

A Lecture

ON

Chinese Porcelain, and its Collection.*

BY REGINALD LE MAY, M. R. A. S.

Chinese Porcelain may seem an odd subject to introduce into the proceedings of the Siam Society, but if you will look at the inside cover of the Journal, you will see that the scope of our Society includes investigation into the arts and sciences not only of Siam, but of neighbouring countries as well. Moreover, all so-called Siamese porcelain from the XVIIth Century onwards was made in China in accordance with designs supplied from Siam, and therefore Siam is intimately connected with China in the matter of porcelain. I should add, however, that I do not propose to speak of 'Siamese' porcelain now, as that is a large subject by itself.

As will be readily recognised, by myself only too well, I have undertaken a task of considerable magnitude, for I have to compress a period of roughly a thousand years into two short hours. I shall, of course, be able to give you only a very general outline of the history of Chinese porcelain, but if I can impart to you some of the charm of the delicate forms produced, and of the pleasure which their sight and touch inspire in me, I shall feel well repaid for my presumptuous attempt.

The art of potting, in some form or another, goes back, I have no doubt, many thousands of years. It was probably one of the earliest discoveries of historic, or perhaps pre-historic, man that clay baked over fire could afterwards withstand a great deal of heat without fusing, and was thus of immense value to him in cooking his food.

We have only to look at the wonderful productions of the Minoan period in Crete, as well as those of Susa in Persia, both of them originating as far back as 3,000 B. C., to realise that the potter's art must by that time already have been of some antiquity.

*This paper was read at a meeting of the Section of Fine and Applied Arts in May, 1928.

Further evidence of this is continually being brought to light, and painted pottery of an excellent standard has recently been found in the excavations now going on in the valley of the Indus, dating from probably 3,000 to 2,000 B. C. and also, I believe, in the north of China. I have seen illustrations of a number of well-shaped and well-painted vessels from there, said to be at least 5,000 years old.

There is little doubt that the types of habitation in use in very early times gave little incentive to make anything of a purely decorative nature, and that the pottery made then was for a definite utilitarian purpose. Later on the Greeks in the fifth and fourth centuries B. C. brought the manufacture and painting of decorative earthenware to a fine art, but it remained for the Chinese to discover the elements for the manufacture of a new substance which could be put to such delightful decorative use, and to provide us with the beautiful material called Porcelain.

And here I think it necessary that we should be clear as to the terms we are using; and for our purpose I propose to make use of three only, Earthenware, Porcellanous Stoneware, and Porcelain.

Earthenware is what we should rightly term Pottery. It is made of baked clay and is non-translucent. It can be scratched with a sharp instrument.

Porcellanous Stoneware represents, as one might say, a proto-porcelain, the transition period between Earthenware and Porcelain, and, in the words of Mr. Hetherington in his 'Early Ceramic Wares of China', may be described as "a non-translucent pottery, in which a certain amount of the essential ingredients of porcelain are presumed or proved to be present."

Lastly, we come to true *Porcelain*. Now what are the essential and mysterious ingredients referred to above? Dr. Dillon, the well-known expert, tells us that they are two:—

1) The hydrated silicate of alumina, provided by the white earthy clay known as 'Kao-lin', or china-clay, a substance infusible at the highest temperature attainable by the potter's furnace (about 1500° C.); and

2) The silicate of alumina and potash, i. e., felspar, with

which is generally associated some amount of quartz and mica. This is known as 'petuntse', or china-stone, and is fusible at the highest temperatures.

Of these two, the first is the immediate product of the weathering of felspar contained in granitic rock, and the second group is nothing else than the granite itself in a more or less weathered condition. These two materials are intimately mixed in powdered form, shaped and baked, and, as the temperature rises, an action known as 'fritting' takes place, i. e. the edges of the particles of the two substances coalesce, although no complete fusion takes place. This mixture forms the substance known as porcelain, and is technically known as the 'Paste'.

It so happens that rich deposits of 'Kaolin' have been found in certain rivers of China from early times, giving that country a great advantage over other countries in regard to the manufacture of porcelain.

The qualities which a vessel, made of these two materials, possesses to an eminent degree are:—1) a hardness, which can be scratched by crystal quartz but which remains untouched by the hardest steel; 2) translucency (not transparency); 3) a white, finely granular, sugary texture when revealed by the broken edge; 4) a resonance, in some cases, as of a gong or bell.

On this last quality the Chinese connoisseur has always laid an especial stress.

There are two other substances which are inseparable from Porcelain in its manufacture, and these are *Glaze* and *Colour*.

The *Glaze*, i. e., the vitreous coating applied to the surface of the raw paste, may be hard or soft, highly vitreous or opaque. The word 'glaze' itself is only another form of the English word 'glass', and actually in composition at least there is often very little difference between the two.

The glazes used for hard paste Chinese porcelain are made essentially of 'petuntse', or felspar, mixed with lime which has been burnt with dry fern as fuel. The very early opaque glazes of the Tang period as a rule contained lead silicate, and the use of this type

of glaze has been traced in Egypt as far back as the XIth Dynasty, 3,000-2,000 B. C. But specimens of Sung glazes were found, on analysis, to be composed of Silica 70%, Alumina 10%, and the remainder of Lime and Alkalies, with small quantities of Iron, Phosphoric and Copper Oxides.

The glazes brought to perfection by the Chinese at an early period differ from European glazes by reason of their hardness, high fusing point and chemical composition. Speaking generally, the glaze of porcelain differs from the paste itself enough to allow its becoming completely liquid at the extreme heat of the furnace.

The *Colour*. There were three methods of applying colour.

1) If the piece was to be a monochrome, without decoration, the colour was mixed with the glaze before application, and before firing, and thus gave the required colour to the vase or bowl; and this was effected by the introduction of heavy, metallic bases or oxides which combined with the silica to form coloured silicates, such as iron, copper, cobalt, and manganese, with tin for white, antimony for yellow, gold for red, and lead for fluxing. Of these, copper and iron were the chief oxides used.

2) By painting on the surface of the raw paste before the glaze was applied, and before the piece was fired.

3) By applying coloured enamels to the surface of the glaze, after the first firing.

As an example of 1) *Monochromes*, Celadon, which is found in grey, blue and green shades, is obtained by putting a small quantity of protoxide of iron in the glaze; while the famous Sang de Boeuf is given by a red sub-oxide of copper chiefly suspended in the glaze.

2) *Under-glaze colours* are two only, blue and red. The first gives the famous blue and white family, and the great depth of colour obtained is due to this very fact that the colour is painted on the raw paste of the porcelain before it is fired. The quality of the blue, which is made from cobalt ore, depends upon its refinement and the mixing with it of a small quantity of manganese. The red was obtained from the red sub-oxide of copper, but the full

development of this colour as an underglaze has long been a lost art.

Both the above had to stand the heat of the 'grand feu,' and were the only two able to do so.

3) *Over-glaze decoration.* In this there was an intermediate stage of painting in three colours, turquoise-blue, manganese purple, called aubergine, and yellow, not on the paste, but on the *biscuit* after a preliminary firing. This was done with a brush, and the vase or jar coloured at the will of the painter. It was then fired again in what is called the 'demi-grand feu'.

Finally we come to the coloured enamels applied to the surface of the glaze, i. e., of course, after the glazed paste has been fired. These enamels fuse at a comparatively low temperature and therefore allowed of the use of a wide range of colours. Those used by the Chinese are essentially silicates of lead with an alkali added. These enamels were baked in a muffle kiln, i. e., they were protected from the direct flame by closed boxes of fire-clay, and the temperature varied, according to the colour, from 600 to 1000 degrees Centigrade. The firing lasted from 4 to 12 hours.

All the remarks made above are essentially intended to apply to the manufacture of Chinese porcelain, and may thus form an introduction to this brief account of the actual wares produced in that country during the past thousand years, and now eagerly sought after by collectors of all civilised countries.

And here, as I am proud to be termed a 'Collector' of Chinese porcelain, will you permit me to say a few words on this subject.

Collecting Chinese porcelain is not at all an arbitrary affair, and there is no greater mistake than to think that a piece is considered good and valuable just because it is *old*. If such were the fact, then Tang or even Han wares would be the most valued, but such is by no means the case. There may be a historical, or sentimental association attaching to a piece, like the blue and white cups given by Queen Elizabeth to Lord Burleigh and now in the Pierpont Morgan collection, which are not of any particular quality and gain their value more from their historical association and their Elizabethan silver mountings; but as general rule it is the actual quality of

the ware itself that counts, i. e., the paste, the glaze, the colour and the decoration. Certain generations of Chinese potters excelled in turning out porcelain of the very finest quality and art, above all their fellows, and this is what makes fine Chinese porcelain so much prized to-day. I personally have handled a large number of pieces of poor quality, pieces of blue and white made in the reigns of Kang Hsi and Khien Lung; and all pieces made in those reigns must not be catalogued in the same class. There were hundreds of factories, from the Emperor's downwards, turning out porcelain of all kinds and sorts.

Now it requires a trained mind to distinguish quality in anything—it is not always, or, as a rule, self-apparent. To distinguish and appreciate good music, good furniture, good porcelain, the mind, the palate, the taste require to be cultivated. You can all visualise the mental picture of Mr. A. saying to Mrs. A. "We won't give the 1870 Port and the Napoleon Brandy to old B. tonight. He wouldn't appreciate it, if he had it." It simply means that old B., in the opinion of A., has neglected to cultivate his palate for wines and spirits.

There is no easy or royal road to appreciating good porcelain. The subject must be studied with care, and not only from books, but also, practically, by handling pieces continually, so as to know by the touch and by the eye whether a piece fulfils the necessary conditions. In time it can be learnt in a certain measure, but if I stand before you lecturing to-day on Chinese porcelain, it is not because I wish it to be thought that I have learnt all there is to know, or even one tenth part. I only feel that, as a humble student, I am beginning to acquire some knowledge of perhaps one of the most difficult subjects in the world, and to find out how much there is to learn. The best way to gain experience, just as in bridge or anything else, is practice first, and theory afterwards. You must buy your experience. It is almost impossible to tell from an illustration what a piece really looks like. You must see it.

Many people say to me, especially about blue and white, "What does it matter whether it is old or new? It all looks exactly the

same". My answer is, "To the very casual observer it may, but to any person, collector or not, with a discerning eye, I am convinced it does not. It is all a matter of comparison." I'll let you into a secret about this blue and white. When I examine a piece now, one of two things happens—either the blue leaps out and hits me in the eye, or else, the more I gaze, the more it recedes, as if I were looking into a pool of deep blue water; and that is the test I always apply now-a-days as far as the colour is concerned.

Of course, age lends a mellowness to porcelain as to many other things, but unless the article were originally of a fine paste, glaze and colour, no amount of age would make it a piece fit for the discriminating collector as opposed to the mere accumulator.

The other principle I have set in front of myself now is, "Never buy a piece unless you know what it is". Of course at first you have to speculate—unless you are lucky enough to find a reliable guide—and I have had my share of 'disappointments', as I will call them.

I cannot undertake to give you a picture of Chinese History or Customs or Religion, although all of these have deeply influenced the manufacture of porcelain in many ways, in form, colour, and design. I have not the knowledge or time at my disposal, so I must confine myself purely to the porcelain itself.

There is good evidence to show that in the Chou Dynasty, 1100-220 B. C., pottery was continuously made, and that in the Han Dynasty, 220 B. C.-200 A. D., it is possible that even porcelain began to be made. There are certain large vases and jars in existence, attributed to Han times, which contain some of the elements of porcelain. But our knowledge of those times is still scanty, and after the break up of the Han Dynasty the country was disunited for many years until the advent of the Tang Dynasty, 600-900 A. D., which is the first with which I propose to deal. Even so, I shall cover a period of over a thousand years from the VIIth to the XVIIIth century, including the Tang, Sung and Yuan, Ming and Tsing Dynasties. These may be divided approximately as follows, for our purpose:—

Tang	...	600-950 A. D.
Sung & Yuan		950-1350 A. D.
Ming	...	1350-1650 A. D.
Tsing	...	1650-1800 A. D.

The *Tang* Period. It is a remarkable thing what rapid strides have been made in our knowledge of Chinese porcelain during the present century. Dr. Dillon, who first published his work on Porcelain in 1904, does not deal with Tang wares and scarcely refers to their existence; and Mr. Hippisley, writing in 1902, says that "No specimens manufactured prior to the Sung Dynasty have survived to the present day".

It has been recognised for some years past that the Tang dynasty produced the highest forms of creative art in China, and it is becoming more and more clear, from the mass of tomb figures and ornaments that are coming to Europe now-a-days, that, as Mr. Hetherington says, "the Tang potter had not much to learn from anyone. Anyone interested should go and look at the magnificent figure of "the Lohan or Saint in the British Museum, which is of Tang manufacture. It is 47½ inches high and as a work of art it is wonderful. The technical skill required to make and fire such an image without flaw or crack could claim comparison with that of any age or country. Figures of camels and models of men obviously not Chinese show the contact of China with the West."

But the Tang potters made not only figures, which, by the way, are all of earthenware or pottery. It seems certain now that the invention of *porcelain* itself dates from Tang times, a fact which was long doubted before. The Tang Dynasty actually began in 618 and came to an end in 906 A. D. Now at a town called Samarra on the Tigris near Baghdad, which was destroyed in, and has been abandoned since, 882 A. D., numbers of fragments of true Chinese porcelain have recently been found in the ruins. This can only mean that not only were the Chinese making porcelain in Tang times, but also that by 882 they had been practising the art long enough to export porcelain to Mesopotamia.

We now come to the *Sung* period which dates from 950 to

1370, if we include the short Yuan or Mongol period as well. For the main part this was a period of tranquility and cultivation of the arts, at any rate until the Dynasty was overthrown by Gengis and Kublai Khan.

Now, as I have hinted before, up to the XXth Century, Tang and Sung porcelain was practically unknown to Europe, and the great collectors of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries in England, France and Germany revelled in the magnificent, but somewhat formal porcelains of the three great reigns of Kang Hsi, Yung Cheng and Khien Lung, which together covered a period of 130 years, from 1662 to 1795, when Khien Lung voluntarily abdicated because he did not wish to outrage conventionality by reigning longer than his grandfather, a period of 60 years.

Through the translations of Dr. Bushell, who used to be Legation Physician at Peking, and other writers, the extravagant praises bestowed on Sung porcelain by the Chinese were known to European collectors, but were laughed at as being fictions of the imagination, and it is only within the last few years that we have really begun to understand and appreciate the art of the Sung potter. And although I do not think that the wonderful vases made in Kang Hsi's reign will ever lose their hold entirely, still signs are not wanting that the more discriminating collectors are turning their eyes backwards to the simple but wholly satisfactory forms and colours of the Sung period. The Sung potter created his bowl, etched a few lines on it, covered it with glaze, and fired it. Sometimes there was no decoration at all, just the form and the colour, and I think that even the few pieces I can show you serve to bring out this purity of form which requires no adventitious aids to enhance its beauty. You may think indifferently of it at first, but live with it and it will grow upon you quietly but surely.

Now in the Sung period there were six wares which were held in high regard by Chinese collectors if we may judge from their written praises, Chai, Ju, Chün, Lung Chün, Ting and Kuan, which, except Chai and Kuan, are named after their place of manufacture.

Of these I can only show you three at this time, with imitations of a fourth make.

Chai ware was named after the family name of the emperor in whose reign it was first made, and is said to be 'as blue as the sky after rain, as clear as a mirror, as thin as paper, and as resonant as the musical stone of jade.' No piece is known of this ware to-day and even in the XVIIth century fragments were set as jewels: so we must rest content for the present with the description.

Ju ware. This also was unknown until quite recently, except from books, and even now we are not absolutely certain about its identity. But certain dishes and vases that have recently come to light correspond very nearly to the descriptions given, and are thought to be the long-lost Ju. In China now they are called 'Ying Ching Yao,' which means a ware with a shadowy blue glaze. The body is highly translucent in thinly potted examples and has a white sugary appearance. As a matter of fact it is, if not entirely, as near true porcelain as anything made in the Sung Dynasty. The form, the design, and the glaze are, it must be admitted, delightful.

There is also another kind of Ying Ching Yao, of a somewhat thicker build, there being two types of the same ware.

Chün Yao. Of this, although the contemporary Chinese put no very great store upon it, the modern collector will pay any price for a fine specimen, even up to £1,000. The colour in Chün is more a sky blue with a splash of mauvish pink, and I was always wondering where the idea of combining these beautiful colours came from until one evening I saw identical colours in our Bangkok sky about dusk. There is no doubt that the Chinese, as evidenced by the quotation already made, were given to drawing their ideas from nature and the heavens.

The principal articles made of this ware were flower pots and bulb bowls, and the latter often have a numeral (from 1 to 10) incised in the base to indicate the size.

Kuan Yao. The word 'Kuan' means 'Imperial,' and this ware is thus a type of ware made for the Imperial Court. It is very rare and I can only say that, from the books, it appears to be a

kind of Chün Yao of superior make, and that the specimens now surviving are of small dimensions.

This exhausts four of our six types, and bring us to the last two which are now pretty well known.

The fifth type is *Ting Yao*.

It is an extremely thin ware, and bowls and plates are the usual articles now met with. I do not think we can call it true porcelain, though it transmits light easily on account of its thinness, but, at the same time, it is certainly not earthenware. So here we have another example of proto-porcelain. It takes its name from its place of manufacture, Ting-Chou, and was made during both the Northern Sung Dynasty (960—1125) and the Southern (1125—1250). It is practically impossible to distinguish between the two now-a-days. You will notice that the rims are unglazed. This is because they were baked upside down and consequently the rims touched the 'saggar' or oven in which they were baked. The glaze was thus burnt. They were often bound with copper or silver to protect them.

Sixth and last, the famous *Lung Chüan Yao*, made at Lung Chüan, and now called Celadon, which had its beginnings in Sung times and has continued right up to modern days.

Some people prefer Celadon to any other ware and, although it is so unobtrusive as perhaps not to attract much notice when you first see it, it certainly grows very attractive if you live with it. This is the Sung ware which was imitated at Sawankalok at the end of the 13th and during the later centuries. I will give you an opportunity of comparing the two. In both cases it is practically true porcelain. The colour of Celadon varies from the bright green of the sparrow's egg, which in the most prized, through blue-greens, grass-greens, olive-greens, and grey-greens to the grey of the dove. In the case of celadon I think it best to show you, as far as I can, specimens dating from Sung times to the XVIIIth century, so that you may get some idea of the variety and range of colour and glaze. And here I will record an interesting fact, namely, that nearly all ladies admire celadon as soon as they see it, whereas practically all men are at first left entirely cold. To this I plead guilty myself! I can

only ascribe this to a greater and nicer perception on the part of the ladies, who are able to discern the subtleness of its beauty without obvious aids such as decoration or bright colours.

The great difference between the Sung glazes and those of later periods is that the former are always opaque and as a rule thickly applied, with a rich unctuous feel as against the vitreous glazes of Kang Hsi and Khien Lung, and you can see this difference very clearly in the specimens before you.

Sawankalok ware. Here I must give a passing reference to the ware made and found at the old town of Sawankalok in Siam. It is commonly believed that about the year 1300 the great Phra Ruang, or Ram Kamheng, went to China on a visit to the Mongol Emperor and brought back with him a number of potters who established kilns at Sawankalok. It is certain at any rate that the first potters were Chinese, but it is doubtful if any successors came to take their places, and probably those that came originally married Tai women and their Chino-Tai sons carried on the business until at length the potters became wholly Tai in thought. Some years ago I made a collection of designs from fragments picked up in the kilns and published an article on them in our Journal. They show the transition very clearly, I think.

If 1300 is the correct date approximately of their foundation, then there were no kilns at Sawankalok in Sung times, as the Mongol Dynasty began in China in 1279, and this may account for the falling off in the quality of the material and glaze as compared with Sung ware itself. The paste is practically a true porcelain but somewhat grey and coarse, and the glazes are watery and not opaque like the beautiful Sung glazes. Besides, painted designs are often seen on the pieces (and not only incisions in the paste), and this bespeaks a later period than Sung.

The ware usually seen is a kind of celadon ranging from blue to grey-green, but other coloured glazes were used, white and brown in particular. White Sawankalok was not generally known till recently.

Sukhodhai Ware. While on the subject of Sawankalok, I

may also refer to its sister city, Sukhodhai. I was told some years ago that there were porcelain kilns at Sukhodhai as well, hidden in the jungle; and last September, while on a visit to Sukhodhai, I took the opportunity of going out to see them. If I remember rightly, they lie north of the famous Wat Sichum, about twenty minutes walk from it. They are not so extensive as at Sawankalok, and the ware made is quite distinctive from the latter. This is, indeed, what I wanted to find out, and I think I shall always know the difference between the two wares now. The Sukhodhai ware is made of a very coarse grey-black clay, which never burns red, showing that there is no iron in it, as in the Sawankalok ware. Another interesting point of difference is that the Sukhodhai ware was fired on a flat round stand of clay with little pointed supports on the base, as opposed to the long red clay pipe which served as support to the Sawankalok ware; so that you never see the black ring on the bottom of a Sukhodhai bowl. The decoration in Sukhodhai ware is usually in a black pigment or sometimes in a brownish-green, and the glaze is very thin and watery. You do not find those delightful bulbs of glaze that you sometimes see on Sawankalok ware. The design chosen is very often a fish (and it is curious that the piece of Sung ware I picked up there also showed a fish) or else a 'chakra', which must be Tai, or more rarely a spray of flowers. It would be very interesting to know what the fish signifies—it is almost certain to be a symbol.

Here in Bangkok they usually call all black painted ware 'Sukhodhai' ware, but this is not correct, as such ware was also made at Sawankalok. The difference lies in the materials used, and the Sukhodhai ware is far inferior to the Sawankalok.

To return now to China itself, there is another ware called *Chien Yao*, which is now much sought after at home, but I cannot show you specimens of it. It is a thick heavy stoneware, and practically all the specimens known are small open bowls, which were largely used for ceremonial tea-drinking. They are much prized in Japan for their glaze, which is thick and opaque and of a treacly

brown colour, sometimes darker, sometimes lighter. Sometimes figures of phoenixes and birds are traced upon the bowls but more often they have no decoration. I cannot say that this ware attracts me very much from the artistic point of view, though the shape is pleasing.

There is also another unidentified type, which is now definitely attributed to the Sung period. In November 1926 I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Oscar Raphael, a well-known London collector, and of examining his collection. Among many fine pieces was a slender exquisite vase, about 8 inches high, covered with a creamy crackle and embellished on the neck with small elephant heads, containing loose rings on the trunk. This vase had been the subject of discussion for many years past, and one of its most beautiful features was an evanescent pink radiance which suffused it in certain lights, possibly due to some chemical action of the glaze on the body.

I returned to Bangkok in January 1927, and that same month, by sheer chance, happened to find another vase which has since been stated both by Mr. Raphael and Mr. Hobson to be almost identical the only difference being that mine is 9 inches high and has lost $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch of the funnel-shaped mouth. Mr. Hobson is now satisfied that these two vases belong to the Sung period, but are of a type which has not yet been identified. They remain, therefore, in a class by themselves.

This brings us to the end of the Sung period, and although I have only shown you only a few specimens out of my meagre collection, I may perhaps hope that I have whetted your appetite for more.

These simple forms and quiet colours are beginning to exercise an extraordinary fascination in Europe, where the Sung mastery of technique is being appreciated, and there is little doubt that the number of collectors taking up the early wares will increase continuously with the years. As Mr. Hobson says, 'I know a number of collectors who have transferred their allegiance from Kang Hsi to Sung and Tang, but I have yet to meet a case of the reverse.'

In the year 1279 the Mongols took possession of the Chinese Empire, and it is doubtful if much attention in those stirring times was given to the manufacture of porcelain. No doubt many of the old factories still continued to turn out their wares, like the Lung Chuan and Ting Yao, and it is often hard to say which is Yuan (as the period is called) and which is Sung.

It is not until the return of a native Dynasty once more in 1368 in the person of *Hung Wu*, the founder of the Great *Ming* Dynasty, that we find any definite or marked advance in Porcelain manufacture.

And now we are launched into, in some ways, the most romantic and wonderful period in the whole history of Chinese Porcelain. With the rise of the Ming Dynasty, Ching Te Chen, in Northern Kiang Si, became the great centre for porcelain manufacture and has continued so right up to the present day. We have a graphic picture of this 'town of a thousand fires' from the pen of a Jesuit father, Père d'Entrecolles, written in the early years of the XVIIIth century.

From the end of the XIVth century onwards the old monochromes tend to disappear, and their place is taken by white porcelain decorated pictorially in underglaze blue (or red), or in overglaze enamels.

You will notice that up to the present no specimen has been shown of blue and white, which, after all, must, it seems to me, remain the central stronghold, the focussing point, of Chinese Porcelain. As far as is known, there is no evidence of blue and white ware having been made in Sung or earlier times; and there is a possibility that the introduction of *cobalt* was a direct result of the Mongol invasion, because the earliest supplies are credibly reported to have come from Persia or Baluchistan, or somewhere in that region. Blue had, of course, been used in Persia for centuries for colouring pottery. It was discovered that blue (and red also) would stand the greatest temperature of the kiln, and therefore that it could be painted on the body under the glaze before firing; and this may be said to have produced a revolution in porcelain making. Hence-

forward we are brought into contact with the art of painting, which manifested itself in innumerable directions in the decoration of porcelain. In addition to blue and red underglaze decoration, there also arose a school of painting in enamel colours on the biscuit, a school which in Ming times rose to very great heights, so high that poor collectors like myself can only gaze at its products from below with admiration, tinged with envy, without any hope of ever possessing one. I cannot show you any to-day, and so I propose to return to blue and white. Now, how shall I describe Ming blue and white, so that you may gather some idea of how to distinguish it? Well, *first* and foremost, the paste itself is as a rule, of a *greyish* tone and not white as in the later porcelains. *Secondly*, it has rather a soft, oily feel to the touch and lacks that hard sugary appearance of later wares. *Thirdly*, the glaze nearly always has a greenish tint in it, and is more or less opaque, as opposed to the melting, vitreous glazes of later times. *Fourthly*, the decoration is generally uncoventional if somewhat rough, and nearly always of a spirited nature. *Fifthly*, in the large pieces which were made in a mould, the join is usually easily visible, and no trouble was taken to cover it up in the finishing.

Not all the ware was rough, and the pieces, made for the Imperial or Mandarin households were often beautifully finished. There is little doubt that the ware made for export to India and Europe, was rough for two reasons, 1) because it had to stand a long voyage, and 2) because it was good enough for 'barbarians'.

Personally, there is something very fascinating about these old pots and jars and plates, with their archaic designs and faulty potting. One seems to get into almost human contact with the artist and one feels that they are original work, conceptions straight from the artist's mind—unlike the more mechanical age that follows, where we can admire the execution but feel no personal contact.

No specimens of Hung Wu blue and white are known at present. One of the very few pieces definitely attributed to this reign is a beautiful bottle which I have seen in Mr. Raphael's collection, and which is illustrated in Mr. Hobson's volume on Ming porcelain. Hung Wu's successor was Yung Lo (1402-24) and here I am sorry I

cannot show you an interesting blue and white bowl I found some years ago in Bangkok among a pile of bowls in a filthy cupboard in one of the pawn shops here. It was almost egg-shell with a melting glaze and the exterior was painted in deep underglaze blue with a scene of ducks swimming in a lotus pond, very freely and unconventionally drawn. The design and the colour of the blue struck me as Ming at once, but the mark was Yung Lo and naturally I doubted. Last year I sent it home to Mr. Hobson at the British Museum and his opinion is that it is undoubtedly Ming and possibly of the period. I am telling you this first, because Yuug Lo is the first reign known at present to have produced blue and white, and it is therefore somewhat of a find for Bangkok, and secondly, because nearly all the Ming pieces of blue and white known to us in Europe are, as you see to-day, large, heavy and rather rough in their manufacture, whereas this little bowl was, as I say, almost egg-shell and very delicately potted.

Once the use of cobalt was introduced, native supplies of the mineral appeared on the market, but unless this was very carefully refined, it had a dull grey or indigo hue. Sometimes the supply of Persian, or, as it was called, Mahommedan blue failed, and this is why you see such a variety of shades in the Ming blue and white. The reigns chiefly famous for this deep, full blue are Hsuan Tê (1426-35), Cheng Tê (1506-21), and Chia Ching (1522-66). Genuine Hsuan Tê pieces are as rare as black swans, and the Cheng Tê pieces known in Europe are not remarkable for their colour, but Chia Ching's reign produced a large series of pieces of a brilliant violet-blue, a tone which is peculiar to that reign. Most of the Ming blue and white known to day, however, belongs to the reign of Wan Li (1572-1619), and in most pieces of this reign you can see the dull grey-blue of the native mineral. Although the Chinese rather scoffed at this, many Europeans to-day are in favour of it. The tones are so soft and restful.

There is another type of Ming blue and white, quite unlike any other style. It is hard, very thin and has an almost metallic ring. Where it was made I cannot say. It is well finished and

distinctive in its decoration; and, as Mr. Hobson says, at its best it is one of the most attractive of the export types. Most of the objects of this ware known to us are deep plates or saucers, and bowls are rather uncommon. It is in the nature of a freak, and for a long time its Ming origin was not accepted, but it is known now to belong to the reign of Wan Li.

From 1620 to 1650 the country was in a turmoil following the death of Wan Li and, although the Manchu or *Tsing* Dynasty began in 1655, it is not until the reign of Kang Hsi (1662) that porcelain came into prominence again, and that we enter into a new phase in the history of its manufacture. Even during the first 15 years of Kang Hsi's reign, he was much too busy settling the country to pay much attention to porcelain, and the period between 1675 and 1680 marks the period of revival. We find, however, that an order was issued in 1677, forbidding the use of his name on the base of porcelain, as being likely to bring him into contempt when the porcelain was broken and trampled on. It is a fact that ordinarily there is no seal mark on the base of Kang Hsi porcelain, but only a double ring in blue, either empty or with an emblem, and sometimes nothing at all. Indeed, the sight of an actual Kang Hsi seal mark should always give rise to grave suspicion as to the date of the piece it is found on. /

Pieces made in the early years of Kang Hsi's reign show obvious affinities with the Ming period. The potting is still rather rough and unrefined, and the painting is not precise, yet the glaze has no longer that greenish opaque quality of the Ming, but is becoming vitreous and melting. Also the paste is whiter and more sugary.

A rather curious fact, which I pointed out to a well-known London dealer, is that the base of Ming pieces is scarcely ever, if at all, exactly round to the eye. In the later Kang Hsi pieces, at any rate, this want of symmetry is never apparent.

I have mentioned the subject of marks just above. Let me say at once, 'Beware of Marks.' They are the most treacherous guides of all in the search for good Chinese porcelain. Even in later

Ming times the seal marks of the early great periods were copied, and the marks of Kang Hsi, Yung Cheng, and Khien Lung have been used, or rather abused, from the date of their death up to the present day. Personally, now, I look at the mark last of all. If everything else is right, then I may accept it as an interesting record, but of itself, it has no value whatever. Date-marks of any kind are exceedingly rare. Cyclical date-marks are sometimes found on Ming procelain, but I have recently come across a tall dignified vase which is of considerable interest from the point of view of date, as it is the only piece of Chinese procelain which I have found with the actual date written on it; viz. "The 26th year of Kang Hsi's reign," and as such it deserves a place in any collection. It is one of two pieces presented by a lady named Lok See in honour of the God of Medicine. Here at least is a date which may be accepted, and you can see for yourselves what type of ware it is.

I can make no pretence whatever of revealing to you the magnificent splendours of Kang Hsi's reign in the shape of procelain. I suffer from limitations of two kinds, my purse and my place of residence. But I may say that this long reign, which lasted sixty years, was chiefly remarkable for four kinds of procelain, the famous Famille Verte, in which a leaf-green predominates; the Famille Noire; Blue and White, in which the best blue is unrivalled for its sapphire qualities; and Blanc de Chine or Fukien ware, a pure white procelain with an ivory glaze. Of course many other kinds were made, but these represent the main families.

And here perhaps I may mention in passing that the triumphs of manipulation produced during the three reigns of grandfather, son and grandson were almost wholly due to the fact that there were only three Superintendents of the Imperial Factory at King Te Chen during a period of about 75 years.

For any of you who are particularly interested in the later Chinese procelain, I can only recommend a visit to the Salting collection in the South Kensington Museum, which is probably unsurpassed as far as the procelain of Kang Hsi's reign is concerned, or to the Metropolitan Museum of New York, which has also a very fine

collection. Dresden also possesses a splendid collection of this period as Augustus the Strong was a great collector of Chinese porcelain and is said once to have paid the cost of a regiment of soldiers for a single vase.

As I have said, in the early years of Kang Hsi's reign the porcelain turned out was akin in many respects to the Ming, but as the reign progressed the execution and manipulation of the material became so expert and exact that even in the pieces which were made in moulds in two pieces and joined together, no trace of the join can be seen. This very excellence brought about its own Nemesis, since it was achieved at the expense of the decoration which lost that free, devil-may-care abandon of the Ming artist and tended more and more to become stereotyped and stiff. Indeed it marked the beginning of the end, though the end was still far off.

During the reign of Kang Hsi, the East Indian Companies Dutch and English, carried on an extensive trade with China, which included the export of porcelain, and Siam itself became an entrepôt for the middle East and Europe. The ware was brought down in Chinese junks and trans-shipped in Siam, and we hear of Constance Phaulkon sending home by a French priest, as a present to King James II, a rare vase of Chinese porcelain, one of ten presented to the King of Siam by the Governor of Shansi. It would be interesting to know if it ever reached England, and if it is still in existence. This export trade reached large dimensions and it is probably in this reign that porcelain began to be made in China for Siam itself. At least I have never seen a piece of Chino-Siamese porcelain which could be attributed to Ming times.

Now, of the four families mentioned above, I can show you specimens of three. The '*Famille Noire*' is usually represented in Europe and America by tall, square, handsome vases with a black background and a spray of flowers, peonies or lotus or prunus, in green or red or yellow, and these vases are some of the most expensive pieces in the whole gamut of Chinese porcelain. Hence their absence here.

The '*Famille Verte*' is not so difficult to procure, but pieces

of it are rarely seen in Bangkok and, as my collection has almost entirely been formed here, I have not had many opportunities to acquire specimens of it. The two I show are not by any means first-class specimens, but still they serve as adequate illustrations of the family.

The '*Blanc de Chine*' is represented here by three specimens. They may not all be of the Kang Hsi period, but *Blanc de Chine* is, I think, the most difficult of all porcelain to 'place' as regards its period.

Now we come to *Blue and White*, which after all forms the bulk of all Chinese porcelain, and here again I am showing you specimens which possibly cover the period of Yung Cheng and early Khien Lung, as well as that of Kang Hsi. There is no abrupt change to mark each of these periods, and the history of blue and white is one of a gradual rising to its zenith and then a falling to its nadir at the end of Khien Lung's reign. As far as is known, all the blue of the Tsing period was obtained from the native mineral and no supplies of Mohammedan blue were imported. But the Chinese themselves had at last taken the trouble or had discovered the method of refining their own native cobalt, and in the finest pieces the blue has all the quality and depth of a sapphire.

I have chosen a number of specimens to show you, which will give you a fair idea of the range of shade, shape and design.

Each of you will have your own special choice from a variety of reasons, but from the collector's point of view the best, in paste glaze, and colour, is this bottle. It was the first piece of blue and white that I ever bought (and this was in Saigon), and I have never been able to match it since. But, whichever you choose, I hope I may convince you that I have not collected these merely because they are 'old'.

Now, although there might be much more to say, I am drawing near the end, because I prefer to close on an appreciative note. The reign of Yung Cheng produced the famous *Famille Rose*, which replaced the *Famille Verte*, and the European trade grew to enormous dimensions chiefly with Canton. There is little doubt that it

was this trade with the 'barbarians' that commercialised the whole manufacture of porcelain, and thus brought about its decline. Yung Cheng himself only reigned 14 years, but he was an ardent connoisseur of porcelain and delighted to send down old Sung and Ming wares to be copied in the Imperial factory. In fact this is the chief characteristic of his reign. In 1736 he died and Khien Lung began his long reign of 60 years. Up to about 1775 the quality of the ware turned out was well maintained and very high prices are given at sales to-day for fine specimens of Khien Lung Famille Rose, jars with covers, ruby-backed plates, and openwork lanterns, etc., and after a time the blue and white began to deteriorate badly, and almost imperceptibly towards the end of the reign a decay set in in every direction. Many excellent pieces were no doubt made in the XIXth century, but the European demand had 'killed the goose that laid the golden eggs', and the collector's interest usually stops with Khien Lung, at the close of the XVIIIth century, if not some time before. Personally, the more I see of the earlier wares, the more my interest in the later tends to wane, and this is why I have laid more stress to-day upon the Tang, Sung, Ming and Kang Hsi periods than I have upon the reigns of Yung Cheng and Khien Lung. I believe the same is happening all over the world among discriminating collectors.

I thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for the kind attention you have paid to my lecture. I am not going, as is sometimes done, to express the hope that I have not bored you. The subject is so near to me that, if you take a delight in Chinese porcelain, you are one of the elect; if you do not, then you are a Philistine and all the boredom in the world is not sufficient punishment for you. So I will end with a prayer of hope, either for your continued devotion or for your salvation.