯赫多年，於明朝最後數代皇帝手中日趨敗壞。嘉靖帝（1521-1567年）迷信道術，為研製長生仙藥，揮霍千金，苛徵重稅，民不聊生，兵力薄弱，無以復加。至萬曆（1572-1620年）及天啟（1620-1627年）二帝先後繼位，時局更亂，社會動盪，軍事荒廢，二帝無心政事，致令朝野腐敗至極，弄權擾政之事層出，再加七年大旱，鄉野赤地千里，哀鴻遍野，國祚更堪憂惶。明末皇帝崇禎西元1628年登位，其時滿族早已侵入大明國土，改革來時太晚。1644年，崇禎自縊，明朝覆滅。



taxes and his army from a crippling lack of funding. The ensuing civil riots and military desertions only worsened under Jiajing's successors, Wanli (1572–1620) and Tianqi (1620–1627), whose lack of interest in affairs of state opened the way for rampant corruption and political intrigue in the court. A terrible seven-year drought, which wreaked havoc on the countryside and its population, compounded the already desperate situation. When the last of the Ming emperors, Chongzhen, came to the throne in 1628, the Manchurian invasion had already made substantial progress into China's interior. His efforts to reform the government came too late, and his suicide in 1644 marked the end of the dynasty.

It was during this period of political unrest that the imperial kilns came into private hands. A new dynamic now began to animate the kilns' production. Previously, the sheer volume of orders from the imperial court had taken up all the kilns' resources. The court also favoured a rather rigid style, which was upheld through visits from specially appointed inspectors. In other words, imperial control of the kilns meant repetition and an almost mandatory lack of originality. With private ownership, however, came the discovery of a new client base whose dramatically different tastes forced the kilns to innovate. For centuries, the kilns had absorbed the most highly skilled artisans in China, reserving their work exclusively for imperial consumption. Now, these same peerless craftsmen found themselves in a market that sought not only their technical finesse but their imagination.

One outlet for the kilns' production was the Japanese export market. The Tianqi period dish (cat. no. 1) in this exhibition is one of many pieces produced in the 1620s for use in the Japanese tea ceremony. More roughly potted than their Chinese counterparts, these pieces are made from slightly coarser clay and are often deliberately misshapen. A high level of experimentation is evident in this remarkable and extremely rare dish, particularly in the application of the cobalt pigment, which is blown through a straw to create a subtle and uneven sprinkling of blue.

Alongside this foreign demand was a new domestic demand, which forms the heart of this exhibition. This demand came from urban merchants, who in the late Ming were enjoying an unprecedented surge in wealth and standard of living. Many of these merchants had made their fortunes from huge landholdings in the fertile Jiangnan region, or in the salt trade, on which this area had a monopoly. Richer than ever, they gathered in the region's urban centres, Suzhou and Shanghai, which offered delicious opportunities to rub shoulders with other rich merchants and, most importantly, members of the Chinese literati.

政局動盪，御窯廠改為私有，窯廠製作氣象一新。原先窯廠全用於宮廷御瓷製作，風格管制嚴格，定期派員監視。宮廷管制之下，窯廠被逼重複瓷器形飾，創新無從。反之，私有作坊為迎合新客人之迥異品味，故而致力創作，推陳出新。數百年來，窯廠薈萃名匠巧工，專為宮廷製作珍瓷。此時御窯廠改為私有，藝匠不僅憑臻藝而廣獲推崇，亦仗巧思備受追捧。

除為國內製瓷之外，窯廠亦作外銷瓷，西元1620年代，窯廠嘗製大批茶具，供日本茶道儀式用，本展之明天啟青花四駿圖盤（編號1）即為一例。此類茶具，工藝不如內銷瓷器精緻，陶土土質稍微較粗，故意標新立異者相當常見。本品極其珍罕，出類拔萃，盡顯藝匠實驗創新之巧思，盤心鈎料，乃由工匠經吸管吹出，令鈎料隨意散落盤心，深淺有致，頗堪玩味。

與此同時，內銷瓷器亦見全新氣象，而此類瓷器，乃本展之重心。晚明年間，城鎮商人日見富裕，顯赫盛勢，前所未見，遂成為瓷器重要買家。如此商賈或為江南富饒之地地主，坐擁田地無數。而鹽業為江南專有，亦多有鹽商由此致富。富商巨賈聚集蘇、滬等地，商賈之間過從甚密，並與文人雅士為伍。

文士追求藝文品味，尚雅慕古，熱心國事，入世同時隱逸，如此境界，千年以來均乃文人所求之極致，中華文化之精髓。宮廷科舉制度精密，選書生為文官，為朝廷效命。科舉要求嚴格，競爭激烈，文士既須熟悉儒家經典、法規制度、稅務明細、天文地理，亦當通曉琴棋書畫，詩詞歌賦。明末年間，江南富商遷至蘇、滬等城市，視文人為雅士之模範。商人不如文士博覽群書，然而收藏珍貴雅器無數，從而宣示身份權勢。在此期間，文人商賈之社會地位分界漸趨模糊，商人身家豐厚，多讓兒孫從文，文士則參與商務，一來充實生活，二來遠離政壇爭鬥。自窯廠脫離宮廷控制起，大多依仗此等新近致富之商人、以及地

The ideal of the scholar as a connoisseur of the arts, involved in political life but also detached from it, had been central to Chinese culture for over a millennium. The imperial court used a sophisticated examination system to elect a class of ‘scholar officials’ to serve as the empire’s civil servants. These highly competitive examinations not only required proficiency in classic Confucian literature, civil law, taxation and geography, but a high level of competence in music, poetry, painting and calligraphy. When the wealthy landowners began moving to the cities during the late Ming, it was the scholars they looked to as a model of urban sophistication. While they could not match them in erudition, what they could do was surround themselves with exquisite (and expensive) objects that would communicate to visitors an unequivocal message of status and power. Indeed, during this era the social distinction between scholars and merchants was starting to blur: the merchants were wealthy enough to have their sons educated as scholars, while many scholars turned to mercantile activities not just to enrich themselves but to escape the intrigues of political life. It was these newly wealthy merchants and advantageously positioned scholars who replaced the imperial court as the porcelain kilns’ most lucrative customers.

This change in patronage heralded a period of immense innovation both in painterly techniques and the development of new porcelain forms. During the seventeenth century woodblock printing was at its height and an unprecedented number of woodblock-illustrated plays, novels and Daoist tales were readily available in the urbanised Jiangnan region. Illustrations from these books formed the vast majority of subject matter seen on the porcelains of the time. Scenes from these books would be chosen and adapted as decoration for painting on the porcelain. Porcelain painters could even draw on painting manuals such as *The Gu Family Painting Manual* and *The Poetic Painting Manual*.

Faced with this new demand, potters invented new porcelain forms whose broad surfaces made them ideal for painting continuous scenes in the round. Probably the most famous of these forms is the elongated cylindrical vase known as an ‘elephant leg’ vase in China, or by the Dutch term *rolwagen* in the West. We are fortunate to have two fine examples of this form (cat. nos. 2&6). The tall sides of the ‘elephant leg’ vase, as well as those of the ovoid jar (cat. no. 3), seem to suggest the vertical format of hanging scroll paintings. It is interesting to note that these two newly invented forms disappeared from the Chinese potter’s studio in the 1670s, when the newly installed Qing court once more brought the kilns under imperial control.

位超然之文士牟取盈利，為其製作珍瓷。

製瓷工藝改由商賈文人推動，無論紋飾、器形盡皆推陳翻新，盡見創思，盛極一時。十七世紀，木刻版畫藝術達致頂峰，戲曲、小說及道家故事多附木刻版畫，製作之盛，前所未聞，流行與江南城市一帶。此期製作之瓷器，紋飾題材大多出自此類版畫，取書中繪圖描飾於器身，亦有參照《顧氏畫譜》及《詩餘畫譜》等畫譜者。

為迎合此風，瓷匠銳意創製全新器形，器面空間廣闊，繪飾環繞器身，誠為妙配。此中最聞名者，應為筒瓶，或稱象腿瓶，瓶身呈圓柱型，西洋稱之 *rolwagen vase* (*rolwagen* 為荷蘭文)，本展有幸呈獻兩品（編號2及6）。此瓶類瓶身甚高，似與立軸呼應，另有蓮子罐（編號3），異曲同工。1670年代，滿清入主中原，接管窯廠，此兩類創新器形亦隨即絕跡，如此轉變，耐人尋味。

除器形外，1630年代之瓷匠畫師創新技法，以鈷藍描繪山石深淺濃淡，營造山水層次（圖1）；又繪人物站立於剔「V」形草紋（圖2）上，改人物懸浮於白地之慣例；以直行雲紋分隔場景，顯示次序，免卻畫面左右連接於背部，因而造成混淆（圖3），雲紋之間，穿插山水樹木。此外，以暗花分隔故事場景之法，亦流行於此時。暗花（圖4）紋飾多見於器口及器足，工匠刻花於半乾瓷胎之上，入爐窯燒，後罩施釉料，使刻紋處遍填釉料，再次窯燒，暗花方成。

本展瓷器大多帶有上述之部份特色，製於明朝末代崇禎一朝。瓷器塑形精雅，繪飾明麗，遠勝萬曆年間，朝廷控制下之典型製品。宮廷紋飾管制深嚴，可謂千遍一律，畫師製作相同形飾瓷器可達數百件之多，藝匠創意無從抒展。細觀本展瓷器，繪飾揮灑自如，淋漓之意躍然畫上，藝匠創思表現盡致。明末年間，時移世易，藝匠改為富商製瓷，表現靈活應變，令人驚嘆，開創新穎器形紋飾與畫風技巧，為藝者得以發揮巧思，欣喜之情，顯然可見。



During the 1630s, porcelain makers also developed a new repertoire of painterly techniques. Layered rockwork painted in various shades of blue gave depth to mountainous landscapes (fig. 1); rather than floating in white backgrounds, figures found their footing in delicate patches of 'v'-shaped grass (fig. 2). Also, by using vertical bands of swirling clouds, pierced by mountains and plants, artists were able to preserve the order of the scene, whose left and right sides would otherwise have met confusingly around the back (fig. 3). An ingenious way of framing scenes, known as *anhua* or 'hidden' design, also became popular. Usually found on the rim and foot of a piece, *anhua* designs (fig. 4) were incised into the 'leather-hard' porcelain body before firing. The entire vase was then immersed in a glaze, which filled these delicate channels, revealing the design once fired.

Almost all of the pieces in this exhibition bear some of these features, dating them to the reign of Chongzhen, the last Ming emperor. There is a superb level of sophistication in the painting and potting of these pieces, far exceeding most of the pieces dating from the Wanli emperor's reign, when the kilns were still under imperial control. Perhaps the painters had become bored with the stiffness of imperial designs. They must have revelled, one feels, in their new-found freedom and release from the monotony of massive imperial orders, which had them repeating the same design hundreds of times. These Chongzhen pieces reveal the true ingenuity of these artists, their astonishing adaptability to a new market and indeed their evident pleasure in developing new shapes, features and techniques.

Apart from narrative themes, the porcelains of this time also display a penchant for natural scenes. Our magnificent ovoid jar (cat. no. 3) with its delicate design of birds and flowers is a fine example of the scholars' timeless adoration for nature and its translation into art. Nature, particularly the lofty seclusion of the mountains, has been a central theme in Chinese art and literature throughout the ages. Its appeal would never have been stronger than in periods of social and political upheaval. Julia Curtis writes that nature 'provided a physiological escape for the Han Chinese scholar-official, who could not serve the "barbarian" imperial house and still maintain his Confucian ethical standards.' Even if these scholars were unable to escape the daily ordeals of administering a disintegrating, war-torn dynasty, they could withdraw in the evenings into their studios, where their beautiful scroll paintings, objects and porcelains would remind them of the immortal vitality of nature. From these, if nothing else, they could draw enough strength to weather the storm.

A form that was not new, but no less aligned with the spirit of the times, was the brushpot. Brushpots were usually made of wood, plain



Fig. 1 (cat. no. 4)  
*Layered rockwork painted in various shades of blue*



Fig. 2 (cat. no. 6)  
*Figures found their footing in delicate patches of 'v'-shaped grass*



Fig. 3 (cat. no. 2)  
*A vertical band of clouds and mountains at the back of the vase.*



Fig. 4 (cat. no. 5)  
*Anhua design*

and uncarved: a simple aesthetic that would have appealed greatly to the literati. This shape now found its way into porcelain. It would undoubtedly have been popular with merchants who wanted to feel scholastic. If the tall 'elephant leg' vase and the ovoid jar related to the vertical hanging scroll, the brushpot was akin to the narrow, horizontal hand scroll.

One of the two brushpots in this exhibition hails from the Chongzhen period (cat. no. 4). Its subtly waisted shape is adorned with scenes painted with extraordinary finesse and attention to detail. Its most distinguishing feature, however, is its design, which consists of not one but three related scenes, probably taken from the Ming novel *Fengshen Yanyi*. Even more intriguing is the fact that the novel's plot mirrors the political situation of the late Ming. Perhaps a perceptive client chose this discreet way to draw a parallel between the change from the Shang to the Zhou dynasty, related in the novel, and the protracted and violent struggle now taking place between the Ming court and the Qing invaders.

Unlike the 'elephant leg' and the ovoid jar, the brushpot form endures throughout the Qing dynasty. The form seems to have reached its peak in popularity during the early part of the Kangxi emperor's reign (1662-1722). After this we begin to see far fewer porcelain brushpots, but a new trend of using materials such as lacquer, ivory and bamboo emerges at this time. Perhaps these rarer, patently luxurious materials were more pleasing to the Qing emperors.

One of the most striking features of the pieces in this exhibition is their deep, vibrant blue. An issue of *The Jiangxi Gazetteer* from the early 1600s tells us of the discovery of a new method of cobalt processing. Instead of washing the cobalt salts to obtain their pigment, the salts would now be baked in a red-hot oven. The intense temperatures increased the content of cobalt oxide and reduced iron oxide, amounting to a much more intense blue. Another ingenious innovation involved the use of a magnet to tease out impure particles in the pigment.

In contrast to the brilliant blue of most of our pieces, we also have in this exhibition an exceptionally rare monochrome white bell (cat. no. 5). Monochromes of any form were extremely rare in this period, but we believe this bell to be unique. The quality of the glaze and body is excellent. Lotus-flower roundels, amidst a pattern of small clouds and foliage, are incised into the body using the discreet *anhua* technique. The piece has strong Buddhist connotations; the lotus is a symbol of purity and 'spontaneous generation' symbolizing the divine birth of the Buddha. Bells are also said to symbolize the Buddha's voice and many Buddhist prayers begin with the sound of a bell.

除場景故事，自然景物亦於此時期廣受歡迎。本展青花蓮子蓋罐（編號3）巧飾花鳥，精緻入微，雍麗典雅。文人素來喜愛融匯自然景物於書畫工藝，本品正為佳例。神逸山水，以至自然景色，均為傳統文藝之重要題材，時局動盪，令人加倍神往隱居山林，飄然出世。Julia Curtis敘述，漢族文人不甘為蠻夷效力，寄情山水，既可潔身避世，又不違儒家節操。即使無法逃避朝政崩壞，戰亂連年，亦可寄情於書畫工藝，珍瓷雅器，暫賞自然恆古不變之盎然意趣，聊遣世道衰亂之抑鬱愁懷。

此外，另一與此時期相關之工藝，應數筆筒。筆筒雖非始創於此時，卻與其精神甚為相符。此器以木材製成，筒身光素而無刻紋，簡約清麗，相信深為文士所喜。瓷器筆筒，始製於此時期，迎合商賈追求文人風雅之意。若說筒瓶或與立軸相關，筆筒則可與橫軸呼應。

本展兩個筆筒之其一（編號4），為崇禎年器，筆筒束腰，描繪風景細膩如詩，一絲不苟，並且兼收明代《封神演義》相關場景三幅，其見神妙。該作隱諷晚明政局，委約此作者，或有意暗將故事其中商周換代之歷史，比作明室遭滿清外族入侵之時局。

上述風格之筒瓶及蓮子罐，在清朝開國後逐漸絕跡，瓷筆筒則繼續流行。此品類於康熙（1662-1722年）早期至為盛行，過後逐漸鮮見，然漆、象牙、竹等材質筆筒則始製於該時期，或因清帝喜愛此等質材貴重罕有，故而格外青睞。

本展展品其一重要特色，乃其青花鈷藍發色明豔。1600年代初《江西志》記載，發現鈷料提煉新法。過往鈷料經淘洗提煉，新法則以爐火高溫煉成。高溫令氧化鈷及還原氧化鐵兩種成份增加，青花鈷藍因而遠為鮮豔。另一創新技術，則利用磁鐵吸出鈷料雜質。

除青花瓷外，本展並呈獻一件珍罕白釉吊鐘（編號5）。單色釉罕見於此時期，本品更應為孤例，釉色亮澤，器形



Another piece in the exhibition with a link to Buddhism is the small jardinière or *kang* (cat. no. 7). What a tremendous rendition of an elephant! Painted by an artist who most likely had never seen one, it is voluminous by rumour. The body seems almost spherical with its great folds of hide. It is said that the Buddha's mother, Queen Maya, was visited by a white elephant in a dream the night she conceived the Buddha.

Fig. 6 (cat. no. 4)  
A flat unglazed  
base from the  
Chongzhen period



Running in chronological order, the last item in the exhibition is a beautiful brushpot dating from the first twelve years of the Kangxi period (cat. no. 8). Contrasted with our Chongzhen brushpot (cat. no. 4), which has all the exemplary features of the 1630s, this brushpot illustrates a noticeable change in style. The broad *anhua* bands of the earlier brushpot have been replaced by bands of decoration painted in underglaze blue. The rockwork, formerly fluid and voluminous, is now rendered in the much more delicate, linear 'Master of the Rocks' style, which was developed in the 1640s (fig. 8). An evolution in style is also evident in the working of the base. In the Chongzhen period, brushpots sat on a flat unglazed base (fig. 6). In the early Kangxi period, however, the base was glazed and the brushpot rested on an unglazed channelled foot rim, a feature unique to this period (fig. 7).



Fig. 8 (cat. no. 8)  
'Master of the  
Rocks' style

The kilns in Jingdezhen were destroyed in 1675 during a rebellion and shortly afterwards were rebuilt under imperial control, this time under the Manchurian Qing dynasty. Thus this remarkable period in Chinese porcelain making came to an end. The fifty-odd years during which the kilns were abandoned by the imperial court had unexpectedly become one of the most fruitful and inventive in their history. A combination of new patrons and new influences, sometimes from abroad but mainly from within China itself, had ushered in a spirit of experimentation. Paired with the exquisite craftsmanship that had always characterized the imperial kilns' production, this artistic freedom served to create a body of porcelains that remains unparalleled today. Some of the very finest pieces of this era are celebrated in the following pages.

雅緻，巧飾暗花團蓮紋，團花外綴精細卷葉雲紋，深蘊佛教涵義；佛教以蓮花為潔淨，釋迦牟尼佛降生時，蓮花自然盛放，而釋迦覺悟成道，則一步一蓮。鐘，代表菩薩妙音，而信眾念佛，亦多先敲鐘。

本展另有一青花掃象圖盆（編號7），與佛教相關。盆身繪一大象，象身近乎渾圓，象皮皺摺深而密，令人捧腹，相信畫師本人從未親眼見過大象。據佛經記載，摩耶夫人夢六牙白象，乃釋迦牟尼自化白象而入夫人之胎。

本展最後一件展品，為康熙十二年製之青花採蓮圖筆筒（編號8）。比較上述崇禎年製筆筒（編號4），崇禎年器帶1630年代特色，本品則明顯經歷風格變遷。前者口沿及筒足帶暗花，本品則以釉下青花紋飾取代。前者山石紋飾豐潤，筆法流暢，本品則描繪細緻，顯示1640年代發展成、較為細緻之畫風（圖8），西洋學者稱之 Master of the Rocks。另一風格演變，可見於底部。崇禎年器平底、澀胎無釉（圖6），本品製於康熙早期，足底見澀胎圈足，中央施釉，為此時期獨有特色（圖7）。

景德鎮窯於1675年因叛變遭受破壞，隨即重建並納入清廷監管，明末之獨特製瓷時期因而結束。晚明朝廷棄窯廠

五十餘載，卻竟成就景德鎮有史以來最大膽創新之時期之一，成果豐碩。為迎合商賈文士要求，並吸收新興藝文風格，兼受海外啟發，因此成就實驗精神，氣象煥然一新。景德鎮藝匠素來造詣驕人，此時乍獲自由，創製成品精妙絕倫，空前絕後。本展嚴選此時期菁華佳作，謹與同好諸君共賞。



Fig. 7 (cat. no. 8)  
A glazed base with channelled  
foot rim from the Kangxi period





*Eight Transitional  
Treasures*



Deliberately misshapen, produced from a coarse clay and fritted at the edges, this dish is of a radically different style from anything produced in China before, and indeed since. It owes its existence to the Japanese demand for porcelain for use in the tea ceremony during the early 17th century.

Its function would have been to present food during the *kaiseki*, a small meal of delicacies served during the tea ceremony prior to the serving of a thick tea called *koicha*.

The dish is decorated in a spirited manner with four horses set on a speckled blue ground. Most likely the horses were covered in a 'wax resist', or indeed paper, in order to protect them from the cobalt blue speckles that were blown onto the surface through a tube with a gauze-covered end. This technique is known in Japan as *fukizumi*, 'blown ink'.

It is quite possible that these are four of the eight horses that pulled the chariot of King Mu, an emperor of the 10th century BCE. Each horse had supernatural powers and indeed almost supernatural names. For instance, 'Beyond Earth' had hooves that did not touch the ground; perhaps that is him flying above the other three.

Distortions, imperfections, coarse clay and rim fritting – known affectionately as *mushikui* ('insect bites') – all appealed to the Japanese aesthetic. This dish is from a group of wares referred to in Japanese as *kosometsuke* ('old blue and white'). The rarest and indeed most treasured forms of this genre of tea ceremony items seem to be the intentionally misshapen pieces that perhaps reflect the subtle randomness of nature's shapes.

DIA. 24.2 cm 9½ in  
直徑: 24.2 公分 9½ 英寸





Painted in an exacting hand in vibrant cobalt blue, this vase deftly combines all the techniques invented during this period. Layered rockwork gives the scene both depth and monumentality; a bank of swirling clouds forms the 'back' of the vase and 'v'-shaped grass grounds the figures in the scene.

The tall sides of the vase allow the painting to be viewed in the manner of a monumental Ming hanging scroll, whose elongated form may well have inspired the creation of this new shape.

The central figure, enthroned on rockwork, is the Star God of longevity Shou Lao. He is easily recognizable by his tall domed

forehead, denoting wisdom, and an elongated beard, representing longevity. The deer with their slender, angular legs and jaunty demeanor act as Shou Lao's vehicle and are the only animals able to find *ling-chi*, the plant of immortality.

Shou Lao is portrayed here giving an audience to a group of legendary Daoist deities known as 'The Eight Immortals', in whose company he is often depicted. All of them were born as mortals and attained immortality through their good deeds. They are identifiable by the different attributes they carry and each has remarkable powers.

H: 42.5 cm 16<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in  
高: 42.5 公分 16<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> 英寸





One of the Eight Immortals is Li Tieguai, the bearded figure offering incense at the table. In order to visit other immortals, Li Tieguai would free his soul from his body while entrusting his earthly form to an apprentice. On one occasion this apprentice became convinced that he was dead and would not return burnt his body. However Li Tieguai did return and found the only body he could enter was that of a homeless beggar who had not yet been cremated, thus he became the beggar immortal.

Next to him, holding a basket, is Han Xiangxi, who could magically produce flowers. He climbed the immortalizing peach tree and fell to the ground, although he died on landing he came back to life gaining immortality.

Lu Dongbin is depicted bearing on his back a sword known as *chan yao kuai*, or 'devil-slaying sabre'. Presented to him by the fire dragon, whom he met as a young man when travelling to Mount Lu, he used the sword to eliminate wrongs and not to slay his enemies as he believed compassion to be the route to perfection.

Holding a lotus, a symbol of compassion and longevity, is He Xiang, the only female immortal. She was instructed in a dream by a divine figure to feed on a constant diet of powdered mother of pearl and moonbeams thus acquiring, in classic Daoist alchemic style, immortality.

The figure holding a small cup is Zhongli Quan. Born into a prominent family, he became a general who fled to the mountains

during a battle, where he became a disciple of the Lord Emperor of the East Mountain (*Donghua Dijun*), the King of the Immortals.

In the other group Zhang Guolao holds a fishdrum made of a bamboo tube containing two rods with which to strike it. He rode backwards on a white mule, travelling thousands of miles to perform good deeds. At the journey's end he would fold the mule up like a piece of paper and put it away in his wallet. When ready to resume his journey he would spurt water onto the beast from his mouth and it would resume its normal form.

Playing the flute is Lan Caihe, a travelling singer and beggar who donated all his money to the poor and who was awarded immortality after nursing a beggar and washing his sores.

Cao Guojiu was reputed to be the brother of Empress Cao. Ashamed of crimes of his brother he decided to live a reclusive life during which he met the immortals Zhongli Quan and Lu Dongbin, who taught him Daoist magical arts. After many years of practice and cultivation, Cao himself also became an immortal. He is holding a yinyang tablet that produced heavenly sounds.

There are numerous myths and interpretations concerning these magical figures added to which there are regional interpretations concerning both their origins and attributes. If one adds to this that most of the artists would not have been schooled in hagiography it helps to explain the many variations one finds in the depiction of these Immortals.





This elegant ovoid jar with its flush-fitting domed cover was an innovative form that emerged in the potter's atelier in the 17th century. The shape presented the artist with a splendid porcelain canvas which in this instance he has used to showcase his remarkable skill in depicting nature.

The subject of nature has an enduring tradition in Chinese painting and one senses in this artist's skilful brushstrokes his sensitivity to the natural realm. In rich shades of cobalt blue, the artist has decorated the jar with a family of kingfishers; some are perched on a stem of bamboo amid bushes of hibiscus and rose growing from rockwork while others hover above. A kingfisher on a branch of camellia decorates the cover.

Literati scholars, artists in their own right, dreamed of escaping the world of politics, intrigue and corruption during this turbulent time to live a secluded life amongst nature. Certainly some did, but most stayed closer to home, contenting themselves with their collections of objects and porcelains, many of which found their inspiration in the natural world.

H: 27.2 cm 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in

高: 27.2 公分 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> 英寸



This brushpot, a masterpiece of the Chongzhen period, is painted in a deep, vibrant cobalt blue in the most precise yet painterly of hands. Remarkable variations of expression have been given to the faces and deportment of the figures. With an economy of brushstrokes, the amused look on the female figure as she acquiesces to the theft of peaches by the mischievous monkeys, the comradely spirit emanating from the three figures in the cave as well as the encounter of the stern military figure standing beside a less than fierce tiger and the literatus.

Three scenes are depicted, separated by vertical layered rockwork and swirling cloudbanks. Their iconographic connection is indicated by a river, skillfully depicted with swift horizontal strokes, that runs through the decoration and links the scenes. The scenes appear to represent episodes from the Ming novel *Fengshen Yanyi* that take place on Mount Kunlun, a Daoist Paradise, during the declining years of the Shang dynasty.

In the first scene, three characters from the novel are depicted on a lofty mountain pathway. One, standing by the face of a rock dressed in scholar's robes and holding a flywhisk is probably identifiable as the hero

of the novel, the brilliant military strategist Jiang Ziya, who goes on to bring victory to the Zhou dynasty. Confronting him with his hand held out in a gesture of warning is an imposing figure wearing military attire, accompanied by a tiger. This is probably Zhao Gongming, also known as Marshal Zhao, who in the story is enlisted as an advisor by the cruel and decadent last ruler of the Shang. Behind the Marshal is a regal female figure, probably Xi Wangmu, a senior deity and ruler of Mount Kunlun. She is accompanied by an attendant.

In the charming second scene, two light-coloured apes dangling acrobatically from a fruit-laden tree jutting from a rock cooperate to pass a sprig of peaches into a basket-scoop held out on a pole by a simply-dressed young girl kneeling by a river. She probably represents one of Xi Wangmu's hand-maidens, sent to collect peaches for a banquet. This scene has multiple echoes. Monkeys and peaches recall Sun Wukong ("Monkey" from the "The Journey to the West") who steals a peach from Xi Wangmu's garden to obtain immortality, while the light colouring of the apes suggests the story of the White Ape who steals a peach to give to his sick mother.

H: 20.8 cm 8 $\frac{1}{5}$  in  
DIA: 18.8 cm 7 $\frac{1}{8}$  in

高: 20.8 公分 8 $\frac{1}{5}$  英寸  
直徑: 18.8 公分 7 $\frac{1}{8}$  英寸







The third scene is more tranquil. Here three figures are shown seated on a ledge over a lake, all overhung by rocks. The iconography is not immediately evident, but it is possible the figures represent the Three Teachings, of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. The venerable figure resting against a recumbent deer, a symbol of longevity, may be Laozi, the founder of Daoism, who is said to have disappeared from the mortal world and have ascended to Mount Kunlun on a white deer. He appears to be holding up the elixir of immortality while in discussion with a Buddhist monk wearing a patchwork robe and a Confucian scholar, identifiable by his jade hair ornament. Beneath them is a figure of an acolyte gathering what appears to be a sprig of lingzhi, the fungus of immortality.

As a masterpiece among brushpots, we can admire the sumptuous intensity of the cobalt-blue; we can marvel at the remarkable prowess of the artist who decorated it; we can even make an educated guess about the identity of the figures depicted. But is there any meaning beyond this? The Fengshen Yanyi treats of a change of dynasties, from the Shang to the Zhou, while the Chongzhen period was on the cusp of an equally tumultuous and acrimonious change, from the Ming to the Qing. Is it too great a stretch to imagine the decoration of this brushpot to be a coded statement of political belief?





Bells are an exceptionally rare form in Chinese porcelain. Indeed this very finely potted white bell of the Chongzhen period would appear to be unique. The body has been very finely incised with three large roundels of flowers amongst small clouds set between further incised bands of flower and wave/scroll and wave pattern at the shoulder and wavy unglazed rim.

The flowers in the roundels are rather hard to accurately identify, on their own we may class the flowers as lotus but the leaves and buds point more towards peony. Perhaps deliberately or perhaps unwittingly the artist has made an object suitable for all markets, to Buddhists for whom a lotus is a symbol of purity, Daoists for whom the peony is a symbol of nature's beauty and Confucianists for whom 'music was a manifestation of virtue and one of the pillars of a properly ordered society.'

Although extremely rare, porcelain bells in blue and white are known from the previous Tianqi period. Equally rare are blue and white as well as monochrome bells from the Qing period of which examples

are housed in the Palace museum. However no other monochrome bell from this period seems to be recorded.

Two blue and white bells made during the previous Tianqi Period are known. One was formerly in the Alfred Clark Collection and one is in the collection of the Palace Museum Beijing, which interestingly is decorated with eighteen lohans. (*The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum* – 35 – Blue and White Porcelain with Underglaze Red II, Commercial Press, Hong Kong, 1995, p. 232-3, no. 212)

From the ensuing Qing Dynasty two monochrome bells are in the Palace Museum, a Qianlong (1736 – 1795) white glazed bell and a Kangxi (1662 – 1722) 'snowflake blue' glazed bell both illustrated in *The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum*, Monochrome Porcelain, Commercial Press, Hong Kong, 1995, p. 129, no. 118. There is also a 'snowflake blue' glazed bell from the Kangxi period with a dragon handle also in the Palace Museum, *ibid*, p. 90, no. 83.

H: (without stand): 19.7 cm 7¾ in

高 (不連底座) : 19.7 公分 7¾ 英寸



This tall elegant form is known in China as an 'elephant leg' vase and in the West as a 'rolwagen' (1). An invention of the Chongzhen potter, it stands on a flat unglazed base and presents to the artist a broad surface ideal for painting continuous landscapes and mountainous scenes. As on this vase, the scenes are usually set between broad incised *anhua* ('hidden') bands at the shoulder and foot.

Painted in a vivid cobalt blue (2), the figure seen here riding a spotted deer is Zhong Kui, the fabled King of Ghosts. It is very rare that Zhong Kui is depicted riding a deer. The bat flying over his shoulder however seems to be a constant companion, and is a symbol of abundant happiness and good fortune.

The artist has conveyed to us a marvelous spirit of stubbornness in the deer, as it determinedly resists being pulled by a demon.

Legend has it that Zhong Kui set forth from his hometown with his friend Du Ping to take part in the imperial examinations. Passing these exams would set one on the path to high office. A brilliant scholar, Zhong

Kui passed with the highest marks in the land, attaining the title of *zhuangyuan*, or principal graduate. The emperor, however, had other ideas and stripped Zhong Kui of his title due to his extreme ugliness. Deprived so cruelly of his hard-earned title, Zhong Kui committed suicide by smashing his head against the palace gates, thus damming himself to hell. Unlike the mortal emperor, the Hell King recognized Zhong Kui's genius and named him 'King of Ghosts', entrusting him with the task of hunting and capturing ghosts for all eternity.

Zhong Kui later returned to the mortal world to rid the Emperor Xuanzong (712-756) of the ghosts who haunted him during an illness. In his dream the emperor saw a small ghost stealing a purse from his favourite concubine. A larger ghost wearing an official's hat, like the one we see Zhong Kui wearing here, then captured the smaller ghost, tore out his eye and ate it. The emperor awoke from his evil dream cured of his illness and out of gratitude awarded Zhong Kui the title of judge.

H: 42.5 cm 16¾ in  
高: 42.5 公分 16¾ 英寸









Skilful brushstrokes in deepening shades of blue create the heavy folds of skin of this voluminous elephant. Standing amongst various pots and jars of water, he looks with some trepidation at the two figures standing to one side, a military officer and a Buddhist monk.

Perhaps his wariness is due to the fact that he knows he about to be washed. The scene of 'washing the elephant' or *saoxiang* translates literally as 'sweeping the elephant'. Interestingly the word *xiang* is a homophone, meaning both elephant and illusion. Thus we have a scene whose meaning can be interpreted as 'sweeping away illusions', a pun that the Ming literati would no doubt have appreciated.

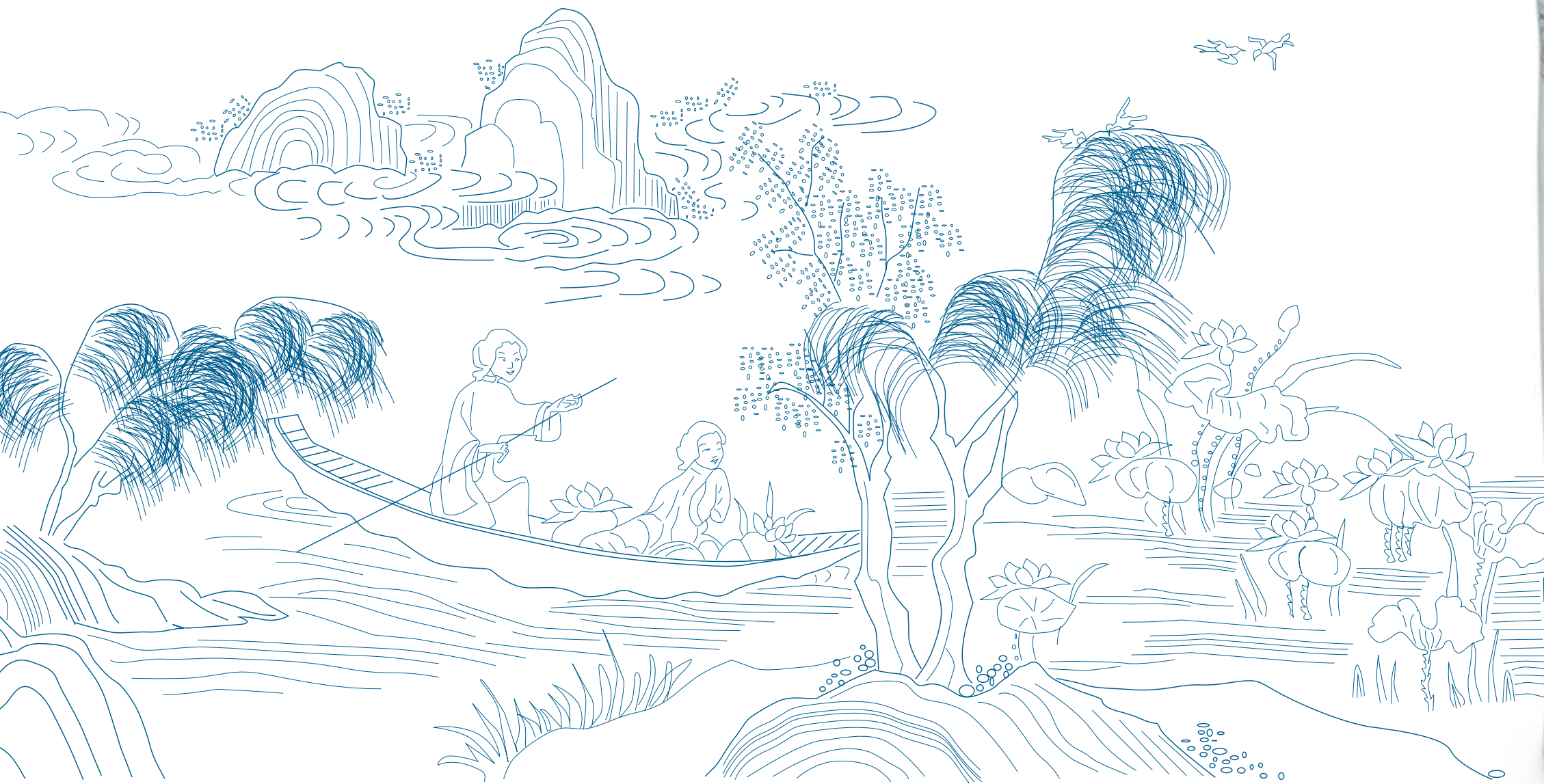
The elephant occupies a significant position in Buddhist legend. The Buddha's mother, Queen Maya, had been childless for many years when she was visited in a dream by a white elephant holding a white lotus. It walked around her three times and entered her womb; at that moment the Buddha was conceived.

H: 18.2 cm 7½ in  
DIA: 21.5 cm 8½ in

高: 18.2 公分 7½ 英寸  
直徑: 21.5 公分 8½ 英寸









The brushpot, resting on an unglazed channeled foot rim, has been painted in soft cobalt-blue tones and washes with a continuous river landscape. The scene is laid out laterally in the manner of handscroll painting.

The scene represents a scholarly idyll. On a broad terrace servants are preparing tea for their masters, whose attention has been drawn away from their game of go by a flock of birds.

Serenely rowing towards them are two smiling ladies. They have been out gathering the lotus flowers growing in the waters and now they drift towards the pavilion past trees growing on rocky outcrops. The white undecorated area has been intentionally used to represent the expanse of the sky, in which mountains emerge from swirling clouds.

The unglazed channeled foot rim and the manner of painting rockwork with curved brush strokes, referred to as “Master of the Rocks”, are features that had been evolving since the mid 1640s. The incised anhua bands found at the rim and foot of the Chongzhen pieces now give way to underglaze blue bands in wave and cracked ice design.

Likewise, the base of the pot is now glazed as opposed to the flat unglazed bases



《翰苑文章》款

of the Chongzhen pieces. The base on this pot bears a four-character mark that reads Han Yuan Wen Zhang, “Scholarly Essays from the Garden of Writing Brushes”. Han Yuan part refers (almost certainly) to the Hanlin Academy.

We have not been able to identify this particular scene but often the scenes found on transitional pieces suggest narrative themes. It is likely that these depict episodes from stories or plays that circulated orally or were current in woodblock-illustrated books unfortunately now lost to us.

H: 16.5 cm 6½ in  
DIA: 17.7 cm 7 in  
高: 16.5 公分 6½ 英寸  
直徑: 17.7 公分 7 英寸





