

SPEAKING FOR THE CHICKEN CUP:
a case study in Chinese art collecting

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Speaking for the Chicken Cup: A Case Study in Chinese Art Collecting

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my own original work.

I would like to acknowledge that a small portion of the methodology section of Chapter 1 in this thesis includes recycled material from the courses ARTH8012 Methodologies of Art History and ARTH6080 Art and Visual Culture of the Long Eighteenth Century, 1660-1815. Both courses included assignments where I had incorporated discussions on methodologies of art history.

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ABSTRACT

In 2014, mainland Chinese collector Liu Yiqian bought a Ming dynasty Chenghua-period chicken cup from the European-based Meiyintang collection, at a Sotheby's auction for US\$36 million. The record-breaking price brought public interest to the chicken cup which was well-known in antique collecting circles. The sale focussed attention on the topics of the Chenghua era, Western collectors, and the contemporary mainland Chinese buyers. This thesis examines these three areas to discover the rich and complex representation of the chicken cup over its lifespan of more than 500 years. The study analyses the chicken cup's transformation from a wine vessel to a collectable antique, and from a work of art to the 'Holy Grail' among today's collectors. Art historical methodologies are employed to assist the discussion in this thesis, including theories of iconography, material culture, biography and social history, connoisseurship and philosophy of aesthetics. The study reveals that the chicken cup often speaks on behalf of extant chicken cups and other antique treasures. Importantly, it epitomises a complicated imperial narrative, provides evidence of the development of Western taste in Chinese aesthetics and exemplifies the ardent pursuits of contemporary mainland buyers. The multifaceted significance demonstrated in this research attempts to fill the academic gap for this eminent piece of historical porcelain, acknowledging the necessity of using multiple viewpoints to adequately evaluate its place in history. This offers a model for application to investigate other forms of Chinese art.



Figure 1 The chicken cup sold at Sotheby's Hong Kong in April 2014¹
(height 4.1 cm; diameter of rim 8.3 cm; diameter of foot 3.8 cm)

¹ Images are taken from "The Meiyintang 'Chicken Cup,'" Sotheby's, accessed July 8, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2014/meiyintang-chicken-cup-hk0545.html>.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION



Figure 2 The Sotheby's team after the Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art Spring Sales 2014²

Sotheby's Hong Kong issued a press release on 8 April 2014 upon the conclusion of the Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art Spring Sales. The headline stated 'The Meiyintang Chenghua "Chicken Cup", sold for HK\$281.24 million/US\$36.05 million to the Shanghai Collector Mr Liu Yiqian', followed by 'World Auction Record for Chinese Porcelain'.³ Similar headings spread throughout the art market and attracted people's attention to the celebrated porcelain wine

² Image is retrieved from "Ming Dynasty 'Chicken Cup' Sold for Record \$36M," *Daily Mail*, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2599498/Ming-Dynasty-chicken-cup-sold-record-36M.html>.

³ Meiyintang is a famous European Collection owned by the Zuellig Brothers—Gilbert Zuellig (1918–2009) and Stephen Zuellig (1917–2017) who were renowned collectors of Chinese art. See the press release in "Sotheby's Hong Kong Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art Spring Sales Conclude With Astounding Results," *Sotheby's*, accessed July 8, 2017, <http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/BID/3075974969x0x741654/1f6f0a40-a3ff-425d-8b1c-d3b5817dc47e/741654.pdf>. There was a Chinese porcelain vase from the Qing dynasty fetched a higher price at £51.6 million in 2010. However, the piece was never paid for. Find the story at Patrick Sawyer and Claire Duffin, "Mystery over £51m Sale of Chinese Vase," *The Telegraph*, accessed September 20, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/interiors/antiques/9075120/Mystery-over-51m-sale-of-Chinese-vase.html>.

vessel made during the Ming Chenghua period (1464–1487). Art collectors and scholars whose interests lie in historical Asian art would have been familiar with the object's fame because it was not the first time the chicken cup (Figure 1) had achieved an extraordinary sum. Almost every time one of these cups has appeared at auction, it has created an uproar in the art market. In the 1980 Sotheby's Hong Kong auction, the same piece was sold for HK\$5.28 million (US\$1.08 million).⁴ In 1999, also at Sotheby's Hong Kong, it achieved a then world record for Chinese porcelain at HK\$29.17 million (US\$3.70 million). In three decades, the price of the cup trebled.

The astonishing selling price of US\$36 million placed its buyer, avid art collector and billionaire Liu Yiqian, under the spotlight. Liu was a secondary school dropout. He was a taxi driver before he accumulated his wealth on the stock market and became one of the first millionaires in China during the 1980s. Liu and his spouse began investing in art in the early 1990s, when the domestic art market was relatively deserted. It was a decade later that the emerging generation of Chinese art collectors and investors began to stir up the marketplace.⁵

There has been much speculation about Liu's motives for the acquisition. On the day that he completed the transaction with Sotheby's, his unexpected act of sipping hot tea from the antique wine cup led to criticism from others, who called it a display of vanity. Liu explained, 'Emperor Qianlong has used it, now I've used

⁴ "Sotheby's Hong Kong Presents The Meiyintang Chenghua 'Chicken Cup,'" *Sotheby's*, accessed July 15, 2017, <http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/BID/5285671237x0x733391/82877845-72F9-42E9-BE6B-9B02BE658E55/733391.pdf>. US\$1.08 million is based on the exchange rate in 1980 between HKD and USD. For historical exchange rate, see "Hong Kong Dollar," *Trading Economics*, accessed July 20, 2017, <https://tradingeconomics.com/hong-kong/currency>.

⁵ Liu's stories are discussed in Jiayang Fan, "The Emperor's New Museum," *The New Yorker*, accessed July 20, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/07/the-emperors-new-museum>. See also Andrey Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market* (Farnham and Burlington: Lund Humphries, 2012), 43.

it. I just wanted to see how it felt'. His wife, Wang Wei, was more prudent with words. She stated that 'my husband and I wanted to buy this small piece of history...and bring it back to China'.⁶ Indeed, many recent purchases of Chinese ancient works by Chinese collectors—especially those from mainland China—have been attributed to some level of patriotism. The Chinese government also encourages restitution and repatriation by offering incentives as part of the Cultural Relics Recovery Program.⁷ However, some radical commentators have questioned the legitimacy of the auction's conduct, suspecting a carefully devised scam carried out by Sotheby's and Liu to deceptively raise the price of the chicken cup for the purpose of the collector's future mortgage or tax abatement.⁸ Others believe that the purchase of the chicken cup provided a distraction from Liu's purchase of *Gong Fu Tie* (Figure 4) six months earlier. This was a prominent Song dynasty (960–1279) calligraphy work that Liu had bought at a Sotheby's New York auction for US\$8.23 million. However, shortly after the purchase, questions were raised regarding the authenticity of the work, causing disputes among scholars and placing Liu in an awkward position as the buyer.⁹

⁶ Corey Charlton, "That's a Very Pricey Brew! Billionaire Who Paid £21m for 500-Year-Old Qing Dynasty 'Chicken' Cup Puts It to Good Use - by Sipping Tea from It at the Auction House," *Daily Mail*, accessed July 15, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2703907/Eccentric-Chinese-art-collector-pays-21million-rare-500-year-old-porcelain-cup-uses-drink-worlds-expensive-cup-tea.html> and Lisa Murray, "Chinese Collector Wang Wei on Life, Art and Why a Teacup Is Worth \$US36 Million," *Financial Review*, accessed July 15, 2017, <http://www.afr.com/lifestyle/chinese-collector-wang-wei-on-life-art-and-why-modigliani-is-worth-us170m-20170329-gv918r>.

⁷ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities*, 153.

⁸ Junfeng Zhang, "艺术品拍卖的洗钱与融资疑云:由《2.8 亿鸡缸杯背后的合法洗钱》一文所想到的 [Money Laundry and Financing behind Art Auction: A Thought after the article 'The Legitimate Money Laundry behind the HKD280 Million Cup']," *East Cang*, no. 9 (2014): 112–17.

⁹ *Gong Fu Tie* is a calligraphy work famously done by poet Su Shi (1037–1101) as a farewell letter to his close friend. For the story of Liu's *Gong Fu Tie* acquisition, see Lei Yang, "《功甫帖》事件：有始无终 [The Incident of *Gong Fu Tie* Is Still up in the Air]," *Art in China*, no. 3 (2014): 7–9.

Passionate discussions over the new owner of the object aside, few comprehensive studies of the chicken cup have addressed why it has become so highly prized. Those who have tried to justify its value have tended to simplify the story by quoting from various historical texts to demonstrate the unfailing desirability of chicken cups for generations of connoisseurs, including the Ming and Qing emperors. However, limited explanations have been provided for the causes of such desire.¹⁰ In addition, many historical texts quoted in current studies date back to the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasty (1644–1912). Therefore, they should not be heavily relied upon to explain the recent continuous escalation in the selling price of the chicken cups. The Sotheby's team did a better job than most to justify the cup's pre-auction estimate of HK\$200–\$300 million (US\$25.60–\$38.50 million).¹¹ They invited Regina Krah, President of the renowned Oriental Ceramic Society, to compose an essay touching on aspects such as history, technique, design, quality and provenance. Influential collector and art dealer Giuseppe Eskenazi also appeared in a video for Sotheby's to confirm the outstanding craftsmanship of the imperial treasure and recognise it as an exceptional opportunity for a private collector or public institution to acquire the item.¹²

¹⁰ Articles in the West (examples in footnote 6) reporting the sale of the chicken cup normally focused discussions on the buyer, or only gave a general view of the cup based on Sotheby's press release. Chinese journals which investigated the chicken cup were mainly using historical evidence such as quotation from traditional literature. See some examples in Jialu Shen, "成化鸡缸杯为啥这么贵 [Why the Chicken Cup Is so Expensive?]," *Prosecutorial View*, no. 10 (2014): 93–95 and Chonghan Li, "明成化斗彩鸡缸杯,口吃皇帝打造的天价诱惑 [Ming Chenghua Chicken Cup: The Astronomical Creation of a Stuttering Emperor]," *National Humanity History*, no. 9 (2014): 116–19.

¹¹ This pre-auction estimate was for their 2014 sale of the chicken cup. See "Sotheby's Presents 'Chicken Cup.'"

¹² The paper written by Krah and the video with Eskenazi can be found in "The Meiyingtang 'Chicken Cup'" and "The Meiyingtang 'Chicken Cup' Video," *Sotheby's*, accessed July 8, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/videos/2014/03/meiyingtang-chicken-cup.html>.

In the catalogue entry for the cup, the Sotheby's team endeavoured to address the three prime considerations for potential bidders: rarity, quality, and authenticity.¹³ There are fewer than 20 original Chenghua chicken cups extant globally, with a small number in private hands. This confirms its scarcity—especially being one that is in pristine condition. The skilful rendition of the delicate cup, with its tactile excellence, richness in colour and vibrancy in decoration represents the crowning artistry of the Ming dynasty and arguably all Chinese ceramic production. The eminent provenance of the cup also implies its genuineness as its past owners—Mrs Leopold Dreyfus (1840–1918), Edward Chow (1910–1980), Sakamoto Goro (1923–2016), Eskenazi and the Zuellig Brothers (Meiyintang) carry substantial weight in elite collecting circles.¹⁴ The Deputy Chairman of Sotheby's Asia and the International Head and Chairman of the Chinese Works of Art department, Nicholas Chow—who is also the grandson of Edward Chow—used the term 'Holy Grail' to describe the chicken cup, reinforcing its glory.¹⁵ In addition, Sotheby's emphasised that they are the only auction house to ever handle the Chenghua chicken cups. This essentially denies the genuineness of all other Chenghua chicken cups transacted in other sales, including a restored cup that was sold first by Christie's in 1999 and subsequently

¹³ '真, 稀, 精 [authentic, rare, high quality]' are three key principles in the collecting circle particularly in mainland China. See Yuan Di, "春秋十载铸辉煌 翰海 1994-2004 纪事 [Ten-Year Glory Record of Events in Beijing Hanhai Arts Auction Corp 1994-2004]," *Collectors*, no. 1 (2005): 3–14.

¹⁴ Mrs Dreyfus is listed as the first oversea owner by Sotheby's. The cup's previous owners in between Mrs Dreyfus and the Qing emperors remain unknown. See the provenance of the chicken cup in "Provenance, Exhibited & Literature," *Sotheby's*, accessed July 8, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/auction-essays/meiyintang-chicken-cup/2014/04/provenance-exhibited-literature.html>. Information about the Zuellig Brothers are mentioned in footnote 3.

¹⁵ To differentiate Nicholas Chow and Edward Chow in the thesis. I am using N. Chow, and E. Chow respectively in the following discussions. Watch the video when N. Chow referred the cup as a Holy Grail in "Chicken Cup" Video."

by Bukowskis auction house in 2009.¹⁶ The exclusiveness claimed by Sotheby's implies that they are the experts to consult regarding any scholarly research, and that their findings are to be believed. This also suggests that the understanding of the cup today almost solely depends on Sotheby's own interpretation, which may be limited and biased.

For an object smaller than a fist-size, without a specific production date nor an identified artist, how has this immutable chicken cup been transformed from an emperor's wine vessel into a Holy Grail after half a millennium? Who has conferred its glory throughout the process, and why? This thesis endeavours to answer these questions. It should be clarified that in many cases throughout the thesis, I am not only referring to Liu's chicken cup, but to all existing chicken cups given their shared attributes. This thesis aims to offer a thorough and chronological explanation of how the chicken cup (and chicken cups), as a witness and as evidence, and as a creative outcome and an agent, has participated in different eras. Throughout their history, the cups have been given numerous identities—a wine cup with a utilitarian function, a collectable antique, an object to emulate, a work of art, a commodity and today, a Holy Grail for ceramic collectors. Associated with these identities are accruing narratives of imperial struggles, love stories, technical and social developments, personal aspirations and political strategies. In addition, the cups carry memories of the vicissitudes of regimes in China, the shift of Western taste in Chinese antiquities and emerging enthusiasm in historical material culture among contemporary Chinese citizens. Over the years, the escalating significance of the surviving chicken cups has

¹⁶ Cecilia Nordström, "A Rare Doucai Chicken Cup," *Bukowskis*, accessed July 20, 2017, <https://www.bukowskis.com/en/auctions/554/1326-a-rare-doucai-chicken-cup-ming-dynasty-six-character-mark-and-period-of-chenghua-1465-87>.

depended upon people's perceptions being continuously renewed. The multifaceted representation that the cups hold and continue to accumulate adds to their immense value which has been cherished by those who study, appreciate and collect them. From an art history perspective, such complexity deserves more attention and discussion than the cups' commercial worth.

Methodologies

Several methodologies are employed to facilitate the discussion in this thesis. The approach of material culture underpins the theme of the thesis which aims to draw intangible meanings from tangible objects. An article's 'features, production, and usage' impart its 'cultural meaning as well as the conscious or unconscious, obvious or circuitous beliefs, values and ideas of a specific community or society'.¹⁷ This statement summarises the objective of this research as I attempt to extrapolate a profound historical and cultural significance from the creation, design and techniques of the chicken cups, along with the imitation, collection and trading of them over the course of more than 500 years.

Erwin Panofsky's (1892–1968) iconography and iconology is another key theory applied particularly in Chapter 2, to examine the underlying connection between the design of the cups and the imperial narratives. Panofsky's three-strata method helps build a correlation between the work of art and the broader context of

¹⁷ Marianne Hulsbosch, Elizabeth Bedford, and Martha Chaiklin, "Asian Material Culture in Context," in *Asian Material Culture*, vol. 4 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 9–16.

ideology, culture and historical events.¹⁸ In a way, his strategy echoes Hegel's idea that 'art...[is] the vehicle of thought', as well as Herder's idea that 'culture determines [art]'.¹⁹ Some specific methods are employed under the umbrella of Panofsky's theory, such as the biographical approach. This approach usually aims to study the object with respect to artists—as famously explored in Western art history in Giorgio Vasari's (1511–1574) *Lives of the Artists*.²⁰ However, for the chicken cups, the focus of biography is beyond the artists, not only because there is no identified specific artist, but also their creation—the idea, design and execution—involved multiple parties, including imperial patrons, court artisans and factory craftsmen. These expanded biographical narratives hence connect to the broader social history.

Art historian Keith Moxey discussed the relation between an artwork and its social history, stating that 'the work is viewed as an agent rather than the consequence of social change'.²¹ This concept is carried through Chapters 3 and 4, which address how the improved accessibility and availability of Chinese imperial items for overseas audiences has encouraged the shift of Western taste towards Chinese art, and how the dispersed national collection has influenced mainland China's buying behaviours today. This diachronic perceptive development for an

¹⁸ There are three strata captured in Panofsky's method which steer the investigation of an object from identifying the 'form' to understanding the 'idea', and finally to comprehending the 'intrinsic meaning'. Panofsky stated that 'the correct identification of motifs is the prerequisite of their correct iconographical analysis, so is the correct analysis of images, stories and allegories the prerequisite of their correct iconological interpretation'. For more about Panofsky's iconography and iconology, see Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 26–54.

¹⁹ Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, "Hegel and the Birth of Art History," in *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 21–39; Donald Preziosi, "Aesthetics," in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 55–69.

²⁰ Laurie Schneider Adams, "Biography and Autobiography," in *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2010), 101–32.

²¹ Keith P. F. Moxey, "Semiotics and the Social History of Art," *New Literary History* 22, no. 4 (1991): 985–99.

object complements some limitations of Panofsky's method, as the latter tends to focus the discussion on the relatively narrow timeframe in which the object was created.

This thesis follows a relatively chronological order where it seems that only the elite classes have been actively engaged in the history of the chicken cups. From royal nobilities during the last two Chinese dynasties to eminent collectors, connoisseurs and scholars in the West during the twentieth century, and then to today's affluent mainlanders in China, these notable participants in the cups' history implies the Marxist concept that art is a result of social class distinction, and the idea of 'cultural hegemony' defined by politician Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937).²² Yet, what has been less-emphasised is the indispensable contribution of the working classes and the public. The hardworking labourer at the ceramic manufacturers, the massive crowd at international expositions or art shows, the unofficial local archaeological excavators in China, the Chinese street art traders, or even the Red Guard teenagers during the Cultural Revolution are examples addressed in the thesis who have formed an integral part of the narrative.

In art philosophy, the repetitive cycle of art has long been a topic of discussion, from Pliny's (23–79 CE) cyclical metaphor of conception, growth and decay to Vasari's theory of 'born, grow up, become old and die' and Johann Joachim Winkelmann's (1717–1768) periodisation of the history of progression and

²² Walter Benjamin and Michael W. Jennings, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [First Version]," *Grey Room*, no. 39 (2010): 11–38. doi:10.1162/grey.2010.1.39.11. T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 567–93.

decline.²³ There seems to be a cycle of aesthetic development in China and the West, and Chapter 4 addresses this through the concept of living aesthetics. Moreover, it appears that not only ideas occur in cycles, but also objects. Liu's chicken cup, for example, has left China for overseas in the last century, and now, back again.

The methodology of connoisseurship also plays an important role especially given there were numerous copies of the chicken cups made throughout the ages. Authenticity is significantly prized, with art historian John Berger (1926–2017) succinctly remarking that the 'market value depends upon it being genuine'.²⁴ As discussed in the chapters, the antiquarian practice carried out by the emperors, Westerners studying Chinese literature and the question of provenance are all associated with the topic of connoisseurship. The nearly six hundred years of historical memory carried by the chicken cups would be voided if their authenticity was disproved.

Use of Chinese Language

Given my mother tongue, I have been able to research Chinese materials for this thesis, including books, journals and news articles. Except for some important Chinese monographs that have been translated, studies in the Chinese language are under-represented in Western academic discourses. Today, with China and Chinese collectors comprising a significant part of the art market, it is important to incorporate Chinese materials to support a thorough investigation. For example,

²³ Udo Kultermann, *The History of Art History* (Norwalk: Abaris Books, 1993), 3; Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, ed. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 6; Michael Gagarin, ed., *Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 231.

²⁴ Watch John Berger's BBC series *Ways of Seeing* in John Berger, "Ways of Seeing Episode 1," video, 30:04, October 8, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk.

this thesis refers to ancient and recent Chinese texts that describe historical events and working systems, development of government policies, Chinese scholars' viewpoints and statistical data for Chinese antique trading.

For Chinese terminologies and book titles, *pinyin* in italic form will be used for the Chinese pronunciation, and a translation in English will be given when the term or title appears for the first time in the thesis. For quoted excerpts from Chinese sources, English translations will be adopted directly instead of providing the *pinyin*. For Chinese names of individuals, dynasties, reigns and locations, no translation will be provided, except for a few special cases, such as the Meiyintang Collection in Europe.²⁵ Names of Chinese people mentioned in the thesis follow the practice in China where surname comes before the first name. Dates of birth and death (unless unknown) are provided for all deceased Chinese and Western figures mentioned in the thesis, except for Chinese emperors whose reigning period is indicated instead.

Chapter Outline

There are five chapters in this thesis, including the Introduction and the Conclusion. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 build the core of the discussion and form layers of value attached to the cups. The three chapters follow a similar sequence in terms of timeline and region as the order of provenance for the US\$36 million chicken cup, from China in the Ming and Qing periods (Chapter 2) to the West in the early to

²⁵ Meiyintang's translation is "Hall among Rose Beds". If the Chinese monographs and articles do not have an existing scholarly-translated English title, I will take the liberty to translate them based on my best understanding. Similar approach is taken for the Chinese literature quoted in the thesis—translation will be adopted from an existing source before my own. Annex 2, 3, and 4 includes three tables that list down both in Chinese characters and English the Ming emperors, list of dynasties, and Chinese terminologies used in the thesis.

late modern era (Chapter 3) and finally to the contemporary Chinese mainland (Chapter 4).²⁶

Chapter 2 addresses the imperial narratives of the chicken cups. It demonstrates how the cups signify a memoir of the Chenghua Emperor, the summit of ceramic technical development in the Ming dynasty and the antiquarian practices of later rulers, who valued the cups' aesthetic features and political connotations. Connoisseurship is also discussed to lay the foundation for later chapters.

Chapter 3 analyses the catalyst role played by Chinese imperial treasures in relation to shaping Western awareness, studies and the collecting fashion of Chinese antiquities. As part of the imperial collection, the chicken cups are testimony to a three-stage development defined in the chapter.

Chapter 4 examines the incentives behind, and the implications of, prolific art collecting and collections in contemporary China. Patriotic and economic motivations that are intertwined with aesthetic appreciation appear to form the thematic melody among Chinese art buyers today.

This thesis is a process of discovery. It was initially difficult for me to associate the chicken cup's unexceptional appearance with its staggering price. However, as the research proceeded, the rationales behind the fever surrounding the chicken cup became more apparent. Nowadays, with artists, collectors, galleries and auction houses becoming more commercial-oriented, it is particularly important for art historians to persist in enquiring, finding and guarding history's complexity.

²⁶ The cup's provenance is also following an order that goes from China, to the West, and then back to China. The cup was first created in the Chenghua period in the second half of the 1400s, and made its appearance in Europe in the early twentieth century. Subsequently, with Liu's recent purchase in 2014, the cup came back to its birth place – the mainland China. See footnote 14.

CHAPTER 2 THE IMPERIAL NARRATIVES

The Ming dynasty is not so far removed (from our own time),
The gems of Xuan(de) and Cheng(hua) may be seen occasionally.
Their brilliance and perfect colouring are universally praised;
And among them the 'chicken cups' are supreme.

Emperor Qianlong (1776)²⁷

Introduction

The history of the chicken cups is infused with imperial blood. From their creation to being part of later emperors' treasured collections and subject of emulation, the cups were intimately associated with the noble families of China's last two dynastic periods. This royal imprint laid an important foundation for the chicken cups to become keen pursuits of modern and contemporary collectors, which will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

²⁷ The poem is inscribed on a few chicken cup inspired porcelain vessels during the Qianlong period (Figure 10). The entire verse goes '李唐越器人间无，赵宋官窑晨星看，殷周鼎彝世颇多，坚脆之质于焉辨，坚朴脆巧久暂分，立德践行义可玩。朱明去此弗甚遥，宣成雅具时犹见。寒芒秀采总称珍，就中鸡缸最为冠，牡丹丽日春风和，牝鸡逐队雄鸡绉，金尾铁距首昂藏，怒势如听贾昌唤，良工物态肖无遗，趋华风气随时变，我独警心在齐诗，不敢耽安兴以晏'[Yue vessels of the Tang dynasty are no long found. The imperial ware of the Song dynasty is as rare as stars at dawn. Yet *ding* vessels of the Shang and Zhou abound to the present day. Bronze is stronger; vessels of clay are more fragile. The strong survive, the fragile perish. Hard work is valued and should be prized. The Ming dynasty is not so far removed, the gems of Xuande and Chenghua may be seen occasionally. Their brilliance and perfect colouring are universally praised; and among them the 'chicken cups' are supreme. The peonies under a bright sun in springtime, the hen and chicks close together and the cockerel in his glory. With golden tail and iron spurs, his head held high. Standing ready for combat, as if he heard the call of Zang Ping. The gifted artist has rendered nature in all its detail. In a style handed down from former times, yet changing in each successive period. But in my heart I will think only of ancient Odes of Qi, and hesitate to remain abed when it is time to rise at dawn. Translation of the verse is adopted from Stacey Pierson and Amy Barnes, *A Collector's Vision: Ceramics for the Qianlong Emperor* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 2002), 43-45. The name Zang Ping appeared in the translation should be Jia Chang based on the Chinese characters in the song. He was an expert in taming chickens in the Tang dynasty.

In this chapter, three sections lay out the imperial tales epitomised in the cups. In the first section, an iconological and technical discussion links the creation of the cups with the monarch's private emotions and the development of the imperial kiln. In the second section, the collection and imitation of the cups in later reigns suggest the intellectual and political motivations behind rulers' antiquarian activities, which in turn inspired further technical achievements. The third section discusses connoisseurship of the cups as authenticity determines the cups' genuine association with the imperial court, thereby laying the groundwork for later chapters.

Creation of the Chicken Cups

In today's context, in which artistic expression and artwork mediums are abundant, the chicken cups' modest size and humble polychrome decoration may seem plain or even slightly underwhelming. However, these characteristics are closely tied to the stories of the most supreme court of the Chenghua period. The design relates to the monarch's most private longings, and the technique reflects the superlative craftsmanship of the imperial kilns. Hence, the visual and technical examination of the cups form the body of this section and reveal this underlying complexity. When deciphering the vessels' decoration, Panofsky's three-stage interpretation is applied to build a connection from the motifs to the allegories and finally to their symbolic value.²⁸ Social history and biographical approaches, which support Panofsky's method, are also employed in this section. Although iconography and iconology does not necessarily address the technical or material aspect of an artwork, his method can be extended beyond the formal analysis—that is, the

²⁸ Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology," 26–54.

techniques involved in making the chicken cups similarly communicate a broader contextual message.

Like many imperial Chinese antiques, the cups' decoration is full of symbols of auspiciousness. An outdoor scene is depicted on the cups, showing two groups of chicken families punctuated by two sets of flower and stone motifs (Figure 1). In Chinese culture, the red peonies identified on one side of the cups are often associated with wealth and honour, while the lilies in pastel yellow are symbols of longevity, especially when juxtaposed with rocks or stones.²⁹ However, the most exceptional detail on the cups, which also gave them their name, is the chicken motif. As early as the Eastern Han period (25–220 CE), the chicken was attributed five merits: literary, martial, bravery, benevolence and honesty.³⁰ In Chinese, 'chicken' and 'auspicious' share the same pronunciation, *ji*. A rooster motif may represent the sun, or in Daoism, *yang*, which signifies masculinity, power and sky. In contrast, a hen symbolises *yin*, femininity, nurturer and earth, which complements *yang*.³¹ Hence, as a symbol of fortune, chicken motifs were widely adopted in literature and paintings from an early time, but they have never been found on extant porcelain objects preceding the Chenghua period. Further, as an imperial wine vessel for royal families, instead of using the familiar dragon or phoenix motif, the chicken theme is seemingly a deliberate instruction from the throne.³² Some scholars attribute the selection of the chicken motif to the rooster

²⁹ Patricia Bjaaland Welch, *Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery* (Tokyo, Rutland, Vermont, Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2008), 26, 34-36, 64-65.

³⁰ This five virtues were mentioned in the *Hanshi Waizhuan* [The Outer Commentary to the Book of Songs by Master Han] compiled during the Han dynasty. Wanzhang Zhu, "画中之鸡与吉祥寓意 [Chicken in Paintings and the Meaning of Auspicious]," *Cultural Relics World*, no. 2 (2017): 39–42.

³¹ Welch, *Chinese Art*, 85-86.

³² It is to note that the dragon motif remains popular in the Ming dynasty.

zodiac in the first year of the Chenghua period.³³ However, the emperor's emotional obsession may also help to explain the design of the chicken cups.

This brings the story back to the rocky childhood of the Chenghua Emperor. Born in 1447, Zhu Jianshen, the later Chenghua Emperor, was the first son of the Zhengtong Emperor, or Zhu Qizhen (r. 1436–1449 and 1457–1464).³⁴ As the eldest son of the king, he was expected to succeed his father as the future emperor. However, when Jianshen was two years old, the Zhengtong Emperor was taken prisoner in a battle with the Mongolia Wala tribe. As a result, the emperor's brother (and Jianshen's uncle), Zhu Qiyu, claimed the throne as the new ruler of the Ming dynasty—the Jingtai Emperor (r. 1450–1457). Less than a year after the Jingtai reign began, the former Zhengtong Emperor was released by the Mongolians. The new king was not willing to hand his crown back to his brother, so he interned the former emperor in the Southern Palace. Although Jianshen was still vested as the crown prince supported by the empress dowager; the conferment was merely a nominal title. He was isolated from a young age and had limited access to parental kinship. His princely title was also removed after a few years by his ruling uncle. In 1457, Qizhen's supporters staged a coup and overthrew the ailing Jingtai Emperor. Qizhen was re-installed as the emperor, and Jianshen was subsequently restored as the crown prince. Qizhen changed his reign mark from Zhengtong to Tianshun, symbolising a wish for peace.³⁵ In 1464,

³³ Zhu Jianshen ascended the throne in 1464 which was in fact a monkey year, but he established the official reign mark Chenghua in 1465 which was then a rooster year.

³⁴ Chenghua is the reign mark set by the emperor after he ascended the throne. The name Zhu Jianshen is used here first before he became the king. Given the Ming emperors share the same surname, to avoid confusion, Jianshen will be used thereafter until he became the emperor. After death, the emperors were often vested with a posthumous and a temple name, in the case of Zhu Jianshen, it is Chundi and Xianzong respectively. In Chinese context, the temple name is often used today to refer to the emperor instead of the posthumous name, and the reign mark is used to refer to the period of time during the reign. See Annex 2 with the list of Ming emperors' names, reign marks, posthumous names and temple names.

³⁵ The literal meaning of *Tianshun* is a smooth reign under the heaven.

after the Tianshun Emperor's demise, Jianshen became the eighth emperor of the Ming dynasty at 16 years of age, and he established his reign mark as Chenghua. The series of political upheavals during Jianshen's childhood had a negative effect on him. It was often believed that the Chenghua Emperor's stutter and his severe sense of insecurity and inferiority was caused by these anxious childhood memories.³⁶

Moreover, these experiences help to explain Emperor Chenghua's strong emotional attachment to Lady Wan (1428–1487), who started as Jianshen's servant and was 19 years older than him. Historical records portray her as an ambitious individual whose humble origin stimulated her appetite for power and wealth.³⁷ She began taking care of Jianshen when he was three years old and became a substitute mother figure in the young prince's formative years, when Jianshen's father was confined and his mother was not always available. As a result, the emperor's emotional reliance on Wan grew stronger, and his fondness for her soon secured her position as the emperor's favourite concubine. When Wan was later accused of murdering Jianshen's sons by his other wives, the emperor hardly placed any blame on her. At the age of 40, eight months after Wan died, the emperor also passed away.³⁸ Although his demise may be attributed to an overdose of immortality medicine that was made primarily using mercury, many still ascribe the Chenghua Emperor's passing to his sorrow

³⁶ Ling Chen and Qiaohui Wang, “明宪宗的‘恋母心理’与万贵妃擅宠 [Ming Xianzong's Oedipus Complex and the Spoiled Wan Guifei],” *Journal of Inner Mongolia Agricultural University* 13, no. 3 (2011): 330–31, 339, doi:10.3969/j.issn.10.1009-4458.2011.129.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Most of the Ming emperors were short-lived due to overdose of the so-called immortality medicine made primarily with mercury. Only five out of the sixteen emperors of Ming had lived beyond forty years old. From the Hongxi to Zhengde Emperor (1425 – 1521) during the Ming dynasty, none of them lived beyond forty years old. See Li, “鸡缸杯 [Chicken Cup].”

following Wan's death, about which he asserted 'Lady Wan has left, and I shall follow as well'.³⁹

Therefore, for the Chenghua Emperor, peace, harmony and family appeared to be his greatest desires, which had perhaps given rise to the chicken motif. The emperor adored a Song dynasty painting that depicts one hen taking care of five chicks (Figure 5). He personally inscribed a poem about the subject on the hanging scroll to express his empathy towards the role of a mother, with the verse stating that 'the virtues of the devoted bird should be made known to the whole nation'.⁴⁰ Hence, the painting is often believed to have inspired the chicken cups. Moreover, some historians have proposed that the cups were dedicated to Wan because she had no children, except for a boy who died as a baby.⁴¹ In Chinese allegory, a cock and a hen in a peony garden denotes a simple and idyllic life, as well as a couple that wants to pursue happiness together and be blessed with prosperity.⁴² Hence, the chicken families painted on the wine vessels appear to symbolise the couple's unfulfilled wish for a prolific and harmonious family. Another interpretation—albeit one that has gained little support—suggested that

³⁹ In the third volume of the *Wanli Yehuo Bian* [An Unofficial Records of the Wanli Period] written by Shen Defu (1578-1642), it recorded the Chenghua emperor's words about the Lady Wan—'万侍长去了，我亦将去矣' [Lady Wan has left, and I shall follow as well]. See Defu Shen, *Wanli Ye Huo Bian* [An Unofficial Records of Wanli Period] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1980), chap. 3, <http://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=262295&searchu=%E4%B8%87%E4%BE%8D%E9%95%BF%E5%8E%BB%E4%BA%86%E5%BC%8C%E6%88%91%E4%BA%A6%E5%B0%86%E5%8E%BB%E7%9F%A3&remap=gb>.

⁴⁰ The entire poem inscribed on the painting scroll (Figure 5) goes '南牖喁喁自别群，草根土窟力能分。偎窠伏子无昏昼，覆体呼儿伴夕曛。养就翎毛凭饮啄，卫防雏稚总功勋。披图见尔频堪羨，德企慈鸟与世闻'. The first three sentences describe how the hen is taking care of her babies which stimulated the envy of the emperor as mentioned in the first half of the last sentence. The second half of the last sentence then mentions Emperor Chenghua's calling for the entire nation to learn from the devoted hen.

⁴¹ Yueyang Wang, "天价鸡缸杯不是风向标 [The Price of the Chicken Cup Is Not the Wind Vane]," *Xinmin Weekly*, no. 15 (2014): 78–79.

⁴² Welch, *Chinese Art*, 85-87.

the Chenghua Emperor created the drawings for the chicken cups himself.⁴³ Although the emperor did possess great artistic talent, so as many rulers during the dynastic period given “arts” was an essential part of their education, this theory is yet to be verified. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the design was sent from the palace artisan workshop to the Jingdezhen imperial factories.⁴⁴

The chicken cups’ pared-back decoration and their relatively small size also imply the Neo-Confucius ideology that was valued during the emperor’s time. Modesty was identified as a shared quality for most porcelain creations during the Chenghua reign, thereby implying the influence of Confucian humility. Neo-Confucianism, which was once popular during the Song era, became prevalent again by the mid-Ming dynasty. It centred around traditional Confucian ideas but encompassed some Buddhist and Daoist philosophies.⁴⁵ The incorporation of diverse ideologies became apparent under the reign of Chenghua. After his traumatic childhood, the emperor appreciated the value of harmony. Therefore, he showed great tolerance towards the various religions in China. His inclusiveness of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism was also expressed in his portrayal in the

⁴³ Chenglong Lv, “柔和淡雅：明代成化御窑瓷器概述 [Soft and Elegant:A Brief Introduction to the Porcelain of the Cheng Hua Period],” *Forbidden City*, no. 11 (2016): 100–121, doi:10.13510/j.cnki.jit.2016.11.012, 101.

⁴⁴ D.F.Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Chinese Export Porcelain* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1974), 45.

⁴⁵ The term Neo-Confucianism was coined by the Jesuit in the seventeenth century. While the Neo-Confucianism agrees to the traditional Confucianism on several presuppositions such as ‘both the universe and life of man...are real’, it also incorporates Buddhist philosophies like ‘transcending birth and death’, and Daoist pursuit ‘to prolong life’. For more detailed discussion, see Siu-chi Huang, *Essentials of Neo-Confucianism : Eight Major Philosophers of the Song Ming Periods* (Westport & London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), doi:10.1007/978-0-387-72639-7.

painting *Yi Tuan He Qi* [A Circle of Good Wills] (Figure 6), where he incorporated a Confucian scholar, a Daoist elder, and a Buddhist *Mile* [Maitreya].⁴⁶

In addition to the design, a key characteristic of the chicken cups is the craftsmanship, particularly the glazing technique *doucai* [contending colours].⁴⁷ *Doucai* is a meticulous colouring process in which a porcelain object is fired twice at different temperatures to stabilise both the underglaze blue enamel and the overglaze polychrome colours.⁴⁸ *Dou* (the first character of *doucai*), which means ‘competing’, denotes that the under- and over-glazes are joined together, vying for glamour.⁴⁹ The double-firing process suggests that the success rate for an uncracked *doucai* ware is relatively low, making it a much rarer category when compared with single-fired blue and white porcelain. Therefore, *doucai* glazing is mostly found on smaller objects because they are less prone to breakage during

⁴⁶ The Buddhist *Mile* [Maitreya] figure that may be recognised immediately is in fact formed by two face-to-face individuals, one of whom is an elderly person wearing a Daoist hairband and the other is a Confucian scholar. Both the Daoist and the Confucian scholars are holding a manuscript in their hand, and the *Mile* [Maitreya] holds a bracelet of Buddhist beads in his left hand. See more in Hui Nie, “朱见深一团和气图轴 [Zhu Jianshen’s ‘A Circle of Good Will’ scroll],” *The Palace Museum*, accessed July 5, 2017, <http://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/231098.html>.

⁴⁷ The term *doucai* is first introduced during the Qing dynasty. Before the term *doucai*, *wucai* was used during the Ming dynasty describing the same technique. See Qingzheng Wang, ed., *简明陶瓷词典* [Concise Ceramic Dictionary] (Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 1988), 32.

⁴⁸ The underglaze blue is applied when the porcelain is in biscuit. Blue enamel is used to outline the pattern and fill in some motifs such as the stones in the chicken cups. A layer of transparent glaze is then applied over the entire body before it is fired for the first time at around 1300 degrees. Subsequently, the second layer of colours is painted on to complete the overall design, and the object is finally re-fired at 700-800 degrees. The transparent glaze applied in between the process separates the two coloured-layers. As a result, enamels painted before the transparent glaze is also called the under-glaze colour, and the latter is referred to as the over-glaze. See Weichao Yu, ed., *A Journey into China’s Antiquity* (Beijing: Morning Glory Publishers, 1997), 80.

⁴⁹ There are three interpretations of *dou* in different literature with the most common explanation of it as contending or competing, written as 斗. Some consider the origin of the *dou* as 豆 which denotes the colour *douqing* or blue, especially given the underlying colour of a *doucai* ware is blue. In addition, 逗, which is also pronounced as *dou*, is considered another possible reading indicating the meaning of play, or a play of colours in this case.

firing, such as the cases of the chicken cups and the grape-decorated stem cups (Figure 7).⁵⁰

Doucai was not invented in the Chenghua period, but it reached its pinnacle during this time.⁵¹ Although Chenghua's blue and white porcelains also enjoy great fame, *doucai*'s perfection is an exclusive achievement ascribed to the era of Chenghua. It is so eminent that the term *doucai* is always mentioned together with Chenghua in later and recent scholarship. Further, when Chenghua's *doucai* wares are discussed, the chicken cups are usually used as an outstanding example. Therefore, Chenghua, *doucai* and the chicken cups frequently appear as a group in various literature discussing Chinese ceramics.

The superior artistry of the Chenghua period may be credited to three factors that were directly or indirectly driven by the imperial court. First, the royal family demanded objects with supreme qualities for their lavish lifestyle. As Lady Wan became favoured, she pursued a luxurious lifestyle that soon corrupted the Chenghua Emperor from his early benevolent policies.⁵² Wan and the eunuchs formed a clique that dominated most imperial decision-making, including what

⁵⁰ In one of the memorials from a court official to the Emperor during the Chenghua period, it was reported that large items during firing would break easier than the smaller objects. See Zhengguang He and Liping Xu, eds., *明代陶瓷大全* [*Ming Ceramic Encyclopedia*] (Taipei: Artist Publishing, 1983), 37-38.

⁵¹ The polychrome wares had actually been existing for several centuries before the Ming dynasty such as the earlier Tang *sancal* [three colours]. Yet, the over-glaze colouring technique is an exclusive invention of the Ming dynasty. *Doucai* is said to have originated in the Xuande period with very few surviving examples such as the *Lotus and Ducks Bowl*. However, the Chenghua period delivered much more exquisite *doucai* wares. See Yong Wang, ed., *明清瓷器真赝对比鉴定* [*Comparison of the Authentic and Forged Ceramics from the Ming and Qing Dynasty*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Works Publishing House, 2002), 12.

⁵² During the beginning years of the Chenghua reign, the emperor launched a few benevolent policies such as reducing exploitation of natural resources, deducting land tax, and selecting talent for the court. However, as his fondness and dependence over Lady Wan getting stronger, the emperor started to delegate responsibilities particularly to the corrupted eunuchs. See Lv, "成化御窑[Porcelain of Chenghua]", 100.

were soon called excessive porcelain orders.⁵³ Large quantities of porcelain were produced. Production was time-consuming, and the cost was uncountable.⁵⁴ However, not all produced goods survived. After firing, only the finest objects were reserved for royal usage, and inferior items, even with minor defect, were scrapped before they could be circulated into the market. This was verified when three Chenghua porcelain scrapyards were discovered at Jingdezhen in the 1980s.⁵⁵ Drinking distilled wine (with a high alcohol content) also became a custom at court, resulting in increased demand for smaller wine vessels.⁵⁶ Even if they were only used for utilitarian purposes, most of the ceramic wares were crafted and decorated with excellence to satisfy the court's indulgence in luxury. The chicken cups appear to have been created under this context.

Secondly, with the start of the Ming dynasty, Jingdezhen rose as the centre for ceramic manufacture and the site of imperial kilns.⁵⁷ The transformation of Jingdezhen did not occur by chance. Some famous factories of the Song and Yuan

⁵³ Chen and Wang, “明宪宗[Ming Xianzong]”, 330-31, 339.

⁵⁴ According to the *Ming Shi* [History of the Ming dynasty] compiled during the Qing dynasty, a massive quantity of porcelain wares for imperial usage were fired during the Chenghua period. The *Ming Xianzong Shilu* [Veritable Record of Ming Xianzong] also recorded memorials from the regional officials recommending a pause of porcelain production given the budget should be spent on relieving the suffered public from natural disasters instead of lavish ceramic production. However, the Chenghua emperor rejected discontinuing ceramic production, but offered other support to the region such as more provisions to the people and less tributes to the court. See Lv, “成化御窑[Porcelain of the Ming Dynasty]”, 103.

⁵⁵ The three sites contain a large number of porcelain ruins which appeared to be deliberately destroyed although only slight flaw may be identified for each item. See Xinyuan Liu, ‘A Study of the Site of the Chenghua Imperial Kiln at Jingdezhen and Related Archaeological Finds,’ in *A Legacy of Chenghua* (Hong Kong: The Jingdezhen Institute of Ceramic Archaeology and The Tsui Museum of Art, 1993), 18–88 and Wang, *Chinese Antiquities*, 79-86.

⁵⁶ Before the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), wine normally had little alcohol content which required larger wine vessels. However, starting from the late Yuan dynasty, distilled wine with higher alcohol content was successfully brewed and favoured by the court. See Liu, ‘Chenghua Imperial Kiln’, 85-86 and Baochang Geng, *明清瓷器鉴定* [Identification of Ming and Qing Ceramics] (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Book Company, 1984), 70-84.

⁵⁷ I am referring the ‘imperial kiln’ as the ceramic factories supervised by the officials and produced ceramics under court patronage. There was an extensive discussion by Margaret Medley about the definition of the imperial kiln. See Margaret Medley, “Ching-Tê Chên and the Problem of the ‘Imperial Kilns’,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29, no. 2 (1966): 326–38.

(1279–1368) periods were destroyed during the change of dynasties and warfare, resulting in the movement of craftsmen to the less disturbed Jingdezhen area.⁵⁸ Jingdezhen was a suitable location to develop the ceramic industry because of its local natural resources, including soil for clay, river water for potting and forest for firewood.⁵⁹ Imperial kilns were officially established at Jingdezhen in the early 1400s.⁶⁰ The Chenghua Emperor further strengthened control over porcelain production by sending eunuch supervisors which encouraged closer collaboration between the palace artisan's workshop and the Jingdezhen imperial factories. Experimentation and innovation were promoted during this time, leading to the success of many favoured outcomes such as the *doucai* colour-glazing technique.

Thirdly, the improvement in craftsmen's status enhanced the quality of the objects. When Mongolian tribes established the Yuan dynasty, they introduced an old-fashioned labour structure that lowered the position of workers to almost slaves, reversing the earlier progress achieved in the Song dynasty.⁶¹ In the century controlled by the Yuan monarchs, the roles of manufacturing labourers remained unchanged for successive generations, and they were unable to travel or marry freely.⁶² This strictness was loosened when the Ming dynasty took over. The factories transitioned, albeit very slowly, to a primitive capitalist handicraft form.

⁵⁸ Luanshu Zhou, 景德镇史话 [History of Jingdezhen], ed. Wenjuan Cao (Shanghai: Shanghai People Publishing House, 1989), 25-79.

⁵⁹ He and Xu, 明代陶瓷 [Ming Ceramic], 8-38.

⁶⁰ Exact year for the opening of imperial ceramic manufacturers at Jingdezhen is still debatable, but it is commonly deemed as the last year of the Jianwen Emperor in 1402. See Zhou, 景德镇 [History of Jingdezhen], 25-79.

⁶¹ During the Song dynasty, the working condition for labourers were improving gradually. However, as Yuan replaced the Song dynasty, given their nomadic background, the working system that developed during the Song dynasty was reversed under the new government of the Yuan dynasty. Ibid.

⁶² Census register was used to track the workers at the ceramic factories. Men are registered as factory labours and their posterity will conduct the same work as they do. Ibid.

Workers enjoyed comparative liberation, and they could pay money in lieu of service to obtain more personal time. As a result, the enthusiasm of the craftsmen increased, leading to improved techniques.⁶³

With the application and expansion of Panofsky's methodology, the chicken cups' thoughtful design and technical sophistication firmly bonds with the emperor's emotional sustenance and the development of the imperial kilns. Carrying these narratives, a handful of cups passed down through the ages, evoking aspirations to collect the objects, as well as to imitate them. The chicken cups became the ancestors' legacy for the new owners, who practised antiquarianism. The cups began to accrue more layers of meanings on top of their existing complexity, as discussed in the next section.

Later Collection and Imitation

The collecting and copying of the chicken cups in the late Ming and the Qing dynasties is evidence of the antiquarian tradition in dynastic China.⁶⁴ Chinese antiquarianism began with *Jinshi Xue* [epigraphy], which traditionally focused on studying bronze and stone inscriptions, but was successively expanded to general antiquities' connoisseurship around the Song dynasty. As the idea echoed the well-established Confucian philosophy of 'believing in and loving the ancients', antiquarianism became a pastime for Chinese scholars and connoisseurs,

⁶³ During the Ming dynasty, the census register remained in most of the Jingdezhen factories although with a relatively better working condition compared with the Yuan dynasty. Successive generations were carrying out the same work from fathers to sons, in a way, it improved the efficiency and possibly, quality of porcelain-making. Zhou, 景德镇 [History of Jingdezhen], 25-79. Yu, *China's Antiquity*, 53-138.

⁶⁴ 'Antiquarianism ... refers to the investigations of the past conducted by antiquaries, scholars who studied antiquity through its material remains as well as through its texts.' See more about the practice of antiquarianism in dynastic China in Peter N. Miller and François Louis, "Introduction," in *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500-1800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 1-24.

especially from the Song period onwards.⁶⁵ The chicken cups, which had a design closely related to the Chenghua Emperor, stimulated a passion for later rulers to collect and emulate them to connect with their predecessors. Further, the chicken cups' technical superiority inspired innovations in polychrome glazing techniques in both the late Ming and Qing eras. Therefore, this section investigates the intellectual and political intentions behind antiquarian studies, as well as developments in richly coloured porcelains.

Antiquarianism practised by those of noble origins created an erudite image and a link to their elite ancestors. In Chinese tradition, the collecting of ancient artefacts dates back as early as the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Copying from old masters has also remained a consistent practice throughout the ages.⁶⁶ The intention of copying is not necessarily to create a forgery, but to pay tribute to forefathers. This may be shown by many of the copied chicken cups later were purposely inscribed with their own reign marks instead of Chenghua. Through antiquarian practice, rulers' acquaintance with the state's heritage supported the image of well-cultured kingship and, importantly, it built a connection with former imperial patrons and owners of the objects, testifying the reigning monarchs' regal authority. In the case of the chicken cups, in addition to the aesthetic appeal, an aura lay in their strong tie with the Chenghua imperial court or, explicitly, the

⁶⁵ In *Lunyu: Shu'er* [The Analects : Shu Er], it is mentioned that '述而不作，信而好古' [A transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients]. Here, 'loving the ancients' echoes with the idea of antiquarianism. See more of the *Analects* in James Legge, ed., "Shu Er," in *The Analects*, chap. 7, <http://ctext.org/analects/shu-er>. This practice of antiquarianism in fact falls into the category of the 'living aesthetics' which will be further discussed in the last section of Chapter 4.

⁶⁶ This copying tradition in China has been well documented especially for art forms like calligraphy. For example, the intellectual from the East Jin Dynasty (317 – 420 CE) Wang Xizhi (303? – 361?) was famous for his semi-cursive style brush writing. His *Lantingji Xu* produced in the year 353 was copied in numerous copies especially during the Tang Taizong's reign (626 – 649). The education in China emphasised copying from old masters in order to perfect a skill. See the story of the famously copied *Lantingji Xu* in Wendan Li, *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 145-147.

emperor and empress. When later emperors collected and commissioned copies of the chicken cups, they were consciously or unconsciously building a continuous string of legitimate ruling power, even though there might be no hereditary entitlement.

This identity was particularly valued by the Qing monarchs. Given their Manchu ethnic background, justifying their reign over the majority of Han Chinese required them to be equipped with knowledge of China's social and cultural history. For example, during the Yongzheng period (1723–1735), an album titled *Guwan Tu* [scroll of antiquities] was commissioned to record many imperial treasures that had been passing down through centuries.⁶⁷ More antique albums and manuals were produced during the Qianlong period (1735–1796), such as pictorial leaves to replicate *duobao ge* [cabinet of treasures].⁶⁸ Emperor Qianlong also commissioned more than one paintings (Figure 8) in which he was depicted in Han-style clothes and surrounded by a variety of antiquities. Moreover, as an ardent connoisseur and collector himself, the Qianlong Emperor left hundreds of poems celebrating the Chinese relics, which heightened his charisma as an erudite connoisseur, a gifted poet, and a legitimate ruler. Not only did he inscribe directly on historical paintings and calligraphy works, his writings were also etched onto many earlier renowned ceramic wares (Figure 9).⁶⁹ One of his songs that had been imprinted on a few porcelain vessels (Figure

⁶⁷ The scroll contains illustrated antique objects including a total of 103 ceramic wares with dates ranging from the Song dynasty all the way to the Yongzheng period. The chicken cups appeared not included in the scroll. Ellen C Huang, "From the Imperial Court to the International Art Market: Jingdezhen Porcelain Production as Global Visual Culture," *Journal of World History* 23, no. 1 (2017): 115–45, doi:10.1353/jwh.2012.0028.

⁶⁸ *Duobao ge* [cabinet of treasures] (Figure 19) contained many prestigious antiquities. Based on the pictorial leaves, the National Palace Museum in Taipei is able to reconstruct *duobao ge* today in the same fashion as the Qing dynasty. Ibid.

⁶⁹ These ceramic wares engraved with Qianlong's poems became popular later among collectors and connoisseurs. Sir Percival David discussed in Chapter 3 is one of the renowned figures who was passionate about these engraved porcelain wares.

10) lauded the chicken cups for being the most supreme among all Ming ceramics.⁷⁰ Apart from the emperor's commendation, numerous monographs were written during the late Ming and Qing dynasty to confirm the chicken cups' value, and these eventually became important references for foreign collectors. This will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Imitating antique objects often inspires new innovations. Copying of the chicken cups started around the late Ming dynasty and increased in the Qing era. It is often considered that the imitations commissioned by the high Qing emperors most closely resemble the Chenghua originals (Figure 11).⁷¹ The *doucai* technique modelled by the chicken cups inspired the popularity of the multi-coloured *wucai* [polychrome] technique particularly during the reign of Jiajing (r. 1521–1567) and Wanli (r. 1573–1620) Emperors. The key difference between *wucai* and *doucai* objects relates to their use of blue enamel. In *doucai*, blue serves as the backbone of the entire design, defining both the outline and some fillings. In contrast, blue in *wucai* is only one of multiple colours, without the function of delineating the contour of the decoration. In relation to the Qing dynasty, both *doucai* and *wucai* wares were imitated. This subsequently inspired the birth of *famille verte* and *famille rose* porcelains, which are polychrome ceramics well-known in both China and the West.⁷²

The later Ming and Qing rulers continued to favour the chicken cups, driven by the vessels' representation of the most supreme power and quality. The study of

⁷⁰ See footnote 27.

⁷¹ The high Qing emperors are referring to the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong emperors. Geng, 明清瓷器[Ming and Qing Ceramics], 70-84.

⁷² The terms *famille verte* and *famille rose* were derived based on the dominant colour on the porcelain which correspond to 'green' and 'pink' accordingly. They are multi-coloured enamel wares which include various tones of green or pink on a single object creating a colour-spectrum effect. Suzanne G. Valenstein, *A Handbook of Chinese Ceramics* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), 155.

antiquities not only formed a well-educated image of the monarchs, but by holding and emulating the earlier imperial creations, an unbroken royal bloodline appeared to be established even without genetic continuity.⁷³ In addition, the act of copying gave rise to a variety of colouring techniques. Given the increasing number of copies, it became important to identify the original Chenghua chicken cups. It seems that only the authentic pieces that once bore the smell of wine, the touches of the monarch and the fire at the imperial kiln are genuine emotion, artistry and history carriers. Therefore, the last section of this chapter discusses the connoisseurship of the chicken cups.

Connoisseurship

Raw materials, casting, colours, seal and decorations are components of the chicken cups that can be used to differentiate originals from copies. For a well-copied cup, its differences from an authentic piece may be subtler and only distinguishable in the eyes of an experienced connoisseur. Hence, connoisseurship is often considered an empirical study.⁷⁴ In Western connoisseurship theories, Karl Friedrich von Rumohr (1785–1843), Giovanni Morelli (1816–1891) and Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) are representatives with well-known approaches to the subject. Their ideas tend to focus on distinguishing the expression and manners of the artist who created the object—that is, finding the ‘artistic personality’.⁷⁵ In the case of the chicken cups, because they were an outcome of carefully devised teamwork rather than an identified individual artisan, the ‘personality’ of the cups

⁷³ The Qing emperors wanted to maintain this royal continuity by preserving the imperial collection, but during the Cultural Revolution in China in the 1960s to the 1970s, the exact opposite actions were pursued as to cut off the connection with the feudal society. This is further discussed in Chapter 4.

⁷⁴ Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, “Connoisseurship,” in *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 4–64.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

lies in their distinctive material and aesthetic qualities, which belong specifically to the Chenghua period.

The raw material and moulding of the chicken cups provide an exceptional visual and tactile experience. Eskenazi described Chenghua objects as ‘the only porcelain you can actually tell blind’.⁷⁶ The body was potted extremely thin and is nearly transparent. Without any orange-peel texture, the evenness of the surface represents a zenith of technical achievement, surpassing the casting techniques in the reigns preceding Chenghua.⁷⁷ The porcelain clay was made from *macang* soil, which was a local raw material found at Jingdezhen; however, the supply was exhausted by the early Hongzhi period (1487–1505).⁷⁸ The outstanding quality of the clay lies in its whiteness, which was tinged with a subtle apricot yellow after firing. In addition, the glaze coating of the chicken cups is usually thick and unctuous, creating a cloudy varnish and a mellow tactile experience. The form of the cups, apart from the lucent body and the waxy surface, was sculpted with a lightly opened-up rim flaring out from a concaved base. The shape is akin to a downsized-urn in Chinese context which explains the origin of the cups’ Chinese name *ji* [chicken] *gang* [urn-shaped] *bei* [cup].⁷⁹ The round foot of the vessel is unglazed, showing a burnt-yellow colour, which is also a typical Chenghua characteristic called *humi di* [burnt-rice bottom].⁸⁰

⁷⁶ “Chicken Cup” Video.”

⁷⁷ He and Xu, *明代陶瓷* [Ming Ceramic], 36 and Daisy Lion-Goldschmidt, *Ming Porcelain*, ed. Katherine Waston (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 100.

⁷⁸ Zhou, *景德镇* [History of Jingdezhen], 25.

⁷⁹ At the Palace Museum in Beijing, the chicken cup is titled *Urn shaped cup with chicken design in contrasting colours*. Liying Wang, “斗彩鸡缸杯 [Doucai Chicken Cup],” *Palace Museum*, accessed September 10, 2017, <http://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/ceramic/226831.html?hl=斗彩鸡缸杯>.

⁸⁰ Geng, *明清瓷器* [Ming and Qing Ceramics], 70-84.

The seal is another feature that helps distinguish Chenghua wares from copies of other periods. It is usually found on the bottom of objects and has a six-character reign mark: 大明成化年製 [produced in Chenghua of the Ming dynasty]. This mark is slightly obscured given it is usually under a thick glaze (Figure 1). The characters are written in a spontaneous and intuitive spirit, resonating with the imperfect double circle or square they are enclosed within. Such spontaneity appears to be relatively consistent in almost all of the seals of Chenghua, including the chicken cups, as if they were written by a single assigned artisan. A well-known connoisseur of modern times, Sun Yingzhou (1893–1966) composed a pithy verse for people to identify a typical Chenghua calligraphic mark on ceramics.⁸¹ There is also a theory that suggests the prototype of the seal was provided by Emperor Chenghua after he ascended the throne. While it may help to explain the seemingly juvenile calligraphic strokes written by a young king, affirmative evidence is still lacking at this stage.⁸²

The colours of Chenghua *doucai* porcelains also have distinctive characteristics. For a Chenghua polychrome ware, bright red, light green, glowing yellow and muted purple are the typical colours used.⁸³ The pale underglaze blue is almost exclusive to Chenghua. Named *potang* or *pingdeng* blue, it is extracted from a

⁸¹ The verse contains six lines: ‘大字尖圆头非高, 成字撇硬直倒腰, 化字人匕平微头, 制字衣横少越刀, 明日窄平年应悟, 成字三点头肩腰’ [大 *da*: The head of the left-falling stroke can be pointed or rounded, and it does not rise high above the horizontal stroke; 明 *ming*: The radical 日 *ri* on the left is narrow and level; 成 *cheng*: The upper half of the left-falling stroke is vertical and the dot on the right appears either just above the horizontal stroke, level with it or slightly below it. 化 *hua*: The component on the right is slightly taller than the radical on the left; 制(or 製 in traditional Chinese character) *zhi*: The horizontal stroke [of the bottom half 衣] never extends to beyond the vertical stroke on the upper right.] Translation is adopted from Liu, “Chenghua Imperial Kiln,” 83-84.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Black and malachite green are colours that are rarely seen on Chenghua *doucai* wares. See Geng, 明清瓷器 [Ming and Qing Ceramics], 70-84.

local raw material in the Jiangxi province.⁸⁴ While imported cobalt from Central Asia was used for some time; native sources were sought after during Chenghua because of trade interruptions.⁸⁵ The local blue enamel is much lighter than the intense foreign cobalt, providing another elegant touch to the already delicate Chenghua objects.

The Chenghua ceramics may also be discerned by their well-spaced and vividly depicted decorations. Unlike the earlier Yuan or the later Qing wares, which are often crowded with opulent ornaments, the motifs on Chenghua wares such as the chicken cups are evenly spread out on the surface. The painting is completed with a combination of brush techniques such as the flat smear on the rocks and the stippling on the chickens. During the Chenghua era, no layered or shaded effects are present on porcelains.⁸⁶ For example, the red flowers on the chicken cup were painted flatly, with only a slight variance in tones to suggest petals. Further, the leaves only show their front side and have no indication of volume.⁸⁷ An outstanding quality of the chicken cup design, and probably the most subtle and difficult for connoisseurship, lies in its natural expression of intrinsic artlessness. The originals enjoy a subdued fluency and effortlessness, whereas a well-copied

⁸⁴ Wang, *陶瓷词典* [Ceramic Dictionary], 95.

⁸⁵ This imported cobalt lends a rich and gaudy appearance, and commonly a heap-and-piled effect over the porcelain which is evident in the Xuande blue and white objects. The later famous 'blue and white' porcelains known to the West were mostly made by this imported colour. The trade with the Central Asia during the Ming dynasty was most likely owing to the maritime routes established by Zheng He, a court official during the Yongle and Xuande period (1402 – 1435). He made seven maritime explorations with the farthest reaching Africa. See Yu, *China's Antiquity*, 53-138. In the late Ming dynasty, import of cobalt restarted and the deep blue enamel on porcelains returned. Wang, *Chinese Antiquities*, 79-86.

⁸⁶ He and Xu, *明代陶瓷* [Ming Ceramic], 536-38.

⁸⁷ If there are figures depicted on a Chenghua porcelain, clothes would be illustrated in a single colour for each individual without implication of layers, giving rise to the term Chenghua Yi Jian Yi [Chenghua figure wears one piece of clothes]. This changed in the Qing dynasty as different colours are used to differentiate the layers of the clothing worn by each figure. See *ibid.*

chicken cup made during the Kangxi (1661–1722) or the Yongzheng period, for example, exhibits slightly stiff and mechanical brushwork (Figure 11).⁸⁸

The distinguishing features of the chicken cups made them almost impossible to replicate. The later copies, even painstakingly imitated, do not carry an exact look as the originals given the *macang* soil was fully-consumed and the *potang* blue became out-dated. Or perhaps, the distinctiveness of the cups is closely associated with that particular team of craftsmen under the reign of Chenghua, who had mastered the execution of casting, decorating, glazing, and firing of the vessels flawlessly. This team is what remains unlikely to re-form.

Summary

The chicken cups convey a complicated imperial narrative of the Ming and Qing dynasties. They embody anecdotes of royal families and monarch's private affections. They represent the technical developments and innovations in historical porcelain production. The collection and imitation of the cups was part of the antiquarian practice—especially among the rulers—demonstrating their sophistication and legitimacy of status. As one of the most copied items in history, the authenticity of the original chicken cups has become more important. Their refined forms, distinctive colours, and lively decorations imply an unparalleled craftsmanship during the Chenghua period. Throughout the last two dynasties of China, the chicken cups have formed a thread that connects consecutive reigns and courts. As the imperial regime collapsed at the beginning of the twentieth century, one might presume that the chicken cups' fate had also perished.

⁸⁸ Rosemary Scott, "Catalogue," in *Imperial Taste: Chinese Ceramics from the Percival David Foundation* (San Francisco: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 17–92.

However, within just a couple of decades, some of them have re-emerged in the antiquity collection circle. This time, they travelled thousands of miles to the West.

CHAPTER 3 WESTERN PERSPECTIVES OF THE IMPERIAL COLLECTION

A critical history of collecting...begins not at the time when objects are collected, but at the very first minute when collectors begin to interpret things' meaning and imbue them with cultural significance as collectible items.⁸⁹

Introduction

The chicken cups are evidence of shifting Western perspectives towards the Chinese imperial collection. I consider it a three-stage development, and this chapter is divided accordingly to address each stage. As the journey has unfolded, the chicken cups have become part of a much broader history beyond the walls of palaces and the borders of China. Echoing Moxey's perspectives, they were an agent in steering the developing course of foreign tastes. In the first stage, which preceded the eighteenth century, the national treasures of China, including the chicken cups, were mostly preserved in emperors' dwellings and had almost no resonance outside the country. Chinese porcelains made for the thriving overseas market during the Qing dynasty had an 'export aesthetics' that represented the Western imagination of the Orient.⁹⁰ The second stage, from the 1800s to the 1920s, saw objects from the imperial collection make their way to the West, which challenged the Western conventional interpretation of Chinese

⁸⁹ This quotation is adopted from Vimalin Rujivacharakul, "China and China: An Introduction to Materiality and a History of Collecting," in *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting*, ed. Vimalin Rujivacharakul (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 15–30.

⁹⁰ The 'export aesthetics' refers to the porcelains designs which are not entirely traditional Chinese, but made for foreign tastes. See more in the first section of this chapter.

aesthetics. Sinology began around the same time to assess arts and crafts of China in a systematic way, mainly to guide connoisseurship. The significance of the chicken cups was made known through literature, although their physical appearance among the overseas audience was still limited. The third stage, from the 1930s onwards, witnessed a series of vigorous activities associated with studying and collecting Chinese art. There were more opportunities to access the imperial collection outside China through trade and exhibitions. Promoted by a circle of foreign collectors and connoisseurs, Asian studies blossomed at clubs, universities and museums. After appearing in books of Western language, the chicken cups' debut at the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* signalled the beginning of their collection by foreign buyers. The chicken cups became both collectable antiques and works of art as they made their way to private collections and public museums. They assumed the role of a microscopic representation of China and its artistic expression in the eyes of foreign audiences.

Stage I: Imagining the East: from the Beginning to the 1700s

Although a large number of porcelains were exported from China during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most first-class works, including the chicken cups, were kept within the imperial court. As demonstrated in this section, the porcelains that were made for export—while still of good quality and far superior to ceramic wares made in Europe—did not really represent Chinese aesthetics. They were tailor-made in accordance with Western demand, which was based on their adapted idea of Chinese exotica.

There is a long history of ceramic trade between China and foreign nations which can be traced back to the Han dynasty. In the Tang era (618–907), the trade of Chinese objects expanded further with the support of the Silk Road and some

established maritime routes.⁹¹ Chinese ceramics were introduced to Europe mainly by Arabian merchants before the first direct trade route was established by the Portuguese in 1557, when they colonised Macau in southern China.⁹² Spanish, Dutch and British traders joined the Portuguese in the following decades to import goods from the Far East, including tea, spices, silk and ceramics. Chinese porcelains imported during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appealed to Westerners because of their outlandish qualities, such as their exceptionally white, thin and finely grained body. The production of porcelain was also not available in the West before the eighteenth century.

As the quantity of export orders increased from the late Ming dynasty, Western merchandisers and their patrons demanded custom-made designs and forms according to their tastes. Many functional objects with fanciful shapes and patterns were ordered to accommodate dining and tea-drinking functions that became fashionable in Europe.⁹³ The earliest customised porcelains might have started in the Ming dynasty, but it was during the Qing era when large orders for overseas aristocracy were created with forms and motifs mostly following

⁹¹ The export network, with the support of the Silk Road, extended west to Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, and east to include Japan and Korean peninsula. Xueli Gan, *中国外销瓷 [Chinese Porcelain : An Export to the World]* (Shanghai: Center, Orient Publishing, 2008), 2-4.

⁹² There are a number of countries who established the routes to import from China. The Dutch East Indian Company and the East Indian Company are probably the most eminent among all during this time. Many of the objects imported to Europe initially were not necessarily practical for everyday use, they were for display unless mounted with additional metal accessories to alter their functions. William R. Sargent, *Treasures of Chinese Export Ceramics from Peabody Essex Museum* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012), vi-8.

⁹³ Prototypes in wood, glass, or metal, or detailed drawings were provided by the European traders to Chinese workshops. See Arlene M. Palmer, *A Winterthur Guide to Chinese Export Porcelain* (New York: Crown, 1976), 20. More discussion in Stacey Pierson, "From Market and Exhibition to University: Sir Percival David and the Institutionalization of Chinese Art History in England," in *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting*, ed. Vimalin Rujivacharakul (Newark: Univesrity of Delaware Press, 2011), 130–37.

European instructions.⁹⁴ These objects, which were later regarded as ‘export taste’ ceramics, almost colonised the European market, with an estimated 2.5–3.5 million pieces reaching the continent each year throughout the eighteenth century.⁹⁵

Earlier imported porcelains were mostly purchased for display, decoration or utilitarian purposes by the upper classes. The Chinoiserie style, which is now well documented in art historical literature, developed as Eastern wares arrived in Europe. A number of monarchs, including James I of Great Britain (1566–1625), Henry IV (1553–1610), Louis XIV (1638–1715) of France and King Augustus II of Poland (1670–1733), were avid collectors of Chinese porcelains. Porcelains imported at this time complemented the Western vogue for Chinoiserie aesthetics and epitomised a romanticised image of the Far East.⁹⁶ The ‘Chinese Room’ at Claydon House in England (Figure 12) and the ‘Porcelain Room’ of the former Santos Palace in Lisbon (Figure 13) are well-known examples of the Chinoiserie craze.

⁹⁴ There were porcelains made during the Jiajing period (1521 – 1567) which were inscribed with Portuguese and armorial emblems, but the quantity was very low. See Valenstein, *Chinese Ceramics*, 155.

⁹⁵ ‘Export taste’ here refers to the tailor-made objects that are almost entirely for the purpose of export. The term was used in Andrey Wang’s book to compare the recent auction prices for porcelain wares with ‘export’ or ‘Chinese’ taste. See Wang, *Chinese Antiquities*, 86. For the number of export wares from China, refer to Zhu Peichu, *明清陶瓷和世界文化的交流* [*International Exchange of Porcelains during the Ming and Qing Dynasty*] (Beijing: China Light Industry Press, 1984), 197–98. Chinese ceramics seemed appealed to the Westerners more than Chinese paintings and calligraphy works. This might be driven by the difference in philosophies of painting between China and the West. Calligraphy also appeared challenging for non-Chinese to appreciate its aesthetic expression. See more discussions in Wang, *Chinese Antiquities*, 9.

⁹⁶ For discussions of the European monarchs as collectors, see George Kuwayama, ‘The Significance of Chinese Ceramics in the East and West,’ in *Imperial Taste: Chinese Ceramics from the Percival David Foundation* (San Francisco: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 105–14 and Gan, *外销瓷* [*Chinese Porcelain*], 64. See more about Chinoiserie in “Style Guide: Chinoiserie,” *Victoria and Albert Museum*, accessed October 1, 2017, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/style-guide-chinoiserie/>. Also see Steven Parissien, “European Fantasies of Asia,” in *Encounters: The Meeting of Europe and Asia 1500–1800*, ed. Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2004), 348–59.

For Western collectors, porcelains became a tangible representation of the 'exotic' East after Marco Polo's (1254–1324) mesmerising description of the Orient.⁹⁷ However, knowledge of China and the hidden treasures at Chinese palaces was still vague. Except for a few rare cases of diplomatic gift exchanges, such as that between the Kangxi Emperor and Louis XIV, the finest court collection, including the chicken cups, remained almost unknown to the West.⁹⁸ This situation started to change when commodity trading led to transnational conflicts in the nineteenth century. This is examined in the next section.

Stage II: Exposure of the Imperial Collection and Early Chinese Studies: from the 1800s to the 1920s

From the nineteenth century onwards, many Chinese imperial items left the court. Some objects were plundered, while some were used as bank collateral and deposited by royal members to fund themselves during or after wars. Further, the late Qing government's participation in some world expositions introduced Chinese-defined grace and refinement to foreign audiences. These events stimulated Western academic study, which questioned their former ideas of China discussed in the previous section and led to a renewed approach to understanding Chinese aesthetics. Studies of Chinese art, including the translation of Chinese monographs, responded to these increasing enquiries and aimed to guide newly invigorated collecting activities. Importantly, the Chenghua chicken cups' prominence was acknowledged within this scholarly environment. However, the

⁹⁷ Zhesheng Ouyang, "The Capital of Yuan Dynasty in The Travels of Marco Polo," *Social Sciences*, no. 1 (2016): 112–16.

⁹⁸ Emperor Kangxi and Louis XIV exchanged gifts. See Felicia Schuster and Cecilia Wolseley, *Vases of the Sea: Far East Porcelain and Other Treasures* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 31. The European missionaries serving at the Qing court as painters might have some opportunities to access the imperial collections, but mainly to depict them in paintings. For example, the painting *Qianlong Emperor in his study* (Figure 14) attributed to the Jesuit missionary Giuseppe Castiglione includes a few imperial objects.

lack of access to a truly representative range of imperial objects meant that a thorough study of this field could not be conducted in the West. The complexity mentioned above will be investigated in detail in this section.

After the high Qing period (1661–1796), Chinese dynastic rulers were still living in their feudal daydream. External rising powers supported by industrial developments were becoming a serious threat to the regime. After centuries of trade surplus for China through the export of ceramics, tea and silk, increased opium imports from the British reversed the situation in the early nineteenth century.⁹⁹ Soon after realising the problem, the Qing government tightened, and later banned, trade with Britain in the 1830s, which led to the first Opium War between China and Britain. With a well-equipped military force, the European giant was soon victorious and enjoyed various benefits from the post-war treaty, such as the concession of Hong Kong. Other countries, such as France and the United States, soon followed to carve up the territories in China in the following decades.

The various confrontations between China and the West triggered the appearance of previously hidden court treasures in the open market. As war prizes and trophies, it seemed natural for the victors to take the spoils. The Opium Wars gave the victorious foreign troops good reasons to plunder. Before the end of the second Opium War in China in 1860, with the aim of pressuring the Qing government to yield quickly, the British and French armies pillaged one of the Qing Emperors' dwellings, and likely the most magnificent palace in Chinese

⁹⁹ For the British, instead of being one of the largest consumers of Chinese goods for which they used to pay in cash or gold, rose to an enormous supplier of opium. The revenue made from selling opium was hence more than sufficient to purchase the Chinese goods for British. Shirley Ganse, *Chinese Export Porcelain: East to West* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2008), 103-156.

history, Yuanming Yuan [Summer Palace].¹⁰⁰ The burning and looting at Yuanming Yuan destroyed more than 200 diligently built structures and an array of ingeniously constructed gardens, including those designed by Jesuit missionaries who customised European palace models.¹⁰¹ It also resulted in the sacking of innumerable imperial objects, including paintings, bronzes, jewellery and ceramics. Many of these items were auctioned off among the soldiers after the assault on the palace, resulting in the dispersal of royal artefacts. Moreover, the Qing government was pressured to sign unfair treaties after the war that allowed the foreign conquerors to conduct collecting expeditions in China, where many more antiques were amassed and transferred to the West.¹⁰²

Around the same time, China's participation in world expositions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century introduced the Chinese culture, as interpreted by the Chinese, to the overseas public. In 1876, the *Centennial Exposition* opened in Philadelphia to celebrate the United States' 100 years of independence and its technological achievements. Fifty governments accepted an invitation to the exhibition, which aimed to present and show off their finest achievements.¹⁰³ The Qing government also agreed to join—perhaps propelled by the intention to

¹⁰⁰ Richard Curt Kraus, "The Repatriation of Plundered Chinese Art," *The China Quarterly* 199, no. 9 (2009): 837–42, doi:10.1017/S030574100999052X.

¹⁰¹ Katrina Hill, "Collecting on Campaign: British Soldiers in China during the Opium Wars," *Journal of the History of Collections* 25, no. 2 (2013): 227–52, doi:10.1093/jhc/fhr039.

¹⁰² Among the foreign expeditions, one of the most significant is the massive acquisition of relics at Dunhuang by the archaeological explorers Aurel Stein in 1907 and 1914. See more about the Dunhuang relics in Sam Van Schaik, "The Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts in China," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, no. 1 (2002): 129–39, doi:10.1017/S0041977X0200006X and "Sir Aurel Stein & the Silk Road Finds - Dunhuang, Hami, Kharakhoto and The Limes Watchtowers," *Victoria and Albert Museum*, accessed September 15, 2017, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-silk-road-finds-map-2/>. The rampant collecting expeditions were also mentioned in Jason Steuber, "The Exhibition of Chinese Art at Burlington House, London, 1935–36," *The Burlington Magazine*, no. 8 (2006): 533.

¹⁰³ In the exposition catalogue, fifty governments are listed which had accepted the invitation. There are a few names of governments listed belong to one country such as the case of Australia. See the list of governments in *Official Catalogue* (Philadelphia: J.R. Nagle and Co., 1876), 7, <https://archive.org/details/officialcatalogu00cent>.

build friendships with others, especially after the Opium Wars.¹⁰⁴ Modern machinery was a main theme at the exposition for many of the participating nations. In contrast to mechanical apparatus of different countries, China exhibited premium tea, silk, porcelains, paintings and ivory carvings, which were considered its most important items—all produced from countless hours of work. These were the finest pieces assembled from all 18 provinces of the Qing dynasty. They represented the esteemed upper class in China and had previously been rarely seen among broader Western audiences. The Chinese exhibit illustrated the country's different definition of 'achievement'—instead of technology and machines, the Chinese interpretation of triumph was closely tied to the artistry that had evolved throughout 2,000 years of civilisation. In many people's eyes, this reinforced the 'backwards' nature of Chinese civilisation; however, the different perspectives of China and the West inspired interested individuals overseas to review their approach to Chinese studies.

From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, private individuals and public institutions in Western countries were galvanised to collect Chinese antiques that were aesthetically different from the earlier made-to-order porcelains. The Morgan and Rockefeller families in the United States were among the first to amass fine articles from China. Many of their collections were later sent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art through donation or acquisition.¹⁰⁵ Some national institutions, such as the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and the Metropolitan Museum, requested foreign expatriates to collect antiquities on their

¹⁰⁴ It was the second time for China to take part in an international exhibit having also participated in the 1873 Vienna Exposition. John Haddad, "The Romantic Collector in China : Nathan Dunn's Ten Thousand Chinese Things," *Journal of American Culture* 21, no. 1 (1998): 7–26, doi:10.1111/j.1542-734X.1998.2101_7.x.

¹⁰⁵ Xiaoxin Liang, "美国大都会博物馆的中国陶瓷传奇 [Legend of Chinese Porcelains Kept in the Metropolitan City of US]," *Collections*, no. 19 (2016): 186–93.

behalf.¹⁰⁶ For example, in 1882, Stephen Bushell (1844–1908), an English physician and amateur Orientalist based in Beijing, was given £500 by the V&A (then known as the South Kensington Museum) and commissioned to acquire Chinese antiques.¹⁰⁷ The Metropolitan Museum sent American art procurer John Ferguson (1866–1945) to China in 1913.¹⁰⁸ These foreign expatriates spent years in China and embraced the language and culture. By studying traditional literature, they were the pioneers in taking on Chinese ideas of connoisseurship.

These burgeoning collecting activities coincided with a time when more imperial objects became available in the market. When the Qing regime was under serious threat by foreign powers, safekeeping of the ancient legacy seemed less important to the monarchs. In 1900, a military force formed by eight countries started to attack Beijing in the name of suppressing the Boxer Rebellion.¹⁰⁹ The siege of Beijing by the foreign alliance resulted in further plundering of the city after the previous Yuanming Yuan incident. Fortunately, the Forbidden City was not extensively looted because the alliance's real objective was to compel the

¹⁰⁶ Expatriates in China were collecting antiques on behalf of their nation. Some of them were contributors to sinology themselves such as Stephen Bushell. See Mingqian Liu, *从丝绸到瓷器：英国收藏夹和博物馆的故事* [From Silk to Porcelain: Stories of British Collectors and Museums] (Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2008), 46. Today, Chinese art forms a major part of many renowned public institutions. For example, the British Museum contains more than 50,000 pieces of works from China out of its more than 2 million digitised collections online. Chinese ceramics from the Percival David Collection remain a highlight of the British Museum as well. At the V&A Museum, there are more than 18,000 Chinese objects with the first group acquired in 1852. Out of the Metropolitan Museum's more than 450,000 online records, items from China account for nearly 17,000. Check out the Chinese art collection at these museums in "Collection Online," *The British Museum*, accessed October 15, 2017, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx?place=42791; "China," *The V&A Museum*, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/china>; "Collection," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection#!?perPage=20&geolocation=China&sortBy=Relevance&sortOrder=asc&offset=0&pageSize=0>.

¹⁰⁷ Liu, *博物馆* [From Silk to Porcelain], 46.

¹⁰⁸ Maxwell K. Hearn, *Asian Art at the Metropolitan Museum* (New York: The Met, 2015), 12.

¹⁰⁹ The alliance was formed by armies from Britain, France, the United States, Germany, Japan, Russia, Italy, and Austria. For history of the Boxer Rebellion and the Siege of the International Legations, see Zheng Lin and Bai Chun, "八国联军在华殖民统治机构考略 [Colonisation of the Military Alliance in China]," *Military Historical Research*, no. 3 (2010): 78–82.

government to agree to terms that would offer them larger and longer-term gains. The invasion of the capital forced the royal family to escape Beijing. The Dowager Empress Cixi (1835–1908) and the Guangxu Emperor (r. 1875–1908) deposited some imperial works as security at the Yui Yeh Bank in exchange for funds.¹¹⁰ This group of genuine imperial objects included a famous Song dynasty *guan* vase and many earlier antiques that were etched with Qianlong's writings. Hence, staff at the Yui Yeh Bank, even if they were not specialists of Chinese art, could work out the divine qualities of these objects.

In the 1920s, the collaterals became available for sale given no repayment was received. Both domestic and overseas collectors competed for their ownership. Sir Percival David (1892–1964), later a renowned collector of Chinese art, was among the individuals vying for the objects. His determination helped to overcome many challenges. With the assistance of his local and overseas network that he had developed, David successfully secured the collection in 1928.¹¹¹ This purchase reflected his passion for inscribed wares. The antiques engraved with Qianlong's poems seemed to be particularly captivating for him, and this was evident from the first catalogue of his collection published in 1934.¹¹² Art historian Stacey Pierson commented that David 'modelled himself on Chinese

¹¹⁰ Lady David wrote about the story in a few books published for the Percival David Foundation. Her opinion that this group of antiquities coming from the Dowager Empress's deposit in 1900 in exchange for cash to escape from Beijing was later challenged by Chinese scholars who suggested the collaterals were deposited in the 1920s instead when the royal family required funds to cover living expenses. See Lady David, "Sir Percival David," in *Imperial Taste: Chinese Ceramics from the Percival David Foundation* (San Francisco: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 9–14. See opinions from Chinese scholars in Liu, *博物馆[From Silk to Porcelain]*, 102.

¹¹¹ Sir Percival David faced life threat during the course of this acquisition. See details in Lady David, "Introduction," in *Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art*, ed. Risenart E. Scott (London: University of London, 1989), 9–26.

¹¹² Inscribed wares formed a key component of his collection which is evident in the first catalogue of David's collection compiled by R.L. Robson in 1934. See R.L. Hobson, *A Catalogue of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain in the Collection of Sir Percival David* (London: The Stourton Press, 1934), xii.

connoisseur'.¹¹³ Therefore, it seemed that his model was one of the greatest patrons and connoisseurs of Chinese art—Emperor Qianlong.

The handover period of the two regimes in China from the dynastic reign to the republic administration saw more instances of objects escaping the Forbidden City. To urge the last imperial court of China to quickly renounce its title, the Provisional Government of the Republic of China and the last Qing government reached an agreement in 1912 for *Favourable Treatment after the Abdication of the Qing Emperor*.¹¹⁴ With this agreement, the last Qing emperor, Pu Yi (r. 1908–1912), and his dependents were able to stay in the royal palace and receive an annual allowance of four million silver taels to cover their living expenses after their abdication.¹¹⁵ However, the new government had financial difficulties and was unable to keep its promise. Therefore, the court, which found it difficult to change its luxurious habits, had to borrow money from domestic and international banks in Beijing using imperial treasures as collateral. These items eventually circulated to the market when repayment became unrealistic. During the same period, Pu Yi bestowed a number of imperial artworks on his noble relatives, including his younger brother Pu Jie. These assets were eventually scattered outside the palace. In 1924, when Pu Yi was forced to leave the palace, among his personal effects were some imperial objects, most of which were traded for

¹¹³ Pierson, "From Market and Exhibition," 130–137.

¹¹⁴ Geremie R. Barmé, *The Forbidden City* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 117–118.

¹¹⁵ The agreed four million silver taels was a result of negotiation between the Qing government and the Nationalist Party. This currency was later changed to *yuan* as new currency was produced, denoting a reduced allowance given silver tael was a larger currency compared with *yuan*. Later in 1924, when Pu Yi and his dependents was requested to leave the Forbidden City, the Republic Government still agreed to pay the royal family 500,000 *yuan* per year. See detailed discussion in Tianhong Yang, "清室优待条件的法律性质与违约责任[The Legal Nature of The Articles of Favorable Treatment of the Great Qing Emperor after His Abdication and Responsibilities in the Case of a Breach]," *Modern Chinese History Studies*, no. 1 (2015): 37–57.

cash along his succeeding journeys. The remains at the Forbidden City subsequently formed the first collection of the Palace Museum, which was established on the grounds of the Forbidden City in 1925, with still a considerable collection including approximately 10,000 porcelains and 9,000 works on paper.¹¹⁶

The increased exposure to Chinese antiques challenged the established Western view of Chinoiserie. Plunders, expeditions and direct outflows from the royal families, as well as illegal excavations and smuggling, formed the first wave of movement of the Chinese stately collection to public hands and an international audience. During this time, it is possible that some chicken cups started appearing in the open market, along with other scattered imperial collections. Moreover, the world fairs held in the late nineteenth century helped to redefine Western ideas of Chinese luxuries and aesthetics. The arrival in the West of some extremely refined porcelains, which possessed noticeable differences from the previous mass import of customised ceramics, demanded a re-assessment of connoisseurship in Chinese art. This was reflected in the growing field of Chinese studies.

The translation of Chinese scholarship into Western languages was an early initiative taken by sinologists. In the 1710s, French Jesuit Father François Xavier d'Entrecolles (1664–1741) compiled some ceramic manufacture notes and drawings based on his personal investigations at Jingdezhen and sent them back

¹¹⁶ Pu Yi's journey after he left the Forbidden City and the number of relics upon establishment of the Palace Museum are mentioned in Rosemary Scott, "The Chinese Imperial Collection," in *Collecting Chinese Art: Interpretation and Display*, ed. Stacey Pierson (London: University of London, 1999), 19–32. Today, the Palace Museum in Beijing owns more than 1.8 million pieces of works, but they are not necessarily all from the imperial collection of the Qing court. See more in "故宫博物院[The Palace Museum]," *Palace Museum*, accessed October 15, 2017, http://www.dpm.org.cn/about/about_view.html.

to Europe to support the invention of porcelains.¹¹⁷ However, the earliest book that is not empirical-based and that almost entirely relied on Chinese authority was French sinologist Stanislas Julien's (1797–1873) translation of *Jingdezhen Tao Lu* (*Histoire et fabrication de la porcelaine chinoise*) [History and manufacture of Chinese porcelain], which was published in 1856.¹¹⁸ This Chinese book, which was printed in 1815, was written by a native of Jingdezhen, Lan Pu (d.1795), and completed by his student Zheng Tinggui.¹¹⁹ It was one of the first monographs in China that thoroughly addressed a series of ceramic subjects, including ceramic production process, history of kiln sites, characteristics of different periods and the imitating activities at Jingdezhen. It is regarded as a classic that is still referred to today. The translated book therefore provided comprehensive Chinese perspectives of ceramics. It helped to address some escalating questions in the West on the subject of Chinese aesthetics, including celebrated techniques and features of earlier wares. The same book was subsequently translated into Japanese in 1907 and English in 1951.¹²⁰ Although Julien's French translation of

¹¹⁷ R.L. Hobson, *Handbook of the Pottery & Porcelain of the Fast East* (London: University Press Oxford, 1937), xv.

¹¹⁸ For convenience, *Jingdezhen Tao Lu* will be referred to as *Tao Lu* hereafter. Julien had translated many technical monographs from Chinese to French including *Tao Lu*. The translation of *Tao Lu* was requested by the royal ceramic factory Sèvres in France. He started working on the translation in 1851. See Ning Chen and Xiaofen Ye, “《景德镇陶录》儒莲法译本编译成因初探 [A Preliminary Study on the Reasons for the Compilation of ‘Jingdezhen Tao Lu’ Translated in French by Stanislas Julien],” *Jingdezhen's Ceramics*, no. 3 (2016): 3–5.

¹¹⁹ Zheng Tinggui's birth and death dates are not available. Junyu Lu, “中国科技典籍文本特点及外国译者的翻译策略研究——以《景德镇陶录》及其英译本为例 [A Study on the Textual Characteristics of Chinese Scientific and Technological Monographs and the Translation Strategies of Foreign Translators - Taking ‘Jingdezhen Tao Lu’ and Its English Version as an Example],” *Journal of Beijing International Studies University*, no. 6 (2016): 81–92, doi:10.12002/j.bisu.2016.072.

¹²⁰ English version was translated by the British Scholar G. R. Sayer (1887-1962). Lu, “中国科技典籍文本特点及外国译者的翻译策略研究——以《景德镇陶录》及其英译本为例 [A Study on the Textual Characteristics of Chinese Scientific and Technological Monographs and the Translation Strategies of Foreign Translators - Taking ‘Jingdezhen Tao Lu’ and Its English Version as an Example].”

Tao Lu was incomplete and not entirely accurate, it provided valuable referencing materials, especially for French ceramic factories such as the Sèvres.¹²¹

The translated Qing monograph *Tao Shuo* [Description of Chinese pottery and porcelain], written by Bushell, was completed in 1891 and published in 1910. This monograph played a more illuminating role, particularly in English-speaking circles. *Tao Shuo* was written 40 years before *Tao Lu* and was considered by Bushell a more important volume than the latter given the author's more scholarly background.¹²² The book discussed the techniques and ceramic features of earlier and contemporaneous periods. In the third volume of *Tao Shuo*, titled *Shuo Ming* [Speak of the Ming dynasty], author Zhu Yan commented that Chenghua wucaï (or doucai in this context) is the most brilliant among the Ming polychrome wares, and that the chicken cups are the finest among all wine vessels. Zhu included extracts in the same chapter from two other sources, both of which praised the Chenghua chicken cups.¹²³ Noticeably, *Tao Shuo* was claimed to be one of the two most important handbooks referred to by David, who was influential in Western collecting circles.¹²⁴

Bushell also translated a late Ming dynasty monograph written by an important collector and connoisseur, Xiang Yuanbian (1525–1590), titled *Lidai Mingci Tupu*

¹²¹ Chen and Ye, “景德镇[Jingdezhen Tao Lu],” 60.

¹²² The author of *Tao Lu* was a local residence at Jingdezhen, whereas Zhu Yan, author of *Tao Shuo* was a Qing dynasty court official who had worked on many monographs before *Tao Shuo*. The dates of birth and death for Zhu Yan are not available. See Bushell's translated version of *Tao Shuo* in Stephen W. Bushell, *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain: Being a Translation of Tao Shuo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 3-172.

¹²³ 《博物要览》Bo Wu Yao Lan and 《鸡缸杯歌注》Ji Gang Bei Ge Zhu were quoted in *Tao Shuo* to praise the chicken cups. See digital copy of the original *Tao Shuo* in Zhu Yan, “Shuo Ming [Speak of the Ming Dynasty],” in *Tao Shuo*, 1774, 17–18, <http://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&file=34752&page=8&remap=gb>.

¹²⁴ The other book referred by David besides *Tao Shuo* is a Ming monograph *Gegu Yaolun* [Important Discussions about Assessing Antiques] which he later translated and published in 1971. See Lady David, “Sir Percival David,” in *Imperial Taste: Chinese Ceramics from the Percival David Foundation* (San Francisco: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 9–14.

[Illustrated description of the celebrated porcelain of different dynasties], which was published in Britain in 1908.¹²⁵ The book contains descriptions and illustrations of 83 notable ceramic objects from the Song and Ming periods. There are ten polychrome objects chosen from the Chinghua period, including the chicken cup. The illustration of the chicken cup (Figure 15) shows a clear visual discrepancy compared with the physical object. This became one of the key arguments for later scholars, represented by the famous sinologist Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), who convincingly challenged the authenticity of the book. However, before Pelliot's argument was published in 1936, the translated book, which dedicated a significant portion to Chinghua wares, made polychrome porcelains well-known to Western scholarly audiences.¹²⁶ This case raises the problem of using texts to study Chinese art without the physical materials. More examples will be addressed shortly.

The translations of Chinese monographs supported the creation of more theoretical volumes in the West regarding Chinese art. Eminent books published during this period include collector William Gulland's (1841–1906) *Chinese Porcelains* (1898), Bushell's *Oriental Ceramic Art* (1899) and *Chinese Art* (1904), and R. L. Hobson's (1872–1941) *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain* (1915), *Wares of the Ming Dynasty* (1923), *Later Ceramic Wares of China* (1924) and *Handbook of the Pottery & Porcelain of the Far East* (1924). The popularity of these books in

¹²⁵ Stacey Pierson, "The David Collection and the Historiography of Chinese Ceramics," in *Collecting Chinese Art: Interpretation and Display*, ed. Stacey Pierson (Cambridge and Massachusetts: University of London, 1999), 57–68.

¹²⁶ Paul Pelliot published his arguments challenging the authenticity of the book in 1936 in France which was later translated in Chinese in 1942 and published in China. In the first catalogue for Sir Percival David's collection, the assumed Xiang's book was still referred to when discussing about the chicken cups. See Christopher S. Wood, "The Credulity Problem," in *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500-1800*, ed. Peter N. Miller and Francois Louis (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 149–204 and Hobson, *Sir Percival David*, xii.

the West indicated the increasing interest in Chinese antiquities and connoisseurship. For example, Bushell's *Chinese Art* was reprinted six times within two decades of its first printing.¹²⁷ The renowned *Burlington Magazine* also incorporated articles on Chinese art since its foundation in 1903.¹²⁸ Many of these publications—whether books or journals—included writings on the features of celebrated Chinese wares inspired by translated Chinese literature. Discussions relating to the Ming Chenghua polychrome wares, chicken cups and copying of the cups in later reigns demonstrated the authors' acquaintance with Chinese historical texts.¹²⁹ However, these literature-based theories were insufficient because of the lack of physical objects. Although many ceramics from the imperial collection were already available in the market, the lack of opportunities to systematically access a full range of wares from different periods remained a barrier to putting the theories into practice.

This issue was apparent before the 1920s. When Bushell first started collecting on behalf of the V&A Museum in the 1880s, his purchases from the marketplace in Beijing were of varying quality.¹³⁰ The 1910 exhibition of *Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain* at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London also raised concerns over the vague authenticity of some of the earlier objects. The exhibition was sponsored by some well-known names in Europe, including connoisseurs Robert Benson (1850–1929), William Alexander (1840–1916) and George

¹²⁷ Bushell's *Chinese Art* was reprinted in 1907, 1909, 1911, 1914, 1921, and 1924. Liu, 博物馆 [Collectors and Museums], 45.

¹²⁸ Carl Brandon Strehlke, "Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art," in Sassetta: *The Borgo San Sepolcro Altarpiece*, ed. Machtelt Israëls (Leiden: Primavera Press, 2009), 37–52.

¹²⁹ The earliest-published book listed here was Gulland's *Chinese Porcelain*. His book includes discussions about the Ming period, the chicken cups, and copying situations in China. See Louise Tythacott, "The Power of Taste," *Journal of the History of Collections* 28, no. 2 (2016): 327–43, doi:10.1093/jhc/fhv033.

¹³⁰ Bushell bought 253 items with the £500 provided by the V&A Museum, yet, there were not many fine wares. See Liu, 博物馆 [Collectors and Museums], 46.

Eumorfopoulos (1863–1939), and it included more than 200 items from the Han dynasty to the pre-Ming era. Some Ming objects, including polychrome porcelains, were also presented, but a clear categorisation by reign or technique was still missing.¹³¹ Further, David donated two blue and white Japanese jugs to the V&A Museum in 1918, mistakenly thinking they were Chinese.¹³² These examples indicated a lack of experience in handling Chinese art, even among Western ‘experts’ in the early days.

The intersection of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the unveiling of imperial collections and the progress of studies of traditional Chinese art and theories in the West. These early studies aimed to provide better guidance for collecting and connoisseurship for individuals and museums. This supports the statement of art historians Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk that ‘connoisseurs contributed greatly to the development of methods in art history’.¹³³ However, to integrate theory and practice, a larger sample size of works and extensive institutional support are required. This occurred mainly from the 1930s in the large-scale *International Exhibition of Chinese Art*, the inauguration of Asian studies at universities, the booming of Oriental art clubs and societies, and the establishment or expansion of Asian art departments at museums. These activities form the third stage of development, which is addressed in the next section.

¹³¹ Edward Dillon, “Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain at the Burlington Fine Arts Club,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 17, no. 88 (1910): 210–13.

¹³² The pair of jugs came from David’s early collection in the 1910s. Stacey Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums: The Field of Chinese Ceramics in Britain, 1560 - 1960* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 111–113.

¹³³ Hatt and Klonk, “Connoisseurship,” 40–42.

Stage III: Blossoming of Studies and Collection of Imperial Objects: from the 1930s

This section examines the passion for Chinese ancient objects, which has blossomed since the 1930s.¹³⁴ At this time, Western connoisseurs had access to translations of Chinese-written histories, and they benefited from further direct contact with imperial collections. In addition, excavations in China unearthed ancient relics that provided new insights for Western studies in Chinese historical material culture. Western forerunners in collecting traditional Chinese objects further influenced overall Western perspectives of Chinese art by participating in scholarly discussions, lending to exhibitions, donating to museums and supporting academic research. Among their initiatives, the renowned *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* successfully transformed Chinese ancient objects into ‘art’. The chicken cups, together with many other Chinese antiquities, started to fill the display shelves of private and public collections overseas, bringing Chinese culture closer to foreign audiences.

During the 1930s, infrastructure construction in China discovered abundant ancient relics. The Zhegan Railway (a railway connecting Zhejiang and Jiangxi provinces) was one of the major lines built between 1931 and 1937 after the Nationalist Government came into power in 1912.¹³⁵ During the project, a large number of Song antiques were said to be discovered, and at least 10,000 objects were subsequently sent to Beijing for sale. However, Chinese collectors and antiquarians in Beijing initially believed the objects were imitations made by the

¹³⁴ The contemporary art historian Vimalin Rujivacharakul used the word ‘blossom’ to describe the vibrancy in Chinese art collection and studies in the 1930s. Rujivacharakul, “China and China,” 15-20.

¹³⁵ Haiyi Xu, ed., *古玩图鉴 陶瓷篇* [Antique Illustrations: Ceramics] (Beijing: Cultural Relics Press, 2007), 150.

Japanese, until Shanghai-based foreign connoisseurs confirmed their authenticity. By the time the domestic patrons changed their mind, it was too late; most of the finer wares had been sold and shipped abroad.¹³⁶

Driven by the growing demand for Chinese antiquities overseas, Shanghai and subsequently Hong Kong became centres to trade Chinese antiques. In Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s, the *zhonguo guwan shichang* [Chinese Curios Market] continually expanded its business territory to incorporate more stalls. From 1937 to 1945, an increase of 155 dealerships testified to a prosperous business, even during World War II.¹³⁷ Museums and collectors from Japan, after the Europeans and Americans, appear to have seized more opportunities at this time to grow their Chinese collection.¹³⁸

Societies for Asian art studies also flourished. It is not uncommon for a group of people who share a similar interest to start a club for more focused discussions and activities. This group is defined as a 'reference group' in consumer culture, which tends to 'influence consumption of a product category...[especially] when the product is a luxury'.¹³⁹ For collecting and studying Chinese art, similar associations began during the early twentieth century, such as the Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst [Society of Friends of Asiatic Art] in Amsterdam,

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Di Yin Lu, "On a Shoestring: Small-Time Entrepreneurs and the International Market for Chinese Curios, 1921-1949," *Archives of Asian Art* 63, no. 1 (2013): 87-102, doi:10.1353/aaa.2013.0001.

¹³⁸ The collection of Chinese art expanded at the Tokyo National Museum during the WWII. Seizo Hayashiya and Gakuji Hasebe, *The World's Great Collections: Oriental Ceramics Vol.1 Tokyo National Museum* (Tokyo, New York, and San Francisco: Kodansha International Ltd, 1982), 21-26.

¹³⁹ Members of the reference group internally inspire each other as a 'primary reference', and they externally affect the non-members as a 'secondary reference group'. As defined in the book *Consumer Behaviour*, a primary reference group is a 'group with whom we have physical face-to-face interaction', whereas a secondary reference group is a 'group with whom we do not have direct contact'. See Wayne D. Hoyer, Deborah J. MacInnis, and Rik Pieters, *Consumer Behavior* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2013), 313.

Netherlands, established in 1918, and the Verein der Freunde asiatischer Kunst und Kultur [Friends of Asian Art and Culture] in Vienna, Italy, in 1925. The most prominent is probably the Oriental Ceramic Society (OCS), which originated in London in 1921 and was successively introduced to other countries such as Sweden, which launched a subdivision in 1929.¹⁴⁰

The OCS played a significant role as a reference group to spread the concept of Chinese imperial aesthetics and connoisseurship. Although titled Oriental, most of their dialogues centred around Chinese ceramics.¹⁴¹ Between 1921 and 1933, the OCS was operated by a small group of elite men consisting of connoisseurs and collectors, and it was presided by Eumorfopoulos and directed by Hobson. David was invited to join the OCS in 1930 and he published regularly in the *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*. The initial gatherings were mostly home-based discussions focusing on the latest updates of unearthed wares or a specific sample's origin, date and authenticity. From 1933, the society started to expand its membership and soon rose from an intimate circle to 125 members in two years. This intimate circle of collectors and connoisseurs soon amplified their influence on a much broader community.

The first time the imperial collection of China showed its full magnificence to wider Chinese and foreign audiences was through the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* held at the Burlington House in London from 1935 to 1936.¹⁴² Between the two World Wars, various societies in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany

¹⁴⁰ For convenience, the Oriental Ceramic Society will be referred to as the OCS hereafter. More information about the Swedish subdivision of OCS can be found "En Kort Historik," OCS Sweden, accessed July 20, 2017, http://ocssweden.se/?page_id=2.

¹⁴¹ For detailed discussion about the OCS, see Judith Green, "'A New Orientation of Ideas': Collecting and the Taste for Early Chinese Ceramics in England 1921 - 36," in *Collecting Chinese Art: Interpretation and Display*, ed. Stacey Pierson (London: University of London, 1999), 43–56.

¹⁴² For convenience, the show will be referred to as *International Exhibition*. See more about this exhibition in Steuber, "Exhibition of Chinese Art", 528-536.

and Britain facilitated seminars and exhibitions of Asian art. However, the *International Exhibition* was undoubtedly the largest one, focusing entirely on art from China. The show included more than 3,000 objects, which was an unparalleled number that remained difficult for later exhibitions to surpass. The works ranged from bronzes, porcelains, paintings and calligraphy to jade, lacquer carvings and cloisonné, and they covered a period from the earliest times to the 1800s.¹⁴³ These different forms of antique objects were, perhaps for the first time, bundled together as Chinese ‘art’—a term that was introduced and became familiar in China in the twentieth century.¹⁴⁴ More than 240 lenders from around the world lent items to the show, including museums, collectors, dealers and scholars. The Nationalist Government in China lent 984 units, contributing nearly one-third of the total number of works on display. These works were mainly from the Palace Museum collection, followed by other principal institutions.¹⁴⁵ Eumorfopoulos and David lent most of the other items on display. The exhibition was more profound than earlier exhibitions because of the long period of history covered, as well as the quality of the objects. Moreover, not only did 401,768 visitors attend the show, but 108,914 exhibition catalogues, 3,486 illustrated supplements, 2,196 exhibition handbooks and 336 copies of the *Royal Society of*

¹⁴³ The gallery plan for the show is in Figure 16. The earliest times here refer to the works from the Yang-Shao period (prehistoric) as classified in the exhibition catalogue. For the full list of works, refer to the catalogues published by the British or the Chinese organising committee. *Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Chinese Art* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1935), 1-263 and 参加伦敦中国艺术国际展览会出品图说[*Illustrated Catalogue of Chinese Government Exhibits for the International Exhibition of Chinese Art in London*] (Nanjing: The Commercial Press, 1935), 25-244.

¹⁴⁴ This difference in perception of ‘art’ in China and the West will be discussed in Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁵ Over 700 pieces were from the Palace Museum, 100 from the Rehe Palace, 100 from the Academia Sinica, 14 from the Henan Museum, 50 from the Beijing National Library, and 4 from the Anhui Library. See Ellen Huang, “There and Back Again: Material Objects at the First International Exhibitions of Chinese Art in Shanghai, London, and Nanjing, 1935-1936,” in *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting*, ed. Vimalin Rujivacharakul (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 141-142.

Arts Journal were sold, which demonstrates the impact of the exhibition.¹⁴⁶ The Chinese Organising Committee, which was formed for the exhibition, also compiled an illustrated catalogue in both Chinese and English for the items on loan.

The chicken cups also made their appearance at the *International Exhibition*. The British and Chinese catalogues featured three pairs of chicken cups that were included in the show and marked with Chenghua seals. All six were on loan from the Chinese government.¹⁴⁷ Although they were all decorated with chickens, the three sets of cups appeared to have different aesthetic features (Figure 17). The first pair was the only pair that came with an attached wooden stand that was inscribed in silver with Emperor Qianlong's song, implying the two were once in the royal collection. The catalogues were printed in black and white, which made it difficult today to comment on the colour of the cups; however, from the shape of the cups and the look of the motifs and reign marks, the first pair resembles the original Chenghua chicken cup qualities discussed in the previous chapter, while the other four are not. Hence, these four cups were likely to have been made after the Chenghua era. Displaying three pairs of chicken cups with different aesthetics might have invited interested parties to investigate the narratives and attributes of the cups. After the exhibition, the chicken cups, together with all loaned works from China were returned and eventually made their way to Taiwan.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Steuber, "Exhibition of Chinese Art," 528.

¹⁴⁷ The chicken cups were on display in the Gallery VIII (Figure 16) at the *International Exhibition*. There are 27 Chenghua pieces in total at the exhibition. Objects that were marked with Chenghua seal in the exhibition were referred to as the Chenghua wares, but they were not necessarily authentic Chenghua objects. There is also no discussion in the exhibition catalogues about the genuineness of these Chenghua wares. This implies the development of connoisseurship for the Chenghua period at that time was still at an early stage.

¹⁴⁸ The movement of national treasures to Taiwan will be addressed in the following chapter.

For the Chinese and British committees, the significance of the *International Exhibition* was profound—much beyond the then claimed ‘to appreciate the beauty of Chinese art’.¹⁴⁹ During the 1930s, China faced internal troubles and foreign threats. Domestically, there were unemployment concerns, a treasury shortage, high inflation, strikes and riots. Externally, Japan imposed territorial pressure and the worldwide depression negatively affected China’s economy. The young Chinese republic regime therefore intended to strengthen its political legitimacy and the public’s trust by co-hosting a successful international event. The Republic Government also held exhibitions before and after the London exhibition in Shanghai and Nanjing respectively to provide opportunities for the Chinese public to view the collection and to ensure that the national treasures were returned intact.¹⁵⁰ At the exhibition in London, a Chinese representative addressed the audience, stating that the Chinese were ‘pacific people’ and the artworks on loan ‘were not produced with a bayonet, but founded upon peace, virtue, and affection’.¹⁵¹ Hence, the new Chinese government was conveying a message of peace and endeavouring to conciliate with foreign nations to prevent conflicts such as those that took place at the end of the Qing dynasty.

For British organisers such as David and Eumorfopoulos, it provided a venue to feature their own collections and establish their reputation and authority to

¹⁴⁹ Chinese representative speaking at the *International Exhibition* mentioned ‘our sole aim in so doing is to make the West appreciate the beauty of Chinese’, but more layers of meanings behind this can be identified as will be discussed in this section. The quotation is exacted from Steuber, “Exhibition of Chinese Art,” 532.

¹⁵⁰ In China, many concerns were raised in 1935 when the Republic Government agreed to send works to London. Some were worried that these items could not be returned after the exhibition due to their bad memories of the plundering in the previous century. Therefore, by having two exhibitions before and after the London exhibition, the Nationalist Party was trying to demonstrate it had the ability to take care of the national treasures. Ellen Huang in her article investigated the Chinese motives behind participating the *International Exhibition*. See Huang, “There and Back Again,” 138-154.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

disseminate their perceptions on Chinese aesthetics. The *International Exhibition* endorsed the value of their collection and the collectors themselves as great connoisseurs. The sponsors of the event included the King and the Queen of the United Kingdom and the Royal Academy of Arts, which implied that national institutions in Britain had started to embrace and follow the taste of these connoisseurs. In 1930, David funded a new degree at the University of London to teach Chinese art and archaeology.¹⁵² This was a transformational step to introduce the subject to the academic field. The British Museum created the Department of Oriental Antiquities in 1933.¹⁵³ It purchased the Eumorfopoulos collection in 1938 to improve its earlier-period categories in the Tang and Song dynasties. In June 1952, the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art was established at the University of London.¹⁵⁴ Comprising more than 1,400 Chinese porcelains from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries, Pierson stated that the foundation was the ‘only Chinese ceramic museum outside China’ and a model collection for many contemporary and future collectors.¹⁵⁵ The Zuellig brothers, who were business tycoons, also started their Chinese art collection in the 1950s.¹⁵⁶ They later formed the Meiyintang Collection [Hall among Rose Beds], which was comparable to David’s collection.

Across the Atlantic Ocean in the United States, the second quarter of the twentieth century also witnessed a rapid expansion of private and public collections of

¹⁵² Stacey Pierson attributed the institutionalisation of Chinese art to one person—Sir Percival David. See Pierson, “The David Collection,” 60.

¹⁵³ For ceramics collection history at the British Museum, see Douglas Barrett, *The World’s Great Collections: Oriental Ceramics Vol. 5 The British Museum, London* (Tokyo, New York, and San Francisco: Kodansha International Ltd, 1982), 19-21.

¹⁵⁴ For details about this foundation, see Margaret Medley, *The World’s Great Collections: Oriental Ceramics Vol. 6 Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, London* (Tokyo, New York, and San Francisco: Kodansha International Ltd, 1982), 19-21.

¹⁵⁵ Quotation is taken from Pierson’s book. See Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ “Meiyintang Marvels; Imperial Chinese Porcelain No Title,” *The Economics*, no. 398 (2011): 92–93, <https://search-proquest-com.virtual.anu.edu.au/docview/857838954?accountid=8330>.

Asian art. The Freer Gallery of Art in Washington D. C., which was established by the celebrated collector Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919), acquired Chinese artefacts, vigorously during the 1930s.¹⁵⁷ Philanthropist John Davison Rockefeller III (1906–1978) established the Asia Society in New York in 1956 ‘to contribute to broader and deeper understanding between the peoples of the United States and Asia’.¹⁵⁸ The Asian Art department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was also expanding in fast pace during the twentieth century. With frequent acquisitions and donations, the quantities of Asian artworks became the largest among the Museum’s collections in 1983.¹⁵⁹

The above events are only a few out of the many projects carried out since the 1930s. The breeze that was initiated by an elite circle to pursue Chinese connoisseurship transformed into a strong wind at academies and museums and in the private collection market. It is believed that in the 1930s, some chicken cups were transferred to Western agents through Chinese dealers, and they ultimately came from the last Chinese emperor, Pu Yi.¹⁶⁰ The famous London-based collector, Dreyfus, acquired a pair and exhibited them at the 1957 *Exhibition of the Arts of the Ming Dynasty*, which was held at the Arts Council of Great Britain.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ For more information about the collecting history of the Freer Gallery, see Daisy Yiyu Wang, “C.T. Loo and the Formation of the Chinese Collection at the Freer Gallery of Art, 1915 – 1951,” in *Collectors, Collections & Collecting the Arts of China : Histories & Challenges*, ed. Jason Steuber and Guolong Lai (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 151–82.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted from Josette Sheeran, “John D. Rockefeller 3rd, the Asia Society, and 60 Years,” *Asia Society*, accessed October 1, 2017, <http://asiasociety.org/john-d-rockefeller-3rd-asia-society-and-60-years>.

¹⁵⁹ See detailed discussion about the journey of collecting Asian Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Hearn, *Asian Art*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Fionnuala McHugh, “The Year of the Cup,” *South China Morning Post*, accessed July 25, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/article/279994/year-cup>. These chicken cups, which made their way to the Western collections during the 1930s, were not the ones on display at the *International Exhibition* given all works after the exhibition were returned to China and subsequently shipped to Taiwan.

¹⁶¹ This pair of chicken cups exhibited in 1957 were mentioned in the *Transaction of Oriental Ceramic Society*. See Sir Harry Garner, “The Arts of the Ming Dynasty,” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 30 (1958): 7–19.

After the 1950s, there were a number of recorded transactions involving the chicken cups. Two were sold by dealer E. Chow in 1959 to the V&A Museum and the Fitzwilliam Museum.¹⁶² In 1968, Sotheby's London handled the transaction of a chicken cup, which eventually entered the collection of the Baur Foundation in Switzerland.¹⁶³ In 1971, Dreyfus sold one of her pair at Sotheby's London to an unknown party. Her other cup went to Japanese collector Sakamoto Goro, possibly through E. Chow as well. E. Chow subsequently handled another pair of cups, selling one in 1980 to the Percival David Foundation, which is now on display at the British Museum, and the other in the following year to Hong Kong-based collector Au Bak Ling. In 1984, the Metropolitan Museum successfully obtained a cup via W. W. Winkworth (1897 – 1991) from Sotheby's New York. In 1999, dealer Ezkenazi bought the piece from Sakamoto at Sotheby's Hong Kong, which entered the then low-key European Meiyintang collection owned by the Zuellig brothers. From 2010, the Meiyintang Collection was promoted through publications and news reports in preparation for a series of Meiyintang auctions at Sotheby's, including the 2014 sale of the chicken cup to Liu Yiqian.

Summary

From unknown to known, from imagined to seen, and from inaccessible to accessible, the recognition and collection journey of the chicken cups overseas is indicative of the overall course of development of Western taste in Chinese antiquities. When most of the antiques and imperial objects were hidden in palaces or underground in China before the 1800s, the import of large amounts

¹⁶² These two transactions were not recorded in Sotheby's article. They are mentioned in Lu, "Chinese Curios," 95-96.

¹⁶³ "The Meiyintang 'Chicken Cup,'" *Sotheby's*, accessed July 8, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2014/meiyintang-chicken-cup-hk0545.html>.

of custom-made porcelains to Europe and America fulfilled the market's fantasy of the East. From the nineteenth century onwards, foreign countries' military advancement over the Qing court caused some superior Chinese historic objects to be lost through looting or trades. Further, international expositions provided opportunities for wider overseas audiences to engage with Chinese material culture. Inspired by traditional Chinese classics, Chinese studies burgeoned in the nineteenth century, offering Western collectors Chinese ideas of connoisseurship. Since the 1930s, studies and collecting of Chinese art have been prolific because of the efforts of a group of elite collectors and connoisseurs.

The *International Exhibition* was a milestone: for the public, it was a venue to come into contact with Chinese history; for the exhibition lenders, it was an opportunity to advertise their collections; for collectors, it generated inspiration and provided further guidance for future purchases; for Chinese leaders, the exhibition was an avenue to promote the new identity of a united China, governed under the republic administration. In 1936, an exhibition was held in Nanjing when nearly 1,000 objects on loan returned to China. It also included photographs taken at the London exhibition for the other more than 2,000 items that had been borrowed outside China for the show of Chinese art. The 'presence' of these photos reminded the Chinese people what was 'absent'.¹⁶⁴ This absence seemed to forecast a homecoming for lost antiquities, including the return of a chicken cup from Europe to mainland China in 2014.

¹⁶⁴ Huang, "There and Back Again," 147.

CHAPTER 4 CONTEMPORARY COLLECTING IN CHINA

My generation started from nothing and after years of hard work,
we made our fortunes...but what we lack is culture.

Liu Yiqian (2014)¹⁶⁵

Introduction

The chicken cup's return from Europe to China with Liu's purchase in 2014 speaks of Chinese mainlanders' enthusiasm for historical and cultural relics. This chapter is divided into four sections to investigate the motives, preconditions, issues and connotations associated with this rising fervour of art collection. As part of the removed antiquities from the mainland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the strayed chicken cups symbolise a lost culture that stimulated a nationalistic urge among contemporary Chinese people to restore the scarred material culture. Since the 1980s, economic reform in China has given rise to affluent individuals. They are not only financially capable of purchasing dispersed relics from overseas, but they are also encouraged, with antique trading policies being regularly updated in China since the 1990s. For new Chinese buyers who may be inexperienced with art history, provenance of the object, which is closely linked to authenticity, is an important matter of consideration. Therefore, when the chicken cup appeared in the 2014 auction

¹⁶⁵ Quotation is taken from "Chinese Billionaire Liu Yiqian Sparks Outrage by Drinking out of 500-Year-Old 'Chicken Cup' Worth \$38M," *National Post*, accessed July 15, 2017, <http://nationalpost.com/news/chinese-billionaire-liu-yiqian-sparks-outrage-by-drinking-out-of-500-year-old-chicken-cup-worth-38m>.

with a history of ownership that is both prominent and ‘appropriate’, the provenance of the cup complemented its intact condition, transforming it to a Holy Grail that was ideal for collectors. At the same time, as a utilitarian wine vessel is being placed onto the shrine, and as art collecting welcomes more audiences including professionals and amateurs, the concept of ‘living aesthetics’ has resurged. It is a concept that merges art instinctively into everyday philosophy; no distinctive line is drawn between a work of art and an everyday article, and it is indiscriminate for anyone to practise the art of living.

Patriotic Motivations

As discussed, at the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese antiquities were removed from mainland China in large scale by a series of incidents. After WWII, the second phase of the Civil War in China (1945—1949) led to another wave of withdrawal of fine works from the Chinese mainland. An enormous number of items in the national collection moved to Taiwan with the retreat of the Nationalist Party at the end of the Civil War.¹⁶⁶ Between the 1960s and 1970s, the Cultural Revolution in China put the remaining ancient patrimony in danger. Therefore, as will be demonstrated in this section, the deprivation of many significant historical materials, or perhaps simply the knowledge of the depriving action itself, provoked an aspiration to reclaim these ‘lost’ objects.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the outbound movement of Chinese antiques was high in the 1930s. As a result, a campaign was started among Chinese

¹⁶⁶ The Civil War in China started in 1927 when the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party started pitting against each other. The Civil War was paused from 1937 to 1945 when both parties fought against the Japanese during the WWII, or the Second Sino-Japanese War. See Richard King and Jan Walls, “Introduction: Vibrant Images of a Turbulent Decade,” in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-76*, ed. Richard King (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 3–26. The Chinese Nationalist Party is also referred to as Guomindang, or Kuomintang in Wade-Giles.

patriots to retain national assets. One instance during this period was David's acquisition from a Shanghai dealer of an eighth-century painting titled *Night-Shining White* (Figure 18) by Han Gan (c. 706-783).¹⁶⁷ The work was considered of great importance as one of only two surviving pieces by the artist, and probably the most well-known horse portrait among Chinese historical paintings. Its significance also lies in the numerous seals and inscriptions imprinted by later owners and admirers, including many eminent connoisseurs, collectors, scholars and emperors. Emperor Qianlong alone had inscribed five poems on the work.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, the sale of the painting to a foreigner became one of the primary motives that stimulated massive domestic acquisition among a group of Chinese collectors represented by Zhang Boju (1898–1982), a well-known banker and connoisseur. Their intervention hence provided some obstacles for the outflow of antiques. The journal of an expatriate in China described how Chinese buyers and dealers from Beijing and Shanghai had watchmen stationed in various unofficial excavation sites to purchase new findings from local peasants unless Westerners offered a higher price.¹⁶⁹

The separation of the state collection between the mainland and Taiwan was another significant episode in Chinese cultural history. As a result of lessons learnt from the earlier looting by foreign intruders, when Japan launched the Mukden incident in the northeast of China in 1931 as a sign of invasion, the Nationalist Party started to prepare the transfer of the treasures at the Palace Museum in Beijing. The treasures transported from Beijing to the south of China amounted to

¹⁶⁷ The incident of David acquiring the *Night-Shining White* is documented in Lu, "Chinese Curios," 90-91.

¹⁶⁸ See detailed description of the work in "Night-Shining White," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, accessed August 15, 2017, <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1977.78/>.

¹⁶⁹ Liu, 博物馆 [Collectors and Museums], 87.

19,550 crates, including almost every category of antiquities. During WWII, these antiquities were relocated many times to stay clear of gunfire.¹⁷⁰ After WWII, they were warehoused at the capital of the Nationalistic Party, Nanjing. However, in a few years, when it became apparent that the Communists were gaining the upper hand in the Civil War, selected treasures were shipped to Taiwan in batches from 1948 to 1950. The quantity was estimated to be a quarter of the total transferred number to the south from Beijing, but all were considered carefully selected representational pieces covering every period of history. The 80 crates of objects returned from Britain after the *International Exhibition* were among the departed shipments.¹⁷¹ Therefore, the three pairs of chicken cups included in the exhibition (discussed in Chapter 3), of which two were probably genuine Chenghua objects, were also on board. Additionally, another six Chenghua chicken cups were likely part of the moving asset during this time, given a total of eight original cups were collected in the Taipei National Palace Museum today.¹⁷²

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, an early initiative was to control and restrict the loss of national relics. *Temporary Rules on*

¹⁷⁰ These transferred items included bronzes, ceramics, jade, works on paper, stationaries, to jewelleries, ivory carvings, seals, furnishings, and monographs. This movement had in fact evoked some level of discontent among the public in Beijing claiming that treasures were being prioritised before the people. The government responded that people could come together and fight against the invaders, but the treasures themselves had no physical power to resist plundering. The objects from Beijing were first moved to a few temporary storage locations in Shanghai in 1933, then to a purposely-built warehouse in Nanjing in 1936. However, within a year, Japanese massive incursion had put the Nationalist capital Nanjing in an emergency state. And the majority of the objects were transferred again westward over three routes to Guizhou and Sichuan province by either river or train in 1937. It was only after the end of the WWII, the goods were returned to Nanjing in 1946. See details of this movement in Zhiliang Na, 故宫四十年[40 Years of the Palace Museum] (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 1966), 45-124.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Some scholars think that all the chicken cups were shipped to Taiwan during this time, and the two cups currently collected at the Palace Museum in Beijing are not authentic. See Annex 5 for the current whereabouts of the extant chicken cups.

Prohibition against the Exportation of Precious Cultural Relics and Books was issued in 1950 to interrupt the foreign acquisition of Chinese artefacts.¹⁷³ As specified by the guideline, 11 categories of items with cultural significance were prohibited from being exported, unless permission was received for overseas exhibition and exchange. New regulations were subsequently drawn in the following years to cover more cultural protection subjects such as historical site management, preservation of relics during agricultural production and provincial responsibilities. These principles essentially discouraged the mainlanders to trade Chinese relics domestically or overseas. However, the early efforts of antique protection and preservation were foiled in front of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. The initiation of the Cultural Revolution by Chairman Mao Zedong (1893–1976) was beyond cultural considerations. However, the cultural sector during the movement was one of the most affected areas. Several reasons have been put forward for Mao's decision to launch the revolution in China. One of the most common interpretations was that the failed Great Leap Movement in the 1950s had raised Mao's concerns of a potential capitalist revival, which would replace the existing socialism.¹⁷⁴ Further, as Mao agreed with legalist ideas, which

¹⁷³ Wenyan Qian, "新中国成立初期国家对文物的保护[Protection of Cultural Relics upon the Establishment of People's Republic of China]," *Jiangxi Social Science*, no. 10 (2013): 110–15.

¹⁷⁴ The Great Leap Movement was a campaign to advance industrialisation in China in 1950s. However, with unrealistic productivity target and overwhelming construction plans, the movement failed to modernise China, but on the contrary, it caused millions of deaths by starvation, and even poorer peasants' lives. It is generally considered the Cultural Revolution lasted ten years, beginning from Mao's directive released on May 16th, 1966, and ending with the downfall of the Gang of Four. The May 16th Directive was the initial essential guidance from Mao to eliminate 'the bourgeoisie who have sneaked into the Party, the government, the army, and various spheres of culture'. The Gang of Four was referring to a political faction formed by Jiang Qing (1914-1991), the last wife of Mao, and three other Communist Party leaders Zhang Chunqiao (1917-2005), Yao Wenyuan (1931-2005), and Wang Hongwen (1935-1992). The Gang strongly advocated the Cultural Revolution and manipulated their power with the intention to succeed the role of Mao. After Mao passed away in September 1976, the Gang was also arrested and classified as a 'counter-revolutionary' force. The fall of the Gang was normally regarded as the end of the Cultural Revolution. See King and Walls, "Turbulent Decade," 3-10.

promoted consolidation of the ruler's political power, the movement was expected to strengthen his dominant leadership in China.

During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards led the most direct assaults on cultural relics. Identified by their red armband, the Red Guards were formed mostly by high school students, who were the first generation raised in the light of socialism. The group consisted of enthusiastic followers of the godlike Mao. As the reformer, Mao opposed the Confucian idea of passing on the ancient culture instead of creating something new. The principle of *Destroying the Four Olds* (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits) became the central principle that guided the students' movement.¹⁷⁵ They rushed to the homes of collectors, intellectuals and those considered bourgeoisie and hurried to the temples, libraries and tomb sites to beat up alleged revolution revisionists and to break, tear, smash and burn countless antiquities. No accurate record for the level of damage could be attained for such a sweeping campaign; therefore, it is uncertain whether any scattered chicken cups in the community were destroyed during this time. The Forbidden City also became a target of the Red Guards. Understanding the severity of the consequences, on the night before the attack in August 1966, Premier Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) ordered the shutdown of the Palace Museum and allocated a battalion of soldiers to protect the place.¹⁷⁶ The Museum reopened in 1971 with a new exhibition—*Excavation Discoveries during the Cultural Revolution*—to accommodate the visit of Henry Kissinger, the American

¹⁷⁵ Confucius idea of promoting ancient studies was also discussed in Chapter 2. See more in *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Dunde Chen, “文物外交的序幕[Prologue to Diplomacy via Cultural Relics],” *Party & Government Forum*, no. 2 (2011): 45.

diplomat.¹⁷⁷ This signalled a new strategic approach to build diplomatic relationships with other countries through the means of Chinese cultural relics.

The chaotic period led by the Red Guards almost ended in 1968 when the Sent-Down Movement started. From the 1960s to the 1970s, approximately 17 million educated youth left the cities for rural areas to join local farmers and workers instead of going to school classes.¹⁷⁸ Despite some benefits, such as relief from urban unemployment and improvements in agricultural output, these 'sent-down youth', or the so-called 'lost generation', became one of the key reasons for the scholarship gap that persisted in the following decades.

The outflow, removal and destruction of Chinese relics from mainland China has been a continuous process since the nineteenth century; however, as discussed, it resulted from a few crucial events, including foreign intrusions, the Nationalist Party's retreat and the Cultural Revolution. More than a handful of chicken cups, together with other national treasures, disappeared from the mainland during this time. The absence of these antiquities provoked bitter memories among the Chinese mainlanders and stimulated their hunger to retrieve their tangible history.

¹⁷⁷ Premier Zhou Enlai was considered the leader for this diplomatic approach using Chinese relics. After the visit of Kissinger in 1971, ancient heritage sites became one of must-visits for foreign delegations including the former President of the United States Richard Nixon (1913–1994) who visited China in 1972, Prime Minister of Japan Kakuei Tanaka (1918–1993) in 1972, Prime Minister of France Georges Pompidou (1911–1974) in 1973, and the Prime Minister of Canada Pierre Trudeau (1919–2000) in 1973. Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Encouraged by Mao, educated youth in the cities were suggested to go to the countryside to learn from the farmers and workers. There is a discrepancy in terms of number of sent-down youths during this period among current scholarship. Some Chinese journal articles stated estimated two million people while Western sources claimed 17 million. This difference may be due to different definition and scope when considering the sent-down population, but it is an interesting area for exploration. See Kevin A. Gee, "The Sent-down Youth of China: The Role of Family Origin in the Risk of Departure to and Return from the Countryside," *History of the Family* 16, no. 3 (2011): 190–203, doi:10.1016/j.hisfam.2011.06.002 and Jian Ou, "知识青年上山下乡的回顾与思考[Review the Sent-Down Movement]," *Journal of Luoyang Agricultural College* 20, no. 4 (2000): 61–62.

This explains the communal and persistent interest among many mainland collectors to acquire imperial objects from overseas. For instance, in April 2010 at Christie's New York, a handscroll painting titled *Chan Yue Tu* [Happiness through the Practice of Chan] by the Kangxi court artisan Yu Zhiding (1647–1709) was bought for US\$3.4 million, reportedly by Liu.¹⁷⁹ In the same year of the chicken cup's acquisition, Liu purchased an imperial embroidered silk Thangka that was made during the Yongle period (1402–1424) for HK\$348.4 million (US\$45 million) from Christie's Hong Kong.¹⁸⁰ These are only a few examples of his recent purchases that resulted in dispersed works returning 'home'. Liu is unquestionably a favoured buyer at the auction houses. However, as one of more than 500 billionaires in mainland China, he is not the only fervent art collector.¹⁸¹ Although not all Chinese collectors have built their collection based entirely on Chinese relics, even for Liu, whose collection extends from antiquities to contemporary, both Asian and Western, acquiring royal artefacts remains the preferred option for most mainland buyers. In 1996, when Christie's was celebrating the 10-year anniversary of its Hong Kong office, it inaugurated a new auction theme—the Imperial Sale—featuring solely imperial ceramics and works of art. The event was a big success and, since then, the Imperial Sale has become an annual ritual at Christie's Hong Kong.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Souren Melikian, "Chinese Bidders Conquer Market," *International Herald Tribune*, April 3, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/03/arts/03iht-melik3.html>.

¹⁸⁰ Yue Wang, "Chinese Billionaire Liu Yiqian Adds \$45 Million Thangka To His Art Collection," *Forbes*, accessed September 20, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ywang/2014/11/26/chinese-billionaire-liu-yiqian-adds-45-million-thangka-to-his-collection/#8a45a273da43>.

¹⁸¹ There were 568 billionaires in China as of 2016. Robert Frank, "China Has More Billionaires than US," *CNBC*, accessed September 20, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2016/02/24/china-has-more-billionaires-than-us-report.html>.

¹⁸² Wang, *Chinese Antiquities*, 47.

The imperial connection attached to Chinese antiquities, like that of the chicken cups, has appealed to the contemporary Chinese generation, just as they have appealed to foreign connoisseurs, but with an additional layer of nationalistic sentiment. Even burial objects, which used to be a taboo subject for Chinese people because of their association with death, are in demand.¹⁸³ However, when the chicken cups were offered in the open market at Sotheby's Hong Kong (three times in the 1980s and once in the 1990s), no mainland collector successfully purchased a cup. I suggest that although an emotional resonance for ancient objects provoked a longing for collection, there was still a lack of financial capability and public policies to support such transactions before the 2000s. The next section addresses how the situation changed, thereby promoting the prolific buying by the 'new rich' in China.

Economic Reform and Updated Policies

Economic reform gave birth to a generation of new rich in China after the 1980s. With updated trading policies that promoted antiquity transactions, the group of well-off individuals began to collect cultural relics not only to retrieve the lost treasures, but also to use them as financial instruments. This section will present this development in detail.

Economic reform has transformed China into a business-friendly environment. From 1979, Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) became the leader of the Third Plenum in China. His idea of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' sought to apply a market economic system to the mainland's socialist political structure. Some of the major initiatives during the early years of the reform included own-plot farming

¹⁸³ Souren Melikian, "Chinese Bidders Conquer Market," *International Herald Tribune*, April 3, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/03/arts/03iht-melik3.html>.

replacing communal farming to improve productivity, setting up special economic zones using incentives to attract foreign investment and decontrolling product prices to maintain supply and demand balance.¹⁸⁴ In the 1990s, loosening of bank loans to non-state-owned businesses, privatisation of national enterprises and stock market development formed another wave of changes. Moreover, joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 signified a further lowered trade barrier for China to conduct business with other countries. By the end of the first decade in the twenty-first century, reminiscent of the prosperous porcelain export situation during the Qing dynasty, China became the largest exporter of consumer products globally, earning the name 'factory of the world'.

The rapid economic development gave rise to a group of 'new rich' in China, including Liu. The popular slogan in China—"let some people get rich first"—which was promoted by Deng at the start of the economic reform, was realised.¹⁸⁵ In 2008, China had 1.6 million affluent households (annual income exceeding RMB250,000, estimated US\$36,000) and came fourth globally after the United States, Japan and Britain in terms of the number of affluent households. It also became the third-largest consumer market for luxury goods in 2010.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ For more detailed policies initiated during the economic reform in China, see Sara Hsu, *Economic Reform in Asia : China, India, and Japan* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), 6-17.

¹⁸⁵ The statement of Deng seemed to be opposing Mao's egalitarianism of which the entire society should equally share resources and wealth. However, Deng intended to address a long-term journey along which some diligent individuals may be first rewarded by the market economic system and they would subsequently inspire others to follow. Therefore, the final goal of this strategy is to ultimately achieve communal affluence in China, echoing Deng's concept of achieving 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Junguo Dang, "究竟应该让哪一部分人先富起来[WhoWill Be Rich First]," *Journal of Ankang Teachers College* 13, no. 3 (2001): 3-5; "To Each according to His Abilities," *The Economics*, accessed September 24, 2017, <http://www.economist.com/node/639652>.

¹⁸⁶ Yanqun He, Deqiang Zou, and Liyin Jin, "Exploiting the Goldmine: A Lifestyle Analysis of Affluent Chinese Consumers," *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 27, no. 7 (2010): 615-28, doi:10.1108/07363761011086362.

Capital opulence encouraged the new rich to consider various investment vehicles. Apart from popular options such as real estate and the stock market, collecting antiquities became a popular pursuit. From 2005, the overheated property market in China began to cool down, especially after the issuing of several national policies.¹⁸⁷ This might have encouraged more investors to participate in unaccustomed areas, such as the art market, where they would favour Chinese antiques given the cultural familiarity and auspicious designs. Hence, art acquisition offers risk control for investors by avoiding putting all of their eggs in one basket. Also, splurging on art and antiquities rather than other luxury goods may be perceived as giving the owners a patriotic and intellectual aura instead of simply being an overt display of abundant wealth. In addition, buying as a registered company instead of an individual often improves the balance sheet structure because expenditure on artworks is deducted from the taxable income, and the company's asset value will increase and continue to expand when the artwork's market value rises.¹⁸⁸ After the global economic crisis in 2008, mainland Chinese art auctions attracted more domestic buyers. Total sales grew by five times in three years from 2009, reaching US\$9.33 billion in 2011. Mainland buyers' active involvement in overseas auctions of Chinese art also contributed to an increase in turnover outside China by 278% from 2009 to 2011.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ *Eight National Measures* policy was first issued in 2005, followed by the *Six National Measures* policy in 2006. These measures were intended to avoid overheating of the property market. Lubanski Lam, "Changes in Real Estate Investment in China After the Financial Tsunami," *Chinese Economy* 44, no. 3 (2011): 59–70, doi:10.2753/CES1097-1475440304.

¹⁸⁸ Mingchun Sun, "China: Unscathed through the Global Financial Tsunami," *China and World Economy* 17, no. 6 (2009): 24–42, doi:10.1111/j.1749-124X.2009.01172.x.

¹⁸⁹ Statistics of Chinese art auction results and findings are retrieved from "2016 中国文化艺术品全球拍卖统计年报[Global Chinese Art Auction Market Report 2016]," *ArtNet*, accessed September 1, 2017, <http://www.cn.artnet.com/cn/chinese-art-auction-market-report/>.

Today, Chinese mainlanders form the main force globally in buying Chinese antiquities. N. Chow from Sotheby's stated that the number of mainland buyers tripled in the five years from 2005 to 2010. Veteran antique dealer Andy Hei also shared that the demographic structure of his client base changed from 90% Westerners to 95% mainlanders after 2001.¹⁹⁰ In addition, Hong Kong has overtaken London, Paris and New York as the headquarters for Chinese art auctions because of its business-friendly environment, free port and, perhaps importantly, geographical proximity to the mainland. Similarly, Beijing has risen as a new base camp for art auctions.¹⁹¹ Apart from the affluent buyers, such growth should ascribe to the renewed Chinese antiquity trading policies in China. Since the 1990s, periodically updated regulations have been providing infrastructure support to stimulate the return of Chinese relics. In 1982, according to the *Cultural Relics Protection Law of the People's Republic of China*, ancient Chinese artefacts were not commodities; hence, they were not for private acquisition. Except for cultural institutions, no other companies could conduct commercial transactions of Chinese antiques. As a result, domestic auctions had been quiet for more than three decades since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The 1992 Beijing International Auction was a milestone that marked the beginning of relaxation in antiquity trading. The auction included 2,188 pieces covering a wide range of mediums and periods, from the earlier bronzes of the Shang and Zhou dynasties (c. 1600–256 BCE) to the latest Qing

¹⁹⁰ Chow and Hei's statements are mentioned in Vivienne Chow, "Newly Rich Mainlanders Push Antique Prices through the Roof Wealthy Mainlanders Push Antique Prices through the Roof," *South China Morning Post*, March 5, 2010.

¹⁹¹ Details about auction centres around the globe can be found in Wang, *Chinese Antiquities*, 44.

porcelains and works on paper.¹⁹² Although the total transactions realised were only RMB3 million (estimated US\$550,680), it signalled the spring of antique trading. New guidelines were issued in the same year to permit the re-export of those newly imported antiques.¹⁹³ In a way, this policy encouraged Chinese antiquities collected overseas to be auctioned in China without concerning unsold objects not being able to leave the country and return to the overseas owners. It motivated auction houses to actively seek sources outside the mainland to consign artworks. Subsequently, six mainland auction houses were established in 1994 and were licensed to sell Chinese relics. This number has now risen to more than 400.¹⁹⁴ China's first *Auction Law*, which was enacted in 1996, also helped to form a regulated business operating environment. Together with the updated *Cultural Relics Protection Law*, which remains effective in retaining home antiques, these renewed strategies have fuelled the return of historical artefacts.

The chicken cup's return epitomised the overall homecoming trend for scattered ancient Chinese articles. Supported by opulent new buyers and positive trading policies, the art market is prospering. However, provenance remains a critical issue for contemporary buyers. In today's context, having prominent and proper provenance may transform an object into a 'divine' vessel.

Issue of Provenance

Provenance has been one of the criteria for measuring authenticity. Connoisseurs from the dynastic period to modern times and from the East to the West have

¹⁹² The development of government policies over auction and trading of Chinese antiquities is discussed in details in Yu Zhao, "中国文物拍卖市场 20 年综述[Twenty-Year History of Chinese Antique Auction]," *Art in China*, no. 1 (2012): 133–41.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ See more about the history and latest situation of the Chinese antique auction market in *ibid.* and "全球拍卖 [Chinese Art Auction]."

been concerned with this issue. New Chinese buyers who might not be knowledgeable in the subject of art also refer to the history of ownership to help determine the significance of an item. This section therefore discusses the complexity of the issue of provenance and demonstrates how the chicken cup purchased by Liu, with its almost seamless chain of ownership, has won great favour among collectors.

From N. Chow's perspective, newly converted mainland buyers' interest in the imperial collection partially results from their lack of sophistication. Chinese connoisseur and collector Ma Weidu similarly commented that 'people have made money...and they want to invest...[but] they don't have the knowledge about art'.¹⁹⁵ Understandably, imperial objects are relatively easier to recognise for inexperienced collectors compared with other types of work. Signs such as reign marks, dragon motifs and emperors' inscriptions are clear evidence of majesty. However, these elements can also be conveniently forged, especially as knowledge and craftsmanship continue to improve after thousands of years of development, supporting the fabrication of more deceptive products. To avoid buying fake objects, it is said that the Liu couple have used the extreme tactic of targeting the pieces shown on auction catalogue covers. As Wang, Liu's wife, mentioned, 'no [reputable] auction house would use fake art on their cover'.¹⁹⁶ On some level, this is evidence of their lack of connoisseurship.

An important supporting factor of authenticity is to have a notable provenance history because it suggests a more convincing source of the object. In the case of

¹⁹⁵ Opinions of N. Chow and Ma are mentioned in Chow, "Newly Rich Mainlanders."

¹⁹⁶ Marion Maneker, "Wang Wei On Collecting Foreign Art and Following the Auction Houses' Lead," *Art Market Monitor*, accessed September 27, 2017, <http://www.artmarketmonitor.com/2016/02/01/wang-wei-on-collecting-foreign-art-and-following-the-auction-houses-lead/>.

Liu's chicken cup, the prominent series of owners, including Dreyfus, E. Chow, Sakamoto, Eskenazi and the Zuellig Brothers, implies the high probability of the cup's genuineness. Similar to earlier Western collectors from the twentieth century, who were inspired by past imperial ownership, mainland buyers correspondingly count on the chain of holders to guide their acquisition.

Pierson pointed out that the source of imperial collection is a sensitive subject in the contemporary art market.¹⁹⁷ Items with a royal origin entering the open market from overseas owners would raise questions today about whether they were plundered from Chinese palaces during the Opium Wars, and hence the issue of selling legitimacy, at least from a moral perspective. The famous zodiac bronze heads are a distinctive example because they were indisputably removed from the water-clock fountain at Yuanming Yuan during the looting in 1860. China insisted that they be repatriated as stolen cultural heritage. The auction of the monkey, ox and tiger head at Christie's and Sotheby's Hong Kong in 2000 led to strong protests from the Chinese government.¹⁹⁸ As pre-auction negotiations failed, the Beijing Poly group, which has ties to the People's Liberation Army in China, eventually purchased the three heads for more than HK\$30 million (US\$3.8 million). In 2003 and 2007, indirectly or directly sponsored by the Macau casino magnate Stanley Ho, the boar and horse heads returned to China.¹⁹⁹ Yet again in 2009, Christie's auction of the rabbit and rat heads in France infuriated China. Chinese officials and lawyers pressed for the withdrawal

¹⁹⁷ Stacey Pierson, "Reinventing 'China': Provenance, Categories, and the Collecting of Chinese Ceramics, 1910 – 2010," in *Collectors, Collections & Collecting the Arts of China: Histories & Challenges*, ed. Jason Steuber and Guolong Lai (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 223–44.

¹⁹⁸ Kraus, "Plundered Chinese Art," 837–42.

¹⁹⁹ Zuozen Liu, *The Case for Repatriating China's Cultural Objects* (Singapore: Springer, 2016), xxiii – xxv.

of the heads, but were unsuccessful. In the end, consultant and collector Cai Mingchao became the winning bidder, but refused to pay the price of US\$40 million, claiming that he only attempted to sabotage the sale. Four years later, the two heads were donated to China by the French businessman and collector François Pinault.²⁰⁰

To avoid questions such as the case above, today's approach to present the provenance for a Chinese antique collected overseas, as argued by Pierson, would be devious without a direct mentioning of the imperial court. The provenance usually includes a list of owners, with 'one associated with the removal from China ideally dating back to the early twentieth-century'.²⁰¹ This timeframe of removal mentioned by Pierson, although she did not make it explicit, was a transitional age with a less-regulated antique trading environment, distancing itself from major plundering activities in the late nineteenth-century and before stricter regulations were implemented in the 1950s. For this reason, objects of such provenance may pose fewer problems during sales, such as the case of the chicken cup sold in 2014. The cup was reputed to have been removed from China in the 1930s, thereby falling into Pierson's desired timeframe.

Chinese antiques with a good provenance history often manage to elevate the price. The supply of antiquities in the open market continues to decline, especially for items with an appropriate and notable chain of ownership. For Chinese private collectors, supply is even tighter because the Chinese government is

²⁰⁰ See *ibid.* and Kraus, "Plundered Chinese Art," 837-42.

²⁰¹ Pierson, "Reinventing 'China'," 235.

usually given a priority option to buy.²⁰² Antiquities that have already been collected by museums and institutions in China or overseas are less likely to return to the public marketplace.²⁰³ However, demand continues to grow, driven by an increase in new buyers, particularly from mainland China since the 2000s. The unbalanced scale of demand exceeding supply tends to cluster buyers' attention on a few outstanding pieces. Auction houses also aim to agitate excitement for rare and authentic pieces. Therefore, when the chicken cup appeared in the market in 2014, its flawless form and almost seamless provenance history implied an impeccable narrative preserved all the way from the Ming dynasty. Hence, the nearly 600-year-old wine vessel became an ideal purchase and transformed into a Holy Grail.

As discussed above, provenance plays a complicated role in marketing Chinese antique sales today. The chicken cup that broke at least two world records has an ownership history that has increased its value among avid buyers. When Liu controversially sipped hot tea from his new purchase, the overlapping functions—vessel, antiquity, work of art, commodity—attached to the cup were heightened, wakening a concept of 'living aesthetics' that incorporates art effortlessly into daily life. The final section below examines this concept.

²⁰² Similar rules may be found in other countries as well such as in UK or Australia. In Australia, the National Cultural Heritage Account helps to raise fund to purchase the national relics. See "National Cultural Heritage Account," *Department of Communications and Arts*, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://www.arts.gov.au/funding-and-support/national-cultural-heritage-account>.

²⁰³ There are cases where public institutions selling their ancient collection like the recent Chinese ceramics sale of the Metropolitan Museum in 2016. See Liang, "中国陶瓷传奇 [Legend of Chinese Porcelains]," 186.

Living Aesthetics

Perspectives of art in China today are heavily influenced by Western ideas. However, as one of the most ancient civilisations on earth, China used to own (and still owns) a distinctive set of aesthetics that echoes the contemporary concept of 'living aesthetics' (or 'everyday aesthetics'). This aesthetics is obscure because it does not idolise or separate the role of art from life. With recent collecting activities being participated in by a wider audience from less scholarly backgrounds, and with the Holy Grail chicken cup blending into popular culture as a result of the creation of numerous affordable copies, this section argues that contemporary China is re-embracing living aesthetics.

In recent years, it has been argued more frequently that the systematic Chinese art history formed in the twentieth century was conspicuously compiled under conventional Western methodologies. Scholars such as Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), Xu Beihong (1895–1953) and Lu Xun (1881–1936), who were trained overseas in Europe and Japan, became influential and prominent revolutionists in various intellectual areas after the collapse of the Qing dynasty.²⁰⁴ They appealed for a Chinese art history that was inspired and composed based on Western theories that centred particularly around Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) idea of independent and disinterested aesthetics.²⁰⁵ Ideas of art transcending daily life and fine art being canonised over popular art were features of this aesthetic value introduced from abroad. The terms 'art' and 'aesthetics' also began to be adopted in China.

²⁰⁴ Qingsheng Zhu, "反对文化殖民[Against Cultural Colonization]," in *批评的时代[Era of Criticism]*, ed. Fangzhou Jia (Nanning: Guangxi Fine Arts Publishing House, 2003), 340–43.

²⁰⁵ Bart Vandenabeele, "Aesthetic Disinterestedness in Kant and Schopenhauer," *Estetika* 49, no. 1 (2012): 45–70.

However, in the second half of the twentieth century, new theories arose in the West, with forerunner John Dewey (1859–1952) proposing ‘art as experience’.²⁰⁶ The new ideas essentially connect with the notion of living aesthetics—aesthetics of everyday life—challenging the so-called high and low taste and questioning the departure of art from ordinary life.²⁰⁷ Everyday aesthetics is also reflected in the transformation of art forms from relatively limited mediums such as paintings and sculptures to a radical range that blurs the line between artistic and utilitarian. It was a break from traditional Western aesthetic boundaries, but it essentially shares a similar philosophy practised by Chinese ancestors.

In ancient China, ‘arts’ had a much broader meaning than it does today. The ‘six arts’—rites, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy and mathematics—were part of basic education as early as the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE).²⁰⁸ Living aesthetics were said to have reached their peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties.²⁰⁹ Not only were the literati engaged in arts practice, but the public, from affluent businessmen to small households, were also exercising a creative philosophy of life. The variety of creativity is captured in the late Ming scholar Wen Zhenheng’s (1585–1645) book titled *Chang Wu Zhi* [Superfluous Things]. The book included 12 living customs, from the design of the dwelling to

²⁰⁶ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), 4-19.

²⁰⁷ Yuedi Liu, “‘Living Aesthetics’ from the Perspective of the Intercultural Turn,” in *Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West*, ed. Yuedi Liu and Curtis L. Carter (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 14–25. See also Yuedi Liu and Curtis L. Carter, “Introduction,” in *Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West*, ed. Yuedi Liu and Curtis L. Carter (Newark: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), vii–xvii.

²⁰⁸ Pan Fan explained the six arts in his article. ‘Rites were living morals. Music was emotional education...Archery involved bowing, and charioteering was steering the cart...Calligraphy was history and mathematics was counting.’ See Fan Pan, “The Modern Issue of the Living Aesthetics of Traditional Chinese Scholars,” in *Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West*, ed. Yuedi Liu and Curtis L. Carter (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 165–72.

²⁰⁹ Yuedi Liu, “写明末生活美学需要四两拨千斤[Writing about the Living Aesthetics at the End of the Ming Dynasty],” *Chinese Book Review Monthly*, no. 12 (2016): 121–24.

the choice of clothes, from tea ceremonies to burning incense, and from the practice of painting and calligraphy to floral arrangements.²¹⁰ These seemingly superfluous habits were seen as a reflection of talent, taste and sentiment, and they were deeply intertwined in the daily life of the intellectual class, which quickly spread to the mass population. In this case, superfluous things are not simply a tangible artwork, but a ritual of display, use and appreciation of beauty. For practitioners, the goal was not just to create beautiful objects, but to meditate and to enrich one's intelligence and mentality on an ongoing basis. These concepts also tie closely with the three main ideologies of China: Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.

The dominant philosophies in China are instrumental in promoting living aesthetics. Confucianism relates art to the art of living and associates aesthetics closely with one's morality.²¹¹ Daoism emphasises the cosmological 'Way' in which art should be non-interfering and in complete harmony with nature. Buddhism in China is called *Chan*, and it seeks spiritual responses inspired by forms and words.²¹² These three ideologies resonate with each other in emphasising the cultivation of one's mind by practising aesthetic customs spontaneously in everyday life in such a way that art should be artless.

Therefore, the production, collection and copying of chicken cups also exhibit living aesthetics. These wine vessels are first reminiscent of a living culture back in the Ming and Qing dynasties, in which porcelain-making was a way to improve

²¹⁰ Wen's book also inspired the French sinologist Craig Clunas' *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China*. Jia Lv, "《长物志》的明代生活美学赏析 [Review the Living Aesthetics of the Ming Dynasty through the Superfluous Things]," *Art Science and Technology*, no. 4 (2016): 200.

²¹¹ Eric C. Mullis, "The Ethics of Confucian Artistry," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 1 (2007): 99–107.

²¹² Susan Bush, "Chinese Aesthetics," *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. Oxford Art Online, accessed October 10, 2017, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0109>.

life for both the imperial and the public. Today, new mainland buyers can actively engage in art collecting even from a lay background. In 2014, Liu commissioned Jingdezhen-renowned manufacturer Yuan Hua Tang to produce thousands of high-quality chicken cup copies selling at RMB6900 (estimated US\$1,123) each.²¹³ Other manufacturers are also producing copies of the cups with a selling price as low as two pairs for RMB100 (estimated US\$16). This allows ordinary households to get hold of a replica, thereby cultivating a collecting habit for leisure.

The above discussion shows that living aesthetics bear two distinctive features. The first is the blurred distinction between art and daily life, and the second is indiscriminating participants. Therefore, when the attributes of the cups now blend utilitarian, artistic and intellectual values together, and when the sale of the cups bring attention and interest from collectors, scholars, as well as the public, the tenet of living aesthetics is revived.

Summary

In contemporary mainland China, the rising tide of collecting Chinese antiquities is driven by many factors. Patriotism is arguably a key contributor given the immeasurable loss of Chinese relics in past centuries. The new rich generation, who were born thanks to the economic reform in China, were encouraged by government trading policies to take part in art and antique collecting. They seek authentic works of art with good provenance history as an emblem of culture, an investment instrument and the expression of an intellectual mind. The living aesthetic that thrived during the Ming and Qing dynasties is blooming again

²¹³ Xiang Zhao, “鸡缸杯”：从‘酒器之最’到‘满地“鸡”走’[Chicken Cup: From the Holy Grail to the Most Seen ‘Chicken’],” *Jingdezhen’s Ceramics*, no. 1 (2015): 31–32.

today as more art collections become more accessible to broader audiences, as imperial objects are copied into widespread commodities, and as the emperors' chicken cups become a prevalent image among households. The chicken cups that transformed from a wine vessel to a collectable object and from a work of art to a Holy Grail, have now been turned into a popular icon and joined with everyday life.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION



Figure 3 Contemporary tea sets featuring the chicken cup design²¹⁴

There is tremendous complexity embedded within each of the petite Chenghua porcelain chicken cups. This thesis deconstructs these complexities to demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of both the objects and the field of Chinese antiquity collecting. Various methodologies are adopted in the thesis, including material culture, iconography and iconology, connoisseurship and the philosophy of

²¹⁴ Image is retrieved from an online store selling tea sets. The set is priced at RMB 125-145 (estimated USD19-22), depending on the quantity ordered. See “景德镇明代宫廷御用成化斗彩鸡缸杯仿古瓷器茶壶茶杯功夫茶具套装 [Porcelain Tea Set Imitating the Ming Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cups],” accessed October 15, 2017, <https://detail.1688.com/offer/553935436545.html?spm=a262fl.8287134.2826707.19.Co21E8>.

aesthetics, but with necessary expansions and adjustments. Through the case study of the chicken cups, the discussion also puts forward a model for potential application in other areas of Chinese art such as painting, lacquerware and furniture.

This thesis follows a temporal and geographical path, tracing the history of the multi-million dollar chicken cup to examine how this unassuming small wine vessel—one of many used by an emperor—has been transformed to a collector's and connoisseur's Holy Grail today. It embodies a world history spanning nearly 600 years, from being an exclusive imperial artefact to an item intertwined with East and West exchange, international trade wars, the Chinese Civil War and economic and social reforms. Its history has engaged rulers' affection and aspiration, connoisseurs' erudition and persistence, and collectors' enthusiasm and patriotism. Its creation reflects the materialisation of self and society, and the subsequent actions of imitation, study, trading and consumption of the object invest new strata of meanings in it. In addition, this specific cup is a representative piece that speaks for many of the extant Chenghua chicken cups, as well as a substantial portion of Chinese antiquities. It has a distinctive biography with an unparalleled provenance, but as a component of material culture, it also constitutes a progressive biography of social, artistic and collecting history.

The chicken cups carry opulent imperial narratives, as explored in Chapter 2. They were a reflection of the noble families' private desires. The Chenghua Emperor's longing for parenthood, a mother figure that he found in Lady Wan and the couple's unfulfilled dream of a prolific family are imprinted on the cups using the unprecedented porcelain design of chicken families. In addition, the Chenghua court, with its lavish lifestyle, centrally managed the imperial kilns at

Jingdezhen and demanded the most delicate porcelain wares. At that time, the consolidated ceramic expertise at Jingdezhen and the less regulated working conditions after the Yuan dynasty facilitated the advance of porcelain-making techniques. The renowned *doucai* glazing technique reached its peak in this period, as is seen at its finest in the double-fired polychrome chicken cups. The increased possibility of cracking during double-firing and the popularisation of drinking distilled wine at court also favoured the refinement of smaller porcelain vessels.

The chicken cups' superior craftsmanship and their intimate bond with the Chenghua monarch stimulated later generations' interest to collect and copy them. In particular, the Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors during the high Qing period were ardent connoisseurs and antiquarians of Chinese relics. Their passion was not only driven by innate desire, but also motivated by strong political will to enhance their charisma as intellectual leaders and legitimise their rule. Although being frequently copied, the original chicken cups can still be distinguished. It has proven almost impossible to replicate their subtle distinctions, such as the apricot glow from the white porcelain, the paler blue underglaze, the spontaneity in the lively depiction of the motifs, and essentially, the mastery of techniques pertaining to the Chenghua craftsmen.

It took around 400 years for the chicken cups to be known and collected in the West. In Chapter 3, the development of Western taste in Chinese ancient artefacts is divided into three stages based on the accessibility of the imperial collection. In the early stage, before the nineteenth century, although the quantity of exports from the East to the West was vast, the imperial treasures, including the chicken cups, were secluded in royal palaces, and there was little knowledge of such exquisite wares overseas. The concept of China among Westerners was

vague and mythical. During the second phase, objects bearing true Chinese aesthetics were uncovered in the nineteenth century. When the late Qing regime lost battles against invaders and were forced to agree to many concessions, Chinese national treasures began to appear in the open market. Foreign looting and acquisition, massive excavations and royal members who exchanged imperial household goods for hard currency led to the loss of fine artefacts abroad. At the same time, international expositions took place and presented China and its culture from the Chinese-defined perspective. These events heightened interest from the West to study traditional Chinese aesthetics and connoisseurship, which supported their collecting activities. Historical texts from China were translated and studied, and the significance of the chicken cups was subsequently recognised. However, access to a broader spectrum of physical samples to assist with hands-on practice was still lacking in the West.

In the third stage, from the 1930s, research, discussions and exhibitions of Chinese art increased markedly. This was mostly because of the efforts of a group of elite Western connoisseurs, collectors and scholars. Chinese art became an official degree at the University of London, and clubs and societies such as the Oriental Ceramic Society expanded and facilitated more seminars and exhibitions of Chinese art. The 1935-1936 *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* was the most outstanding example, with a full range of Chinese works on display from the primitive times to the Qing dynasty, including three pairs of chicken cups on loan from China. Moreover, after the 1930s, museums and institutions grew quickly, expanding their own Asian collections notably through an increased number of donations from individual collectors. These donations transformed the identity of the collection from private to public, and therefore spread the collectors' tastes

to a wider audience. David, Eumorfopoulos, Bushell and Freer were among the prominent figures who helped to shape the broader perception of Chinese art in the twentieth century.

As discussed in Chapter 4, a growing group of Chinese mainland art buyers are today motivated by patriotic, economic and aesthetic reasons to collect Chinese relics. Liu's acquisition of the chicken cup in 2014 is one of many examples in which a dispersed object was successfully returned to China. After WWII, when memories of the enormous outflow of works to foreign lands was still fresh, mainland China faced further treasure losses. The retreat of the Nationalist Party to Taiwan at the end of the Civil War in the mid-twentieth century saw a major section of the national collection removed from the mainland. During the years of the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards destroyed countless symbols of the ancient civilisation, driven by their anti-feudal ideology. Only two chicken cups survived the turmoil in mainland China; they are now preserved at the Palace Museum, Beijing.²¹⁵ Therefore, nationalism became a shared concern of the government and private collectors, with both wanting these cultural materials, which are highly prized by the West, to be returned.

In addition, since the 1980s, economic reform in China has nurtured a group of financially affluent people who can afford highly priced antiquities. Government policies that used to restrict antique trading and individual buying started to loosen up, chiefly to encourage the return of Chinese antiques. Liu is considered an early entrant to the art market. He started collecting in the 1990s and has had a multitude of followers since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The new buyers from mainland China not only pursue antiquity collecting as a patriotic

²¹⁵ This two cups' authenticity is still challenged by scholars today. See footnote 172.

and intellectual expression, but also as an economic means for investment and risk diversification. As a result, the outbound flow of antiques during the previous centuries started to reverse, correlating with the rising purchasing power of affluent Chinese consumers. The price of the works continues to escalate because of the imbalance in supply and demand, especially given the congested buyers' market for the few authentic artworks with well-defined provenance. The chicken cup sold in 2014 was given the title of the Holy Grail by Sotheby's, which affirmed its preciousness and bestowed an aura on its past and future owners.

Although some may argue that the mainland buyers' avid collecting of imperial treasures reflects their lack of sophistication in the diverse art market, the expanding collections in China are inspiring a classless aesthetic that stimulates interest, studies and appreciation of art in the wider public. This living aesthetic, which incorporates art into people's daily lives and used to be prevalent during the Ming and Qing dynasties is therefore revived in today's more democratic society. Similarly, after Liu's acquisition of the chicken cup, 'chicken cup fever' burgeoned, with innumerable affordable copies and goods decorated with chicken motifs appearing in the market—the 'imperial chickens' walk into everyday households.

The chicken cup case study has changed my first impression of this seemingly unremarkable petite artefact. Although the title of Holy Grail conferred by Sotheby's may have been used for marketing purposes, the multifaceted value of the item, which was revealed through the research process, has provided an explanation of its divine nature.

In the age of information and consumerism, the commercial value may attract more attention than the historical and cultural complexity rooted in the chicken

cups. However, art historical studies offer more prudent evaluations to reveal the immense value of an object that may be obscured by its price. When the imperial, modern and contemporary timelines connect, when Chinese and Western stories unfold, and when personal, technical, political, economic and aesthetical factors blend, the seemingly immutable chicken cups are able to convey profound cultural and historical significance. However, it is difficult to equate such significance with monetary value. As I am writing the conclusion of the thesis, a Song dynasty brush washer (Figure 20) breaks the world Chinese ceramic auction record held by the chicken cup. This *ru* ware, which is ‘rare as the stars at dawn’, sold for US\$38 million at Sotheby’s Hong Kong on 3 October 2017.²¹⁶ Despite how comprehensive research may be, there always seems to be an inexplicable factor in the formula that results in astronomical numbers on price tags. As with the chicken cup, there is no doubt a long and complex history associated with this brush washer that is there to be enquired, found and guarded—and perhaps, this is the value of art historians.

²¹⁶ “Ru Ware—Rare as the Stars at Dawn,” *Sotheby’s*, accessed October 3, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/videos/2017/ru-ware-rare-stars-dawn.html>.



Figure 4 Su Shi, *Gong Fu Tie*, collection of Liu Yiqian²¹⁷



Figure 5 Song dynasty painting inscribed with Emperor Chenghua's poem, collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei

²¹⁷ Image is retrieved from "Su Shi 1037-1101," Sotheby's, accessed September 10, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/fine-classical-chinese-paintings-n09009/lot.565.html>.



Figure 6 Emperor Chenghua, *Yi Tuan He Qi*, collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing



Figure 7 Chenghua stem cup with grape motif, collection of the British Museum



Figure 8 Anonymous, *Hongli Shi Yi Shi Er Tu* [Painting of the Qianlong Emperor], collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing



Figure 9 Song dynasty *ru* bowl etched with Qianlong Emperor's song inside, collection of the British Museum



Figure 10 Cup produced during the Qing dynasty inscribed with Emperor Qianlong's song which praises the chicken cups, collection of the British Museum



Figure 11 Left: Chicken cup copy from the Kangxi period; Middle: Chenghua chicken cup. Right: Chicken cup copy from the Yongzheng period²¹⁸

²¹⁸ Image is taken from Jessica Harrison-Hall, "Chenghua Period Porcelains," in *Catalogue of Late Yuan and Ming Ceramics in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 2001), 159.



Figure 12 The 'Chinese Room' at Claydon House in England²¹⁹



Figure 13 The 'Porcelain Room' of the former Santos Palace in Lisbon²²⁰



Figure 14 Giuseppe Castiglione (attributed), *Qianlong in his study*, collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing

²¹⁹ Image source: Luke Lightfoot, "Chinese Room, Claydon House," accessed September 15, 2017, <http://insideinside.org/project/chinese-room-claydon-house/>.

²²⁰ Image source: Zhang Liyun, "Rare Collection of Chinese Porcelain Evidence of Long History of Portugal-China Ties," *Xinhua*, accessed September 15, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-05/10/c_134224896.htm.



Figure 15 Chicken cup illustrated in the book *Lidai Mingci Tupu* [Illustrated description of the celebrated porcelain of different dynasties]²²¹

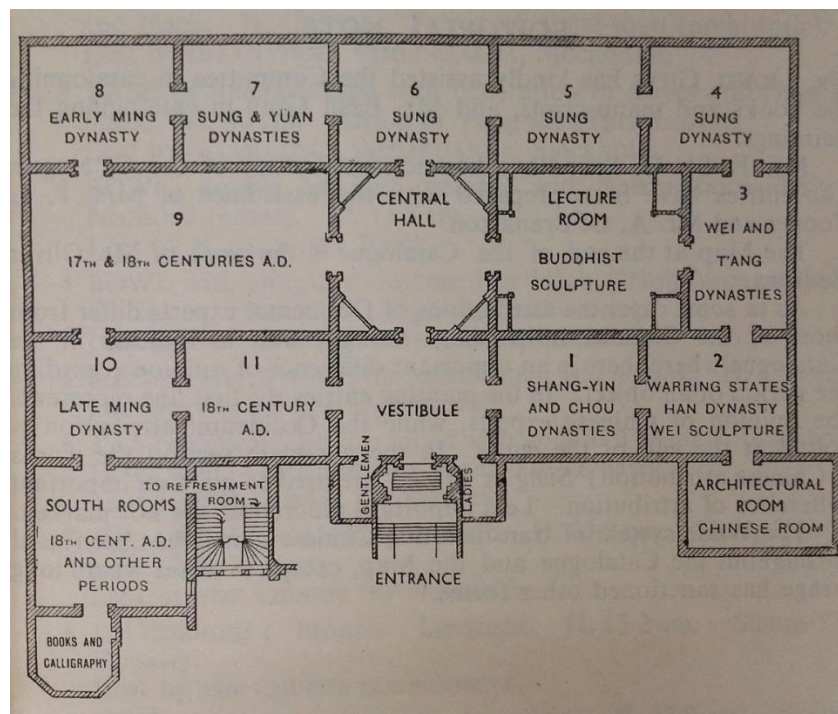


Figure 16 Gallery Plan for the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art*²²²

²²¹ Image source: Yuanbian Xiang, *Porcelain of Different Dynasties*, trans. Stephen W. Bushell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 64.

²²² Gallery plan is adopted from *Catalogue*, xxiii.

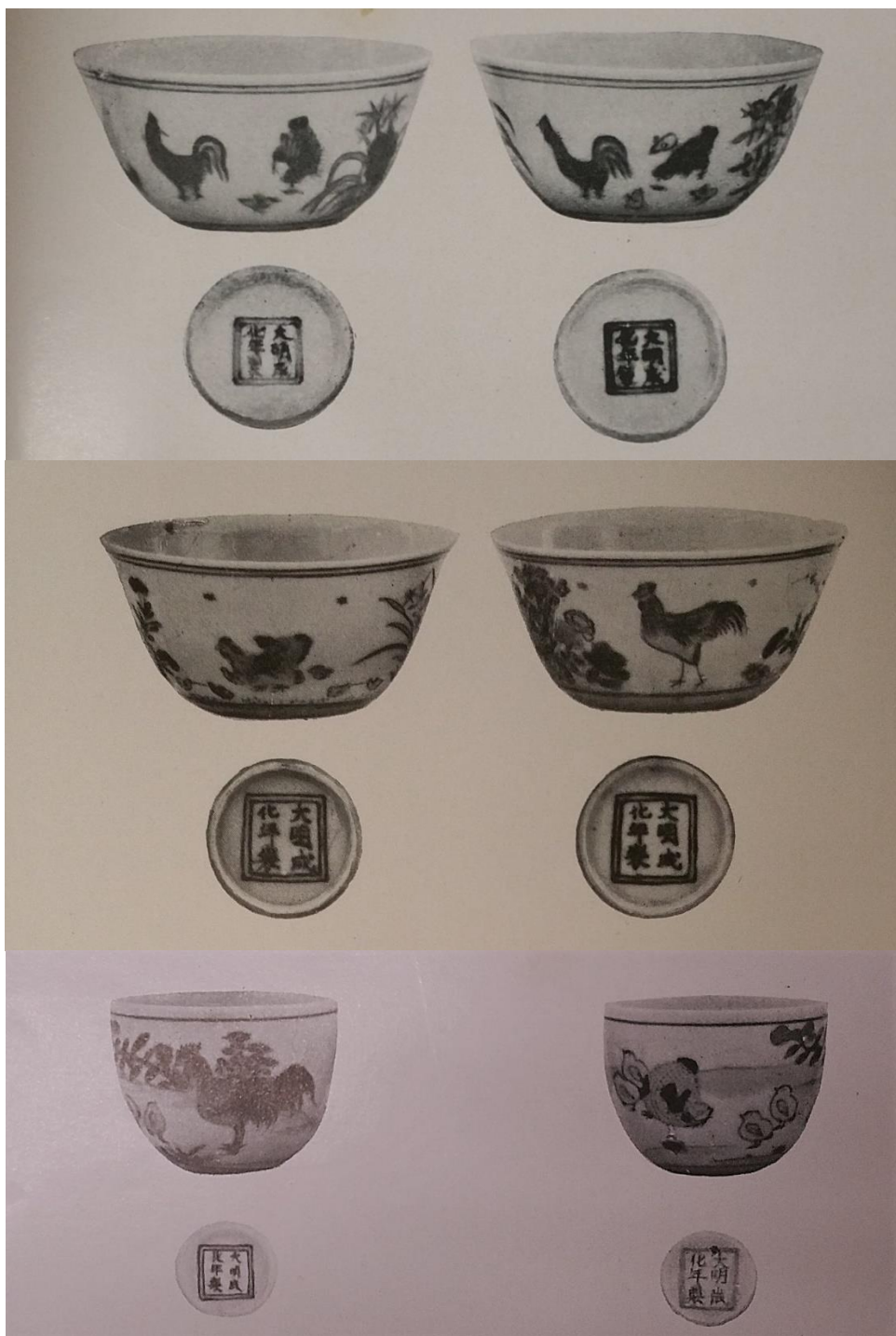


Figure 17 Three pairs of chicken cups on loan from the Chinese government at the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art*²²³

²²³ Image source: 图说[*Illustrated Catalogue*], 129-130.

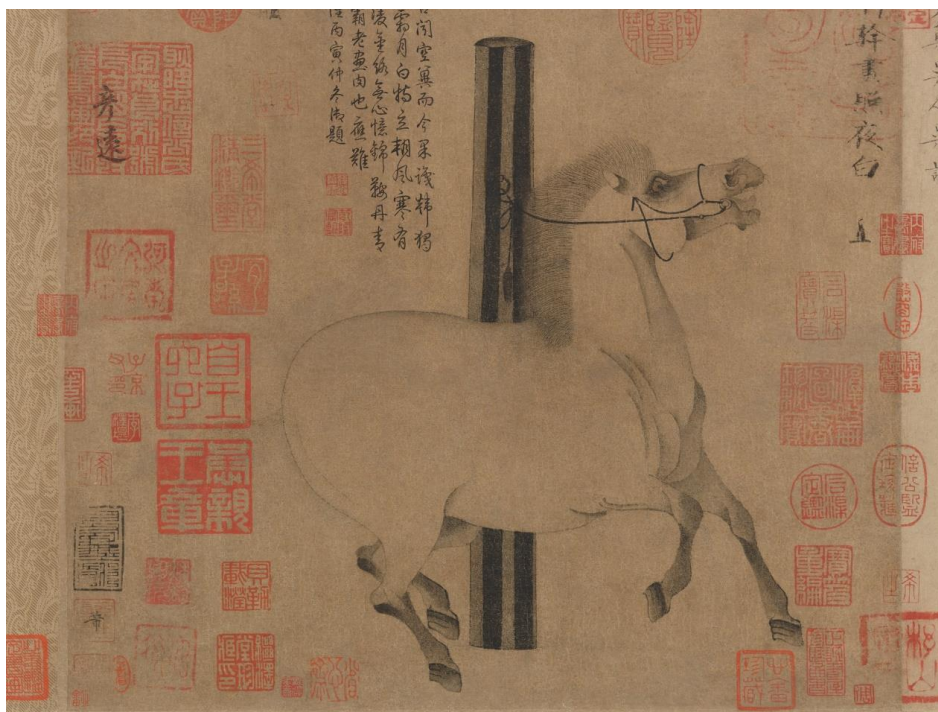


Figure 18 Han Gan, *Night-Shining White* detail, collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art



Figure 19 Example of a duobao ge²²⁴

²²⁴ Image is taken from Huang, "Jingdezhen Porcelain Production," 124.



Figure 20 Nicolas Chow holds the Song dynasty *ru* ware which created the latest world auction record for Chinese ceramic²²⁵

²²⁵ Image is retrieved from Mark Molloy, "Extraordinarily Rare Chinese Bowl Sells for Record \$38m at Auction," accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/03/extraordinarily-rare-chinese-bowl-sells-record-38m-auction/>.

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Annex 2 List of Ming Emperors

Emperors	Reign years ²²⁶	Given name	Reign name	Posthumous name	Temple name
Hongwu Emperor	1368–1398	Zhū Yuánzhāng 朱元璋	Hóngwǔ 洪武	Gāodì 高帝	Tàizǔ 太祖
Jianwen Emperor	1399–1402	Zhū Yǔnwén 朱允炆	Jiànwén 建文	Ràngdì 讓帝	Huìzōng 惠宗
Yongle Emperor	1402–1424	Zhū Dì 朱棣	Yǒnglè 永樂	Wéndì 文帝	Chéngzǔ 成祖
Hongxi Emperor	1425	Zhū Gāozhì 朱高熾	Hóngxī 洪熙	Zhāodì 昭帝	Rénzōng 仁宗
Xuande Emperor	1426–1435	Zhū Zhānjī 朱瞻基	Xuāndé 宣德	Zhāngdì 章帝	Xuānzōng 宣宗
Zhengtong Emperor	1436–1449 and 1457–1464	Zhū Qízhèn 朱祁鎮	Zhèngtǒng 正統 and Tiānshùn 天順	Ruìdì 睿帝	Yīngzōng 英宗
Jingtai Emperor	1450–1457	Zhū Qíyù 朱祁鈺	Jǐngtài 景泰	Jǐngdì 景帝	Dàizōng 代宗

²²⁶ Information is in reference to “Emperors of the Ming Dynasty,” in *A Legacy of Chenghua* (Hong Kong: The Jingdezhen Institute of Ceramic Archaeology and The Tsui Museum of Art, 1993), 15.

Chenghua Emperor	1464– 1487	Zhū Jiànshēn 朱見深	Chéng huà 成化	Chúndì 純帝	Xiànzōng 憲宗
Hongzhi Emperor	1488– 1505	Zhū Yòuchēng 朱祐樞	Hóngzhì 弘治	Jìngdì 敬帝	Xiàozōng 孝宗
Zhengde Emperor	1506– 1521	Zhū Hòuzhào 朱厚照	Zhèngdé 正德	Yìdì 毅帝	Wǔzōng 武宗
Jiajing Emperor	1521– 1566	Zhū Hòucōng 朱厚熜	Jiājìng 嘉靖	Sùdì 肅帝	Shìzōng 世宗
Longqing Emperor	1567– 1572	Zhū Zǎihòu 朱載堉	Lóngqìng 隆慶	Zhuāngdì 莊帝	Mùzōng 穆宗
Wanli Emperor	1573– 1620	Zhū Yìjūn 朱翊鈞	Wànli 萬曆	Xiǎndì 顯帝	Shénzōng 神宗
Taichang Emperor	1620	Zhū Chángluò 朱常洛	Tàichāng 泰昌	Zhēndì 貞帝	Guāngzōng 光宗
Tianqi Emperor	1621– 1627	Zhū Yóujiào 朱由校	Tiānqǐ 天啟	Zhédi 愍帝	Xīzōng 熹宗
Chongzhen Emperor	1628– 1644	Zhū Yóujiǎn 朱由檢	Chóngzhēn 崇禎	Lièdì 烈帝	Sīzōng 思宗

Annex 3 Chronicles of Dynasties (simplified)

DYNASTIES	PERIOD ²²⁷
Xia Dynasty (unconfirmed) 夏	ca. 2100–1600 BCE
Shang Dynasty 商	ca. 1600–ca. 1050 BCE
Zhou Dynasty 周	ca. 1050–256 BCE
Qin Dynasty 秦	221–206 BCE
Han Dynasty 汉	206 BCE–220 CE
Six Dynasties 六朝	220–589 CE
Sui Dynasty 隋	581–618
Tang Dynasty 唐	618–906
Five Dynasties 五代	907–960
Liao Dynasty 辽	907–1125
Song Dynasty 宋	960–1279
Yuan Dynasty 元	1279–1368
Ming Dynasty 明	1368–1644
Qing Dynasty 清	1644–1911

²²⁷ Information is taken from the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. See “List of Rulers of China,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, accessed October 3, 2017, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chem/hd_chem.htm.

Annex 4 List of Terminologies

Pinyin	Chinese	English
<i>Doucai</i>	斗彩	contending colours
<i>Duobao ge</i>	多宝阁	cabinet of treasures
<i>Humi di</i>	糊米底	burnt-rice bottom
<i>Jinshi Xue</i>	金石学	epigraphy
<i>Macang soil</i>	麻仓土	A type of local soil found in the Jiangxi province. Porcelain made from this material has an apricot glow after firing.
<i>Potang / Pingdeng blue</i>	坡塘青 / 平等青	Blue pigment sourced locally at Jiangxi province during the Chenghua period
<i>Wucai</i>	五彩	Polychrome (or five colours)

Annex 5 List of Extant Chenghua Chicken Cups

No. of Cups	Museums	Past Transactions ²²⁸
2	Palace Museum, Beijing ²²⁹	
8	Taipei National Palace Museum	
1	The British Museum, London, from the Sir Percival David Collection	Sotheby's Hong Kong, 25th November 1980, lot 31
1	The Victoria & Albert Museum, London	Edward Chow
1	The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, from the Evill collection	Edward Chow
1	The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from the collection of W.W. Winkworth	Sotheby's London, 27th November 1973, lot 308A, Sotheby's New York rooms, 4th December 1984, lot 332
1	the Collections Baur, Geneva, from the George Eumorfopoulos and Mrs. Walter Sedgwick collections	Sotheby's London, 2nd July 1968, lot 135
	Private	
1	Liu Yiqian	Sotheby's Hong Kong 2014; Ezkenazi London 1999 via Sotheby's Hong Kong; Sakamoto Goro; Edward Chow (by repute); Mrs Dreyfus (since 1930s) ²³⁰
1	Au Bak Ling	Sotheby's Hong Kong, 19th May 1981, lot 429; Edward Chow
1	N.A.	Sotheby's London, 2nd March 1971, lot 166; Mrs Dreyfus (1930s)
1	N.A.	Christie's restored piece from fragments
19		

²²⁸ Most of the information is retrieved and summarised from the "The Meiyintang 'Chicken Cup,'" *Sotheby's*, accessed July 8, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2014/meiyintang-chicken-cup-hk0545.html>.

²²⁹ The two cups at Beijing are challenged by scholars to be copied chicken cups instead of authentic ones. Ibid.

²³⁰ Fionnuala McHugh, "The Year of the Cup," *South China Morning Post*, accessed July 25, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/article/279994/year-cup>.

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[China&sortBy=Relevance&sortOrder=asc&offset=0&pageSize=0](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection#!?perPage=20&geolocation=China&sortBy=Relevance&sortOrder=asc&offset=0&pageSize=0).

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