DESCRIPTION OF CHINESE POTTERY AND PORCELAIN

BEING A TRANSLATION OF THE

T'AO SHUO

陶說

WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

BY

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NOTE

THE translation of the *T'ao Shuo*, now for the first time published in its entirety, was completed by Dr. Bushell in 1891, and has been printed with little alteration from the MS. as he then left it. Of the twenty-one figures with which he contemplated illustrating the work, eighteen were to be taken (see pp. xi, xvii) from the sixteenth-century Manuscript Catalogue of porcelain by Hsiang Yuan-P'ien. This work was published by Dr. Bushell in 1908 (*Chinese Porcelain of Different Dynasties*: eighty-three plates in colour by W. Griggs; with the Chinese text reproduced by line-blocks, and an introduction, translation, and commentary: Clarendon Press).

It may be mentioned that a set of Chinese illustrations of the manufacture of porcelain similar in style to those described on pp. 7–30 is reproduced in Stanislas Julien's *Histoire et Fabrication de la Porcelaine Chinoise*, Paris, 1856. They are only fourteen in number instead of the twenty described in the text of T'ao Shuo; those wanting being Nos. 3, 8, 12 (which bears the same title as 7), 14, 19 and 20. Two of the remaining three have been reproduced in Cosmo Monkhouse's *History and Description of Chinese Porcelain*, 1901, and in Dr. Bushell's South Kensington Museum Handbook, *Chinese Art*, 1906.

The *Lettres du Père d'Entrecolles* mentioned on p. ix have been added in an Appendix. The text has been printed, practically without alteration, from a copy of the *Lettres Édifiantes* in the British Museum.

[LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS[1]]

[1] The numbers in brackets are the plate-numbers in *Chinese Porcelain of Different Dynasties*.

INTRODUCTION

BY THE TRANSLATOR

THE *T'ao Shuo*, 'Description of Pottery,' in Six Books, by Chu Yen, was the first special work written upon the subject of Chinese Ceramics, and is still generally considered by native connoisseurs as the chief authority on the subject. I translated it for my own use some years ago; and when Mr. W. M. Laffan, the well-known publisher of 'The Sun', wrote to me last year from New York, calling my attention to the fact that we had no books of reference in English from original sources, and asking if I would undertake the translation of this one, I was pleased to offer him the MS., after the thorough revision which a more extensive knowledge of Chinese porcelain showed to be required. There are some important collections in America, notably those made by Mr. Dana of New York, and by Mr. W. T. Walters of Baltimore, and I hope that this book may be of some use as an aid to their classification.

The author Chu Yen, known also as Chu T'ung-ch'uan, or by his literary title of Li-t'ing, was a native of Hai-yen, in the province of Chêkiang. In the year 1767, as we learn from the third preface (p. 170), he was engaged by Wu, Governor of the Province of Kiangsi, and given an appointment under the jurisdiction of the Governor, and he seems to have been stationed there up to the time of the publication of his book in 1774. During his residence in this province he made a personal investigation of the processes of manufacture of porcelain at Ching-tê Chên, the celebrated site of the Imperial factories, as well as of the private potteries which supply the whole of China in the present day. Ching-tê Chên is situated on the south bank of the Ch'ang River, and the porcelain

when packed is shipped down this river into the Po-yang Lake, and across this lake to Kiukiang on the Yang-tzŭ River, where it is transhipped, and from this port it is distributed to all parts of the empire under the name of Kiukiang porcelain, to distinguish it from the Imperial porcelain (*kuan yao*), which is sent by way of the Grand Canal twice a year to Peking.

Our author seems to have been a most voluminous writer, judging from a long list of his works given in the last preface (p. 172), which was composed by a relative of his for a new edition of the *T'ao Shuo*, published in the year 1787. This list comprises twelve different works, besides the present one, which is described as the most important of all, and includes—'A Commentary on the *Shuo Wên*' (an ancient dictionary of the second century A. D.), 'Selections from old prose authors and poets of the T'ang and other dynasties', 'Instruction on Playing the Lyre', 'On the Art of Writing Verses', &c., winding up with a 'Collection of Verses of his own (Li-t'ing's) composition'.

These works indicate the general bent of his mind to be that of a scholar and antiquary, and he often breaks off into a disquisition into the origin of a piece of pottery, or the derivation of a new name, in a way which may prove wearisome to one who is not interested in Chinese philology. Some of the names, like that of the alms-bowl (*pâtra*), and the water-jar (*kuṇḍikâ*), of the Buddhist mendicant, he even traces back to the original Sanscrit. His conclusions seem to be generally correct, if it be not presumptuous in me to offer an opinion on such a recondite subject; and he does not indulge us, *more Sinico*, with too many of his poems, although he finishes with a verse of his own, to cap some others written in honour of Hao Shih-chiu, the celebrated potter of the end of the Ming Dynasty.

The form of the book is that of a series of extracts, gathered from the vast field of native literature, loosely strung together, and accompanied by a running com-

mentary by the author. The titles of the books quoted are usually prefixed. I have collected a hundred and five of the principal of these titles in an Appendix, headed 'Bibliography', and arranged them in alphabetical order for convenience of reference, with a brief note on the scope of the different works and the approximate date of each.

I have not given the Chinese characters on account of the difficulty of printing them, but may refer those interested in the subject to the excellent glossary at the end of Stanislas Julien's 'Translation of the *Ching-tê Chên T'ao lu*',[1] a book to which all students of Chinese Ceramics owe so much, accompanied as it is by technical notes by Salvétat, the chemist attached to the Imperial Porcelain Manufactory at Sèvres, who had the opportunity of analysing two collections of the colours employed in the decoration of porcelain brought from China for the purpose. A valuable independent authority is the Jesuit missionary Père d'Entrecolles, who frequently resided at what he calls his *Chrétienté* at Ching-tê Chên, and wrote from there two letters[2] upon the porcelain manufacture, dated 1712 and 1722, towards the close of the long reign of the Emperor K'ang-hsi, the culminating period of ceramic art in China. Where these two authorities differ it is usually the worthy missionary who is right; as, for instance, in the question of the colour of the glaze of the old Lung-ch'üan porcelain, which he states to be green, bordering upon olive, while Julien will have it to be blue. This is an interesting subject on account of its bearing on the old céladon dishes found in such quantities in Persia, Egypt, and other countries on the coasts of the south-west of Asia and the east of Africa. This is probably the kind of porcelain of which forty pieces were sent as presents

[1] 'Histoire et Fabrication de la Porcelaine Chinoise', traduit du Chinois par M. Stanislas Julien. Paris, 1856.

[2] 'Lettres du Père d'Entrecolles, Missionnaire de la Cie. de Jésus. Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses'; see Appendix.

in the year 1171 by Saladin to Nur-ed-din.[1] It seems to have been through Egypt that it first reached Europe; at any rate a present of porcelain vases was sent by the Sultan of Egypt to Lorenzo de' Medici in 1487. The Chinese, on the other hand, owe some of the designs used in the decoration of porcelain to the West, as well as material for colouring it; for, as far back as the tenth century, the Annals of the Sung Dynasty (Book ccccxc, fol. 42), describe the Arabs (*Ta-shih*) as bringing to China, among other presents for the Emperor, pieces of *wu ming yi*, the cobalt blue, which had long previously been employed in Western Asia in the decoration of faience.

It is impossible to discuss satisfactorily the shape, decoration, and glaze of the many old varieties of porcelain and pottery referred to in books, without actual inspection of specimens. Such specimens are rare, even in China, and of some of the factories described they can hardly exist. Ancient Chinese settlements were generally in the valleys of the great rivers, the sites have become buried under heaps of alluvial detritus, and it is only when the Yellow River, for example, in its erratic course, digs a new trench through the plain, that any old remains are brought to light. Most of the earliest objects discovered in this way, which were decorated by the Chinese artist for sacrificial purposes or ornamental use, were moulded of bronze, and native collectors have published many illustrated catalogues of such bronze antiques, of which some are referred to in the following pages. These bronze vessels supplied many of the forms in which the first porcelain pieces were moulded, as well as the ornamental designs used in their decoration.[2]

[1] Catalogue of a Collection of Oriental Porcelain and Pottery, by A. W. Franks, F.R.S., F.S.A., Science and Art Department, South Kensington. Second edition, 1878.

[2] 'Dissertation on the Ancient Chinese Vases of the Shang Dynasty from 1743 to 1496 B.C.' P. P. Thoms. London, 1851.

'Description de la Chine', par M. G. Pauthier.—Illustrations 38–44, containing a selection of bronze vases from the *Hsi Ch'ing Ku Chien*,

Illustrated Collections of Porcelain are much more rare, and I was unusually fortunate in my discovery of the Manuscript Catalogue of the sixteenth century, in which the artist and collector, Hsiang Yuan-p'ien, painted in water-colours, and described, a fairly representative series of eighty-two of the pieces appreciated in his time. I described this at length in a paper read before the Peking Oriental Society in 1886, accompanied by some extracts from the book before us. Now I will in revenge try to reproduce some of the plates to illustrate the *T'ao Shuo*, although I hope soon to be able to publish the Catalogue in full. But first it is necessary to say a word on the origin and history of porcelain in China.

The title of our book, *T'ao Shuo*, would be more correctly rendered 'Description of Pottery'. *T'ao* means 'pottery' in its widest sense, and includes all kinds of clay vessels fired in the kiln, the different varieties of earthenware and stoneware as well as porcelain. The Chinese have from the most ancient times cultivated the art of welding clay, and, like most of the great nations of antiquity, they claim for themselves the invention of the potter's wheel. It is generally ascribed by them to the ancient Emperor *Shun*, who is supposed to have reigned during the third millennium B.C.; but some attribute it to his still more fabulous predecessor *Huang-ti*, who is given by them a Director of Pottery among the other officers of his court. In more historical times, about a thousand years B.C., *Wu Wang*, the founder of the Chou, the third of the three ancient dynasties, is recorded to have sought out a lineal descendant of the ancient Emperor *Shun*, on account especially of his skill in pottery, to have given him his eldest daughter in marriage, and to have appointed him feudal ruler of the state of Ch'ên (now Ch'ên-chou Fu in the province of Honan), to keep up there the ancestral worship of his

the large catalogue of the Emperor Ch'ien-lung, published in 1749, in forty-two folio volumes, with 1444 figures of objects in the Imperial Collection.

accomplished ancestor. Tradition has it that he was the first Director of Pottery under the new dynasty, an official often alluded to in the Ceremonial Classic and other ancient records. In the *K'ao kung chi*, a relic of the same dynasty, there is a short section on pottery, quoted below, in which the processes of fashioning on the wheel and moulding are clearly distinguished. But we have no specimens of these things left. They are supposed to have been fashioned of common clay (terra-cotta), and it is doubtful even whether this was covered with a coloured glaze of any kind.

'*Porcelain*' is *tz'ŭ*, which is defined in the oldest dictionaries as a 'fine, compact pottery' (*t'ao*). In our definition of porcelain we should add 'translucent', but this is not necessary according to Chinese notions, as they would call any thick opaque piece *tz'ŭ*, if it gave out a clear resonant note on percussion, this being the practical test by which they distinguish porcelain. Mr. Franks (l. c., p. xviii), observes that 'there is considerable difficulty in distinguishing glazed vases of Chinese pottery from true porcelain, as the coloured glaze in many cases conceals the material, and the thickness prevents their being translucent, a distinguishing character of porcelain, and the substance of many of the vases is coarse, sometimes grey or even red, and such as would in European fabrics be termed stoneware.'

In fact, ordinary faience passes by imperceptible gradations into porcelain when the materials are more scientifically and intimately blended and the fire made more intense. For the same reason it is difficult to fix the date of the invention of porcelain, which suddenly appears in Chinese official records in the fourth year (A. D. 621) of the reign of Wu-tê, the founder of the T'ang Dynasty, as ordered by the Emperor to be made at Ch'ang-nan Chên (the modern Ching-tê Chên), and sent from there to the Capital (Hsi-an Fu) for the use of the palace. The vessels are described as made of fine white clay and of thin fabric, the best being of as brilliant and pure a colour as jade, so that they were known at the

time by the name of 'false jade vessels' (*chia yü ch'i*), and were undoubtedly of true porcelain. One earlier date is given in the Records of this district, that of a decree of the last ruler of the Ch'ên Dynasty issued in 583, ordering a supply to be sent to Chien-k'ang (now Nanking) for the Emperor's use.

These same Topographical Records (*Fou-liang Hsien Chih*), in the Section headed *T'ao Chêng*, 'Administration of Porcelain,' say that porcelain was first made in the district of Hsin-p'ing. Julien (l.c., pp. xx, xxi), starting from this short note, attributes the invention of porcelain to Hsin-p'ing Hsien (the modern Huai-ning Hsien, in the Province of Honan), which was founded under that name in 185 B.C. by the Emperor Kao Ti of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the name being changed in A.D. 88. 'Il s'ensuit qu'on peut placer l'invention de la porcelaine entre les années 185 avant et 87 après J.-C.' This argument is neat, but founded unfortunately on a misapprehension. Hsin-p'ing was really the original name of Fou-liang Hsien, as we see by referring to the Geographical Section of the Annals of the T'ang Dynasty (*T'ang Shu*, Book lx, f. 25), which say that this walled city was founded under the name of Hsin-p'ing, in the fourth year of Wu-tê (A.D. 621), with jurisdiction over a part of the old district of Po-yang, re-established in the fourth year of K'ai-yuan (716), under the name of Hsin-ch'ang, and changed finally to its present name of Fou-liang in the first year of T'ien-pao (742).

In another part of the same book (p. 82), referring to porcelain made by Ho Chung-ch'u for the use of the Emperor in the year 621, in which the said Ho is described as a native of Hsin-p'ing, Julien strangely says in a note that this refers to another Sin-ping, corresponding to the modern Pin-chou, in the province of Shensi, which was called so during the Eastern Han (A.D. 25–220), but not since, an anachronism of at least four centuries. Hsin-p'ing is referred to more than once in the last three books of the *Ching-tê Chên T'ao lu*, which are omitted in Julien's

Translation, as in an extract from the biography of Chu Sui, styled Yü-hêng, an official of the T'ang Dynasty, who was Superintendent at Hsin-p'ing, when, in the first year of the period Ching-lung (A. D. 707), a decree was received by the Governor of Hung-chou, ordering him to supply with all speed sacrificial utensils for the Imperial tombs. Chu Sui is described there as energetically pushing on the work so that they were sent within the year. This Hung-chou is the modern Nan-ch'ang Fu, chief city of the province of Kiangsi, and Jao-chou, within the bounds of which lies Fou-liang Hsien, is stated in the Annals of the T'ang Dynasty as having been at that time actually under the jurisdiction of the Governor of Hung-chou. I am afraid therefore that we must give up the Han Dynasty as furnishing a date for the invention of porcelain.

Some European writers doubt the existence of transparent porcelain even as early as the T'ang Dynasty, in my opinion without reason, the product of the factory at Yueh-chou being described by contemporaries as translucent like jade, and as being, like the white porcelain fabricated at Hsing-chou, so resonant as to be used in sets of 'musical cups' to play tunes upon. This is confirmed by an Arab traveller who was in China in the ninth century, and who furnishes the first mention of porcelain outside the country[1]—'There is in China a very fine clay with which they make vases which are as transparent as glass; water is seen through them. These vases are made of clay.'

There were no painted designs upon the porcelain of this period. The decoration consisted in the different colours of the monochrome glazes, which are distinguished in the books of the period, according to the suitability of the colour in bringing out the tint of tea or wine. Jade, the most precious of stones in native eyes, seems to have supplied the first motive of decoration, and the earliest

[1] 'Relation des Voyages faits par les Arabes et les Persans dans l'Inde et à la Chine dans le ix^e^ siècle de l'ère chrétienne', par M. Reinaud, Membre de l'Institut. Paris, 1845.

specimens are accordingly described as either white or green; especially as green, and this seems without doubt to be the colour of the glaze of the famous *pi-sê* (secret or prohibited colour) porcelain, said to have been so called because it was reserved for Imperial use. A verse is quoted in the *T'ao lu* (Book ix, f. 2) from a Selection of Poetry of the T'ang Dynasty, as having been composed by Hsü Yin, to accompany a service of *pi-sê* teacups made for presentation to the Emperor, which runs:—

'Like bright moons cunningly carved and dyed with spring water:
Like curling disks of thinnest ice, filled with green clouds:
Like ancient moss-eaten bronze mirrors lying upon the mat:
Like tender lotus leaves full of dewdrops floating on the river-side!'

These similes could apply to nothing but green, and, moreover, the glaze at the time was generally called the 'colour of distant hills'. The difficulty lies in the ambiguity of the Chinese word *ch'ing*, the original meaning of which is the 'green of growing plants', but which in ceramics is used for all shades of clear greens and blues, from the olive-green and grass-green of ancient Lung-ch'üan ware to the deep sapphire blue of more modern monochromes, and the brilliant blue of the blue and white of the hawthorn vases of the reign of K'ang-hsi. Julien, for the sake of consistency, always renders *ch'ing* 'blue', so that some of his translations require correction. A favourite colour in old glazes is the indeterminate tint known as 'sea-green' or 'céladon'. Chinese authors also fully appreciate this difficulty. Chêng T'ing-kuei, the editor of the *T'ao lu* (Book x, f. 8), says:—'For ancient porcelain *ch'ing* (green) was preferred as harmonizing with the different kinds of tea and wine, while for the banqueting-table plain porcelain, or white painted in blue, is the best.' He quotes a series of authors of the T'ang Dynasty to prove that the colour preferred was really green, and not like the *ch'ing* of the Ch'ai porcelain of the tenth century,

which was described at the time as being 'blue as the sky, brilliant as a mirror, thin as paper, and resonant as a musical stone.' He adds—'Among the porcelain called by this one name of *ch'ing*, in the Ch'ai porcelain and the porcelain of Ju-chou, the *ch'ing* colour approached a light blue, in the Imperial porcelains of the Sung Dynasty, and in that of the Ko, Tung, and Hsiang factories, the *ch'ing* approached a pale emerald colour, in that of the potteries of Lung-ch'üan it approached a deep green, while in that of Yueh-chou and Yo-chou it approached the bluish green of some silk dyes. The old authors in describing porcelain call all these different colours *ch'ing*.' The same blue material called *ch'ing liao*, a cobaltiferous ore of manganese, was employed in the preparation of all these coloured glazes referred to above, which makes their distinction all the more difficult.

But it is most unsatisfactory to discuss the different shades of colour of porcelain glazes after mere verbal description. In some cases, as in the old *céladon*[1], the Lung-ch'üan ware, which is common throughout China, and which was so widely distributed at the time, that Persia and Egypt have furnished a collection for the Dresden Museum[2], and Zanzibar, through Sir John Kirk, to the British Museum, genuine old pieces are before us, so that it is not necessary to theorize on the subject. A minute's handling is better than a page of description, especially when it has to be translated from such a language as the Chinese. Next in value to an actual specimen comes a coloured picture of the object. How would it be possible without some such help to be certain of the meaning of *Hung yü pa pei*, literally 'Red fish handled cups', the name of the famous wine-cups of the reign of Hsüan-tê of the Ming Dynasty. Julien translates 'cups having the handle ornamented with a red fish', whereas

[1] 'Ancient Porcelain. A Study in Chinese Mediaeval Industry and Trade.' By F. Hirth, Ph.D. Leipsic and Munich, &c., 1888.

[2] 'Lung-ch'üan-yao oder Altes Seladon-Porzellan', von A. B. Meyer. Berlin, 1889.

the plate (Fig. 12) shows the handle (*pa*) to be really a foot or stem, the cup being moulded in a shape somewhat resembling that of the modern egg-cup, and decorated with three red fish painted on the bowl.

This brings us to the Illustrated Catalogue, to which I have already alluded, from which I have taken this picture, together with seventeen others, chosen out of the eighty-two pieces figured in the original, to illustrate this translation of the *T'ao Shuo*. These eighty-two pieces, as I mentioned in my pamphlet[1], include forty-two referred to the Sung Dynasty (A. D. 960–1279), only one piece of the Yuan (1280–1367), the remaining thirty-nine belonging to the Ming Dynasty, of which five reigns are represented, viz. Yung-lo (1403–24) by one piece, Hsüan-tê (1426–35) by twenty pieces, Ch'êng-hua (1465–87) by ten pieces, Hung-chih (1488–1505) by four pieces, and Chêng-tê (1506–21) by two pieces; the number being made up by two pieces of 'boccaro' ware not dated. The Manuscript Catalogue, which has been described in my pamphlet quoted above, came from the Collection of the hereditary Princes of Yi in Peking.

It is entitled *Li tai ming tz'ŭ t'u pu*, 'Illustrated Description of the Celebrated Porcelain of different Dynasties.' It was compiled by Hsiang Yuan-p'ien, about the end of the sixteenth century, and shows what things were appreciated by connoisseurs 300 years ago. The author is included in the 'Imperial Cyclopedia of Celebrated Writers and Artists', as both a calligrapher and an artist, and described there in a short biography as 'fond of collecting ancient inscriptions from stone and metal, as well as paintings of famous artists,' and also as 'a skilful painter of old trees, of the flowering plum, and of orchids.' He says in his Preface:—

'In ancient times, while *Shun* was still living in the midst of the fields, he tilled the ground, sowed grain,

[1] 'Chinese Porcelain before the Present Dynasty.' By S. W. Bushell, M.D. (Extract from the *Journal of the Peking Oriental Society*). Peking, Pei-T'ang Press, 1886.

made pottery and fished, to gain his livelihood, so that even before the Three Ancient Dynasties, the art of welding clay was already practised. But long years have passed by since these remote times, and no specimens of his work have survived.

'Passing on through the Ch'in, Han, Wei, and Chin Dynasties, we come to the earliest mention of the names of makers, in the wine-cups of Chi Shu-yeh and the wine-vessels fabricated by Hsü Ching-shan. The successors of these two, working day by day and from month to month, kept on turning out an abundant supply, till we arrive at the rule of the House of Ch'ai, which was the first to become celebrated for its pottery, so much so that in these days men search for a mere fragment of its porcelain without being able to find one, and declare it to be only a phantom.

'Next after this Ch'ai pottery, the fabrics of Ju-chou, of the Imperial Factories of the Sung, of the Ko Potteries, and of Ting-chou, follow in their order, till finally we come to our own sacred dynasty, and have before us pieces of porcelain of the reigns of Yung-lo, Hsüan-tê, Ch'êng-hua, and Hung-chih, to compare with specimens of the Sung, and find that they even surpass them, excelling in fabric and in form, as well as in the colouring of the glaze.

'I have acquired a morbid appetite for "scabs", and delight in buying choice pieces of the three dynasties of Sung, Yuan, and Ming, and displaying them as ranking equal with the bells, caldrons, sacrificial dishes, and wine-vessels of ancient bronze, dating from the Three Ancient Dynasties, the Ch'in and the Han.'

'With the help of two or three intimate friends, meeting constantly, both by day and night, for discussion and research, gathering only examples which we have actually seen or have in our own possession, I have arranged them in order and compiled this catalogue. I have painted the illustrations in colours, and related the source of each one, in order that I may preserve them from being lost