

Chinese Blue & White Ceramics

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CHINESE BLUE & WHITE CERAMICS

Compiled by
S. T. Yeo & Jean Martin

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by the
SOUTHEAST ASIAN CERAMICS SOCIETY
in conjunction with the
NATIONAL MUSEUM, SINGAPORE
APRIL 1978

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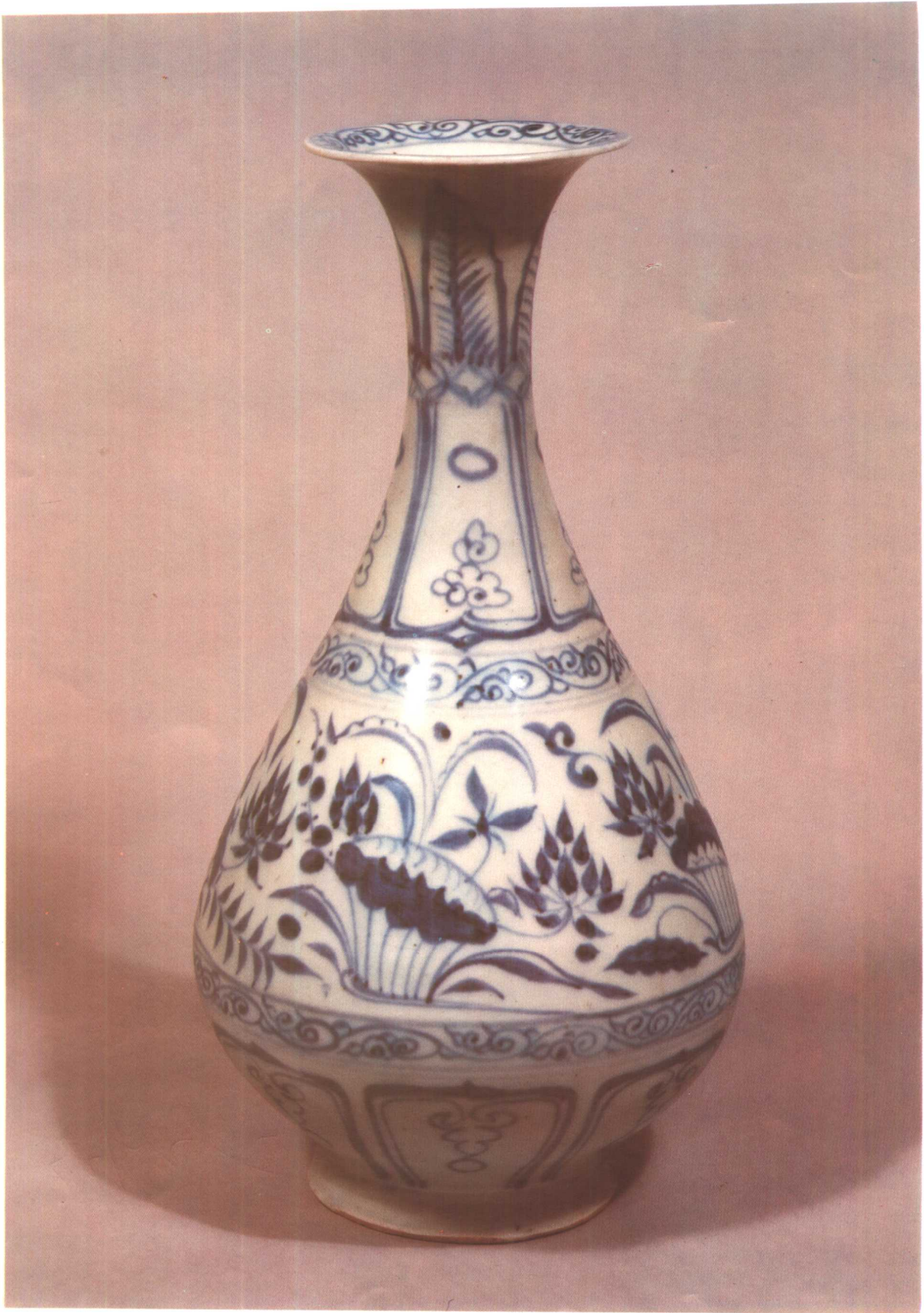


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**Figure 1 Yuan Blue-and-White Pear-Shaped Vase,
14th Century. (Christie's, London)**

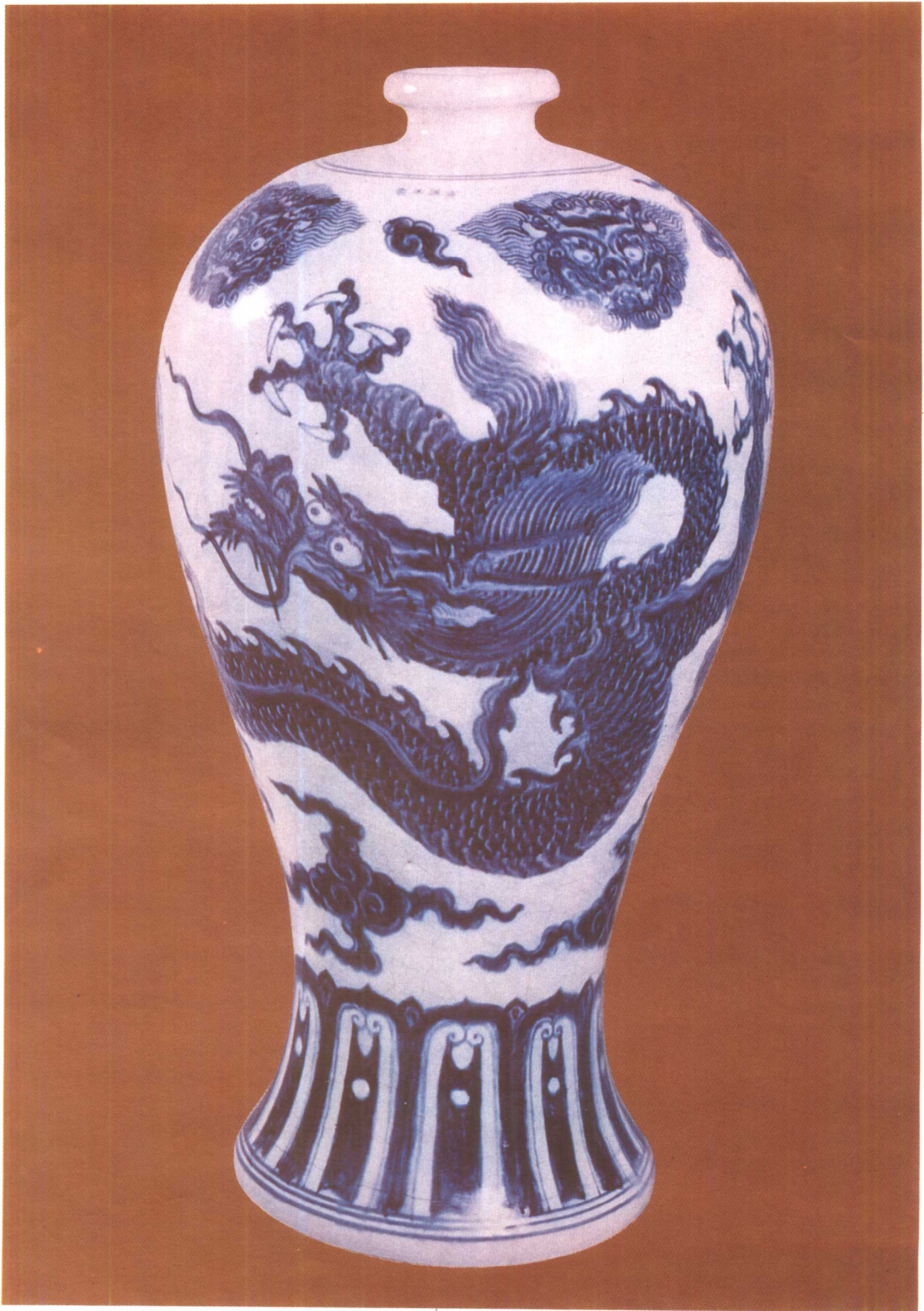


Figure 2 Early Ming, Hsuan Te Blue-and-White Mei Ping, 15th Century. (Nelson-Atkins Gallery, Kansas City, USA)

MESSAGE
from
Director
National Museum of Singapore

This Exhibition of Chinese Blue-and-White Ceramics is an event jointly organised by the National Museum and the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society.

It is a labour of love on the part of many.

The members of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society and the staff of the National Museum have put in a great deal of hard work, time and effort into the exhibition, as well as, if I may add, the production of the catalogue.

The collectors who participate in the exhibition have been most obliging in lending their ceramic pieces. Friends and supporters of both the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society and the National Museum have given assistance in various ways, including those who have made generous donations of showcases, without which the exhibition will not be as it is.

The intention behind the exhibition is to stimulate an understanding, as well as to foster a greater appreciation, of this most fascinating aspect of Chinese art, and of trade between China and other countries in the region, occupying a period of 600 years from 1280 to 1911.

The contributors of articles to the catalogue have dealt on various topics related to Chinese blue-and-white ceramics. All these should provoke further discussions.

One topic which should invite greater attention is the problem of the origin of Chinese blue-and-white ceramics. The time and place of the first pieces of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain produced in China cannot be ascertained at this moment, for the reason that the data available are insufficient and can be further increased only through archaeological excavations. Nevertheless, the researches of scholars are beginning to give hints on possible solutions to this engaging problem.

The pieces of Chinese blue-and-white ceramics chosen for the exhibition represent a selection of what is available in Singapore and in the hands of many who are members of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society. There are a good number of other collectors whom we shall also invite to participate in exhibitions on Chinese ceramics in future.

I am confident that the exhibition will be of interest and value to all concerned, especially those who can find time to view it at the National Museum.

Christopher Hooi
Director
National Museum of Singapore

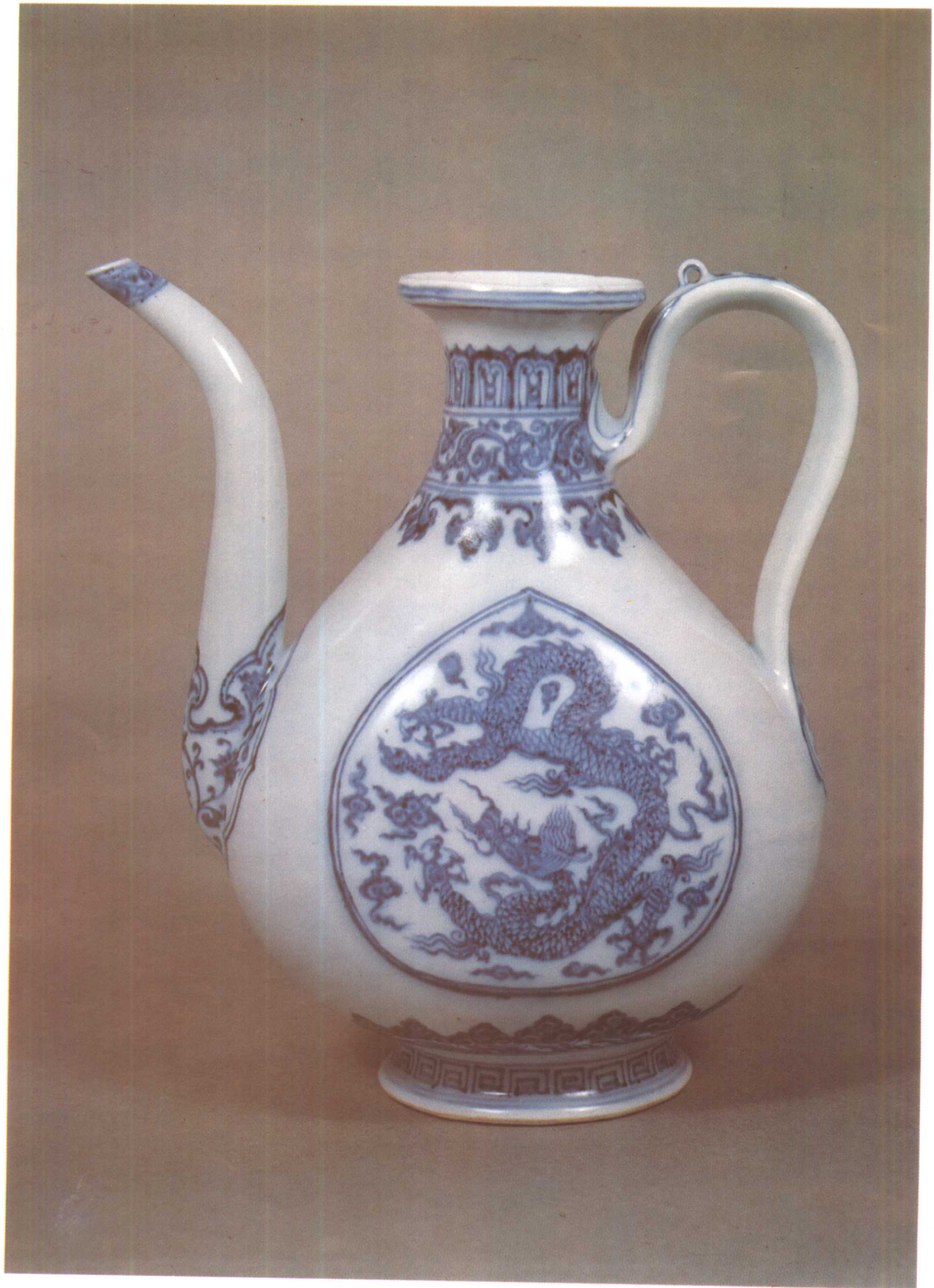


Figure 3 Early Ming, Yung Lo Blue-and-White Ewer, early 15th Century. (Sotheby's, London)

FOREWORD

This Exhibition of Chinese Blue and White Ceramics is the third exhibition of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society; the first *Ceramic Art of Southeast Asia* was held in 1971, and the second *Chinese White Wares* in 1973. Although this is the third exhibition for the Society, it is the first to be arranged in co-operation with the National Museum of Singapore and we are most grateful to Mr. Christopher Hooi, the Director, to Mrs. Grace Wong, the Curator, and to all the staff of the Museum who have helped to make this exhibition a success.

This book which will be a permanent record of the Exhibition has an illustrated introduction on Chinese blue-and-white ceramics by Mr. S. T. Yeo and Mrs. Jean Martin, an article on Chinese maritime trade in ceramics by Mrs. Grace Wong and an article on some aspects of blue-and-white by Mr. Lu Yaw, together with an illustrated index of decorations and over two hundred and twenty colour photographs. We particularly wish to thank the publishers, Arts Orientalis of Singapore for their enthusiastic co-operation and excellent work in designing and producing this book.

We would also like to thank: the compilers of this book, Mr. S. T. Yeo and Mrs. Jean Martin, together with Mr. K. M. Quek and the following members of the Society — Mr. Can Thuc Ha, Mr. Tan Teo Kwang, Mrs. Helen Ling, Mrs. M-F de Peyronnet, Mrs. J. Oh, Mrs. P. Morrissey, Mrs. R. Edwards and Mr. J. W. P. Martin who have given valuable assistance with the selection, description and research work for this Exhibition; Mr. Wong How Khin who took the photographs of the 400 pieces of the Exhibition and Mrs. S. Houseman who did the drawings in the Index. We must especially thank the Society's Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Jean Martin, without whose indefatigable drive and work this exhibition could never have been held.

Above all, we wish to thank those members of the Society and other collectors in Singapore who have so generously lent their pieces for the Exhibition.

D. F. H. Sinclair
President
Southeast Asian Ceramic Society

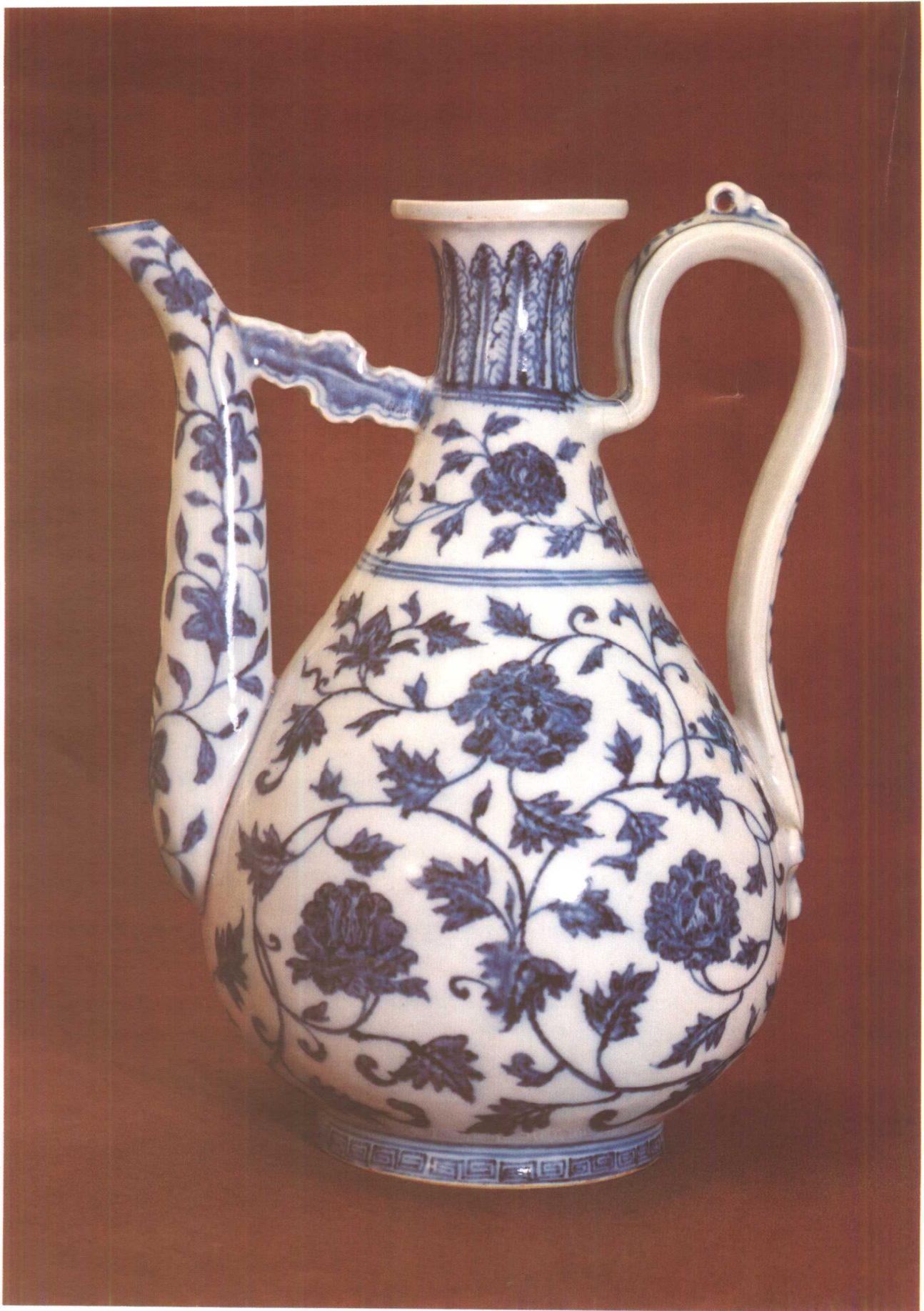


Figure 4 Early Ming, Yung Lo Blue-and-White Ewer, 15th Century. (Sotheby's, London)

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We are grateful to the following for the loan of exhibits:

Mr. and Mrs. R. Booker	Mr. and Mrs. G. K. Morton
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Mrs. Helen Ling	Mr. and Mrs. R. Tan
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Mr. and Mrs. J. W. P. Martin	Mr. and Mrs. S. T. Yeo

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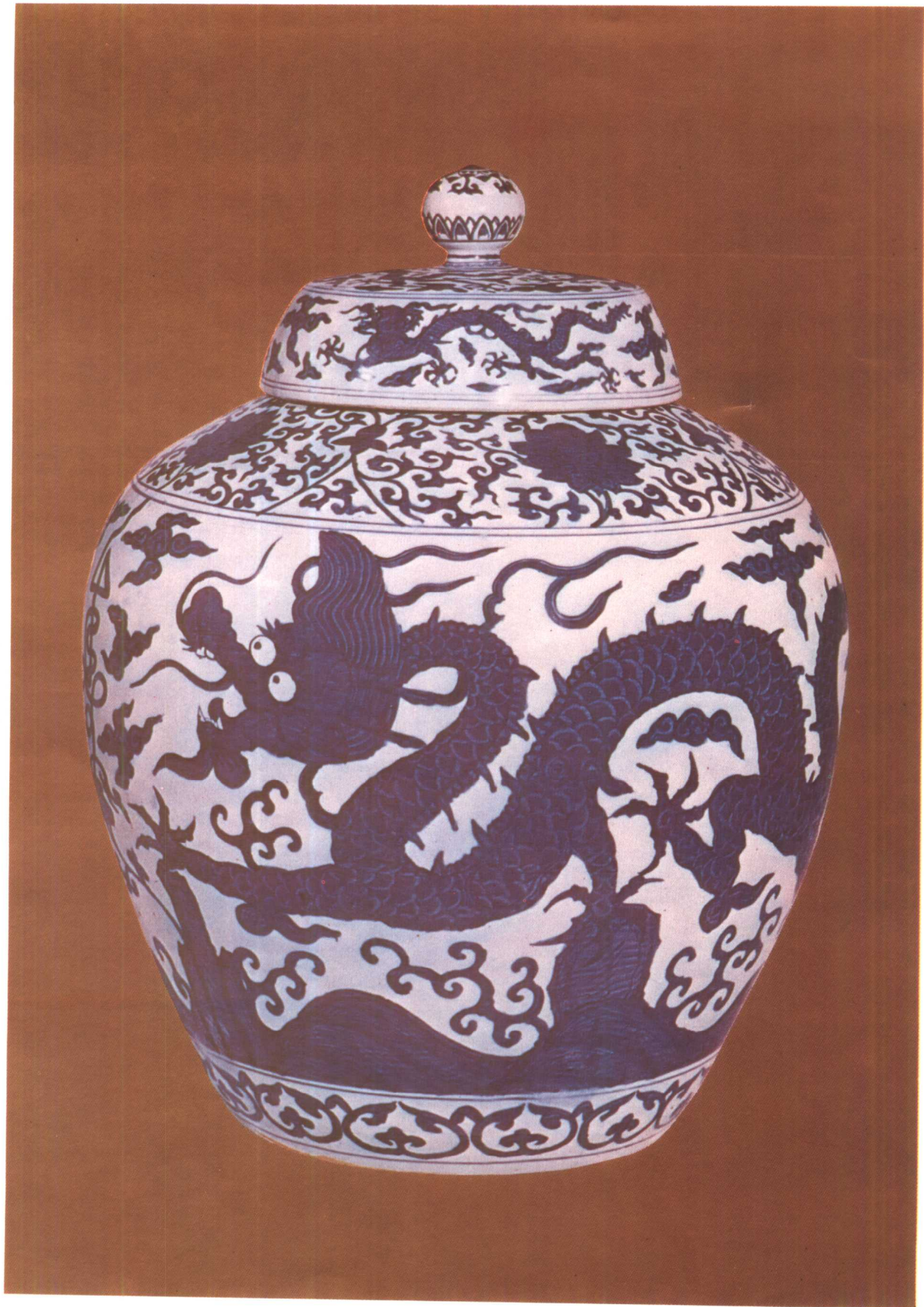


Figure 5 Ming, Chia Ching Blue-and-White Covered Jar, 16th Century. (Baur Collection)

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINESE DYNASTIES AND REIGN PERIODS

SHANG		1523BC - 1028BC
CHOU (ZHOU)		1027BC - 256BC
CHIN (Qin)		221BC - 206BC
HAN		206BC - AD220
SIX DYNASTIES		220 - 589
SUI		581 - 618
T'ANG (TANG)		618 - 906
FIVE DYNASTIES		907 - 960
LIAO		907 - 1125
SUNG (SONG)		960 - 1279
Northern Sung (Song)	960	- 1127
Southern Sung (Song)	1128	- 1279
CHIN		1115 - 1234
YUAN		1279 - 1368
MING		1368 - 1644
Hung Wu (Hong Wu)	1368 - 1398	Hung Chih (Hong Zhi) 1488 - 1505
Chien Wen (Jian Wen)	1399 - 1402	Cheng Te (Zheng De) 1506 - 1521
Yung Lo (Yong Le)	1403 - 1424	Chia Ching (Jia Jing) 1522 - 1566
Hsuan Te (Xuan De)	1426 - 1435	Lung Ch'ing (Long Qing) 1567 - 1572
Cheng-T'ung (Zheng Dong)	1436 - 1449	Wan Li (Wan Li) 1573 - 1619
Ching t'ai (Jing Tai)	1450 - 1457	T'ai Ch'ang (Tai Chang) 1620
T'ien Shun (Tian Shun)	1457 - 1464	T'ien Ch'i (Tian Qi) 1621 - 1627
Ch'eng Hua (Cheng Hua)	1465 - 1487	Ch'ung Chen (Chong Zhen) 1628 - 1643
CH'ING (QING)		1644 - 1912
Shun Chih (Shun Zhi)	1644 - 1661	Tao Kuang (Dao Guang) 1821 - 1850
K'ang Hsi (Kang Xi)	1662 - 1722	Hsien Feng (Xian Feng) 1851 - 1861
Yung Cheng (Yong Zhen)	1723 - 1735	T'ung Chih (Tong Zhi) 1862 - 1874
Ch'ien Lung (Qian Long)	1736 - 1795	Kuang Hsu (Guang Xu) 1875 - 1908
Chia Ch'ing (Jia Qing)	1796 - 1820	Hsuan T'ung (Xuan Tong) 1909 - 1912
REPUBLIC OF CHINA		1912 - 1949
Hung Hsien (Hong Xian)	1915 - 1916	
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA		since 1949

In this Catalogue the PINYIN system of romanisation is given in brackets. For example: Early Ming, Hsuan Te (Xuan De) period, 1426 - 1435.

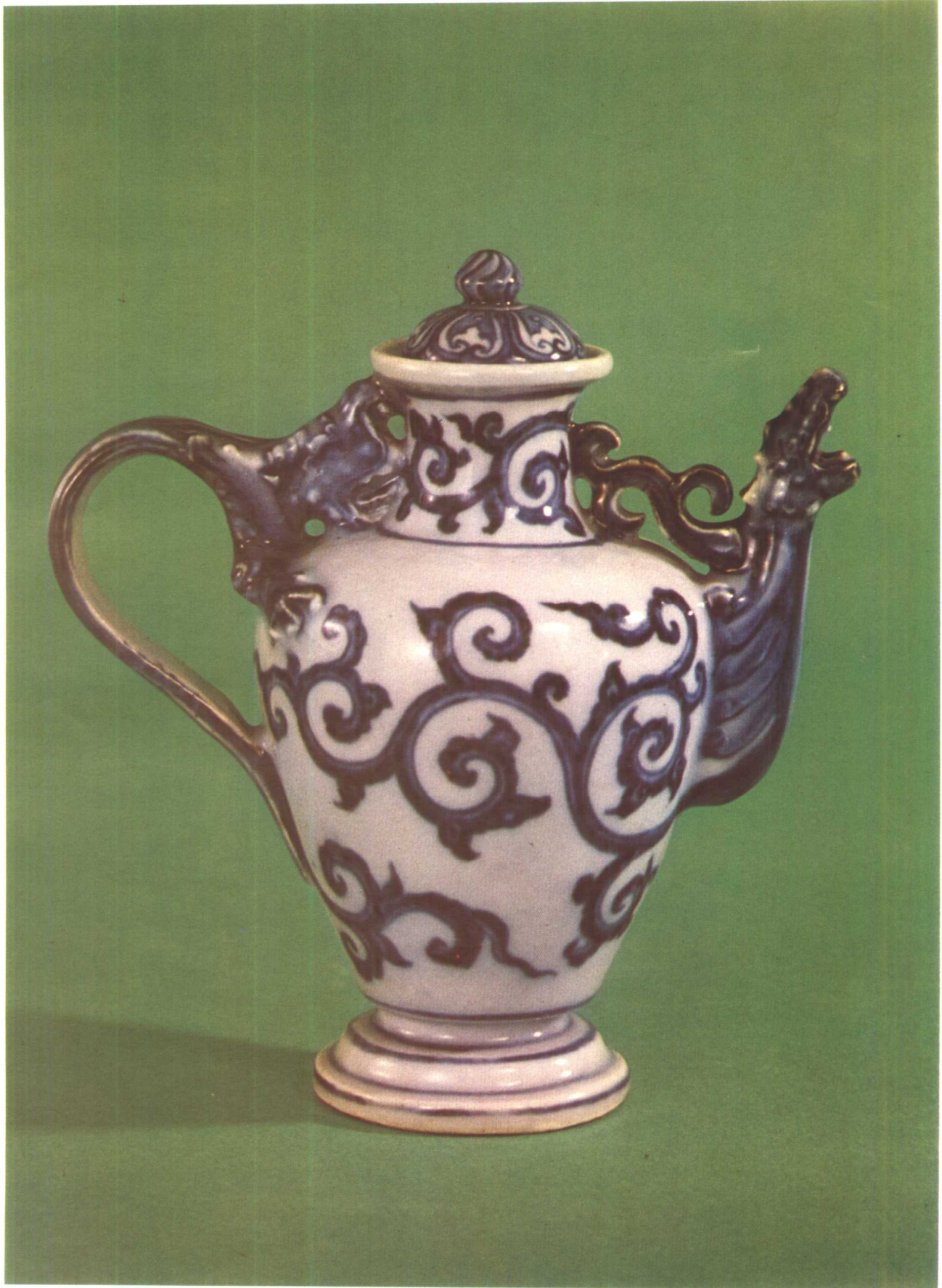


Figure 6 Early Ming, Blue-and-White Dragon and Phoenix head Ewer, 15th Century. (British Museum, London)

CHINESE BLUE AND WHITE CERAMICS — A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

S.T. Yeo and Jean Martin

Blue-and-white porcelain has been the principal product of China's ceramic industry since the middle of the 14th century. It is a truly utilitarian and highly decorative ware which provided years of elegant service for its early owners and ultimately enjoyed wide popularity among enthusiastic collectors around the world.

The technique of brush painting in cobalt blue under a transparent protective glaze has permanently recorded a whole range of Chinese design and decorative styles throughout the centuries. This, together with the tranquility of its many shades of blue and its variety of mature elegant shapes and exquisite glazes, seem to have summed up the whole aesthetic achievement of the Chinese potter. It is understandable that Chinese blue-and-white has attracted universal interest and stimulated a high degree of connoisseurship among scholars and collectors.

This exhibition which consists of over four hundred pieces of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain drawn from collections in Singapore therefore offers an ideal opportunity for the student and collector to view an important section of the fascinating field of Chinese ceramic art. Since most of the pieces were actually found in Southeast Asia, this exhibition also illustrates the extent of the export trade in porcelain and cultural exchange between China and countries in Southeast Asia over the six hundred year history of Chinese blue-and-white, covering the Yuan through Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.

Historical Background

Blue-and-white has an important place in the long tradition of technological and artistic development of China's ceramic history which can be traced back to over 2,500 years B.C. when painted earthenware was already in common use in the Yang-Shao Neolithic culture of northern China. By the time of the Shang Dynasty (1523 B.C.—1028 B.C.), the Chinese potters had discovered that certain materials would melt at high temperatures in the kilns to form a glassy coating or glaze, on the surface of a ceramic ware serving to seal the vessel as well as to decorate it. The Shang potters also started making high temperature fired stoneware which is dense and impervious to liquid, a considerable improvement over the previous low-fired porous earthenware.

The manufacture of ceramic ware continued with further development in techniques and refinement of styles during the ensuing dynasties of the Chou (1027 BC–256 BC), Chin (211 BC–206 BC) and Han (206 BC–AD 220). By the early Six Dynasties (AD 220–589), during the Three Kingdom period (AD 220–280), a green celadon glazed stoneware called Yueh ware was first produced, the forerunner of the splendid celadons of the later Sung Dynasty.

The T'ang Dynasty (AD 618–906) saw the development of true translucent porcelain in the form of white Hsing ware and other white wares at various locations, including the area of Ching-te Chen in Kiangsi Province which was latter to become the centre of Chinese ceramic production from the Yuan Dynasty onwards. The technique of brush painting in coloured pigments under a transparent glaze was first used at Ch'angsha during the T'ang Dynasty. The pigment used was iron oxide which gave a green/brown colour under the transparent glaze. Cobalt blue, most probably imported from Persia, was also first used as a lead glaze colourant in T'ang pottery. These two highly significant developments have an important bearing on the early development of the underglaze cobalt blue decorative technique in blue-and-white porcelain.

The Sung Dynasty (960–1279) was a period of high artistic achievement and the classic aristocratic taste was reflected in the elegant refined shapes and the cool monochrome glazes of Sung ceramics. The famous monochrome wares of the Sung Dynasty include the deep olive green of Northern Celadons; the thick opalescent light blue of Chun ware often aesthetically splashed with crimson or purple; the rare greenish blue of Ju ware and Kuan ware; the ivory white of Ting ware and the jade-like bluish green of Lung Ch'uan celadons.

Among the "popular wares" used by the ordinary people during the Sung period, T'zu Chou wares of Northern China are much appreciated for their robust shapes and vigorously executed designs often freely painted in brownish black under a transparent clear glaze. The T'zu Chou underglaze painting tradition first seen in T'ang pottery at Ch'angsha was later carried south probably by migrating T'zu Chou potters to Chi Chou in Kiangsi Province during the Southern Sung Dynasty, and from there, might have influenced the potters in nearby Ching-te Chen in the production of underglaze blue-and-white porcelain. Another Sung "popular ware" produced in Southern China, mainly in Ching-te Chen, is the Ying Ch'ing or "shadowy blue" porcelain with its clear slightly bluish glaze and hard white porcelain body. This ware has also been called Ch'ing Pai by some western authorities but this term is now in dispute and we prefer to use the traditional Chinese term, Ying Ch'ing.

By the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), the basic technology of ceramic production had already been well developed. It was only in decorative styles and new materials that the potter found scope for further experimentation and innovation. However, in contrast to the restrained classical taste of the Sung court, the new Mongolian rulers' disinterested attitude in the arts provided a more liberal artistic environment which was conducive to creative experimentation and new directions in decorative styles. The single most important ceramic development during the Yuan period was the successful use of imported cobalt blue for painting under a clear glaze to produce blue-and-white porcelain. This underglaze blue technique provided an ideal medium for a whole new range of Chinese decorative expressions often depicting the rich mythology and symbolism which were so much a part of Chinese life. Underglaze copper red was also used, often in conjunction with underglaze cobalt blue decoration. (See Figure 7 in page 17).



Figure 7 Yuan Blue-and-White with Underglaze Copper-red Jar, 14th Century. (Christie's, London)