

The Market for Imperial Chinese Porcelain: Collecting and Connoisseurship

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity
with the requirements for the
Master's Degree in Art Business
Sotheby's Institute of Art

2013

13,567 words

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By: Hadley Schreiber

Imperial Chinese porcelain is a mainstay of the Chinese art market and its prices at auction have remained quite high amidst China's recent economic slowdown. As a country steeped in tradition and history, China is full of antiquities that tell its story. One such antiquity that proves to be an indicator of China's growth – both culturally and economically – is imperial porcelain. Changing through dynasties and morphing with each new emperor, imperial Chinese porcelain exemplifies the trends and aesthetic styles during various periods in China. Examining important events in China's history –such as the illustrious Qing dynasty, the once-treasured Yuanmingyuan, the rule of Mao Zedong, and the subsequent leadership of Deng Xiaoping – allows us to not only get a sense of the Chinese art market but also to discover the motivations of Chinese collectors. Looking at imperial Chinese porcelain through both a historical and economic lens demonstrates the multifaceted value of a porcelain piece. Imperial porcelain is full of symbolism and tradition – animals and the use of certain decorating techniques all carry a different meaning. As a result of Deng Xiaoping's reforms to revive and open up the Chinese market to foreign trade, many Chinese people have become newly wealthy. There have been an overwhelming increase of high net worth individuals in China and these people want to collect art. Imperial porcelain is one of their top priorities in collecting as they wish to restore China's glory and heritage as well as bring back exquisite works to their country that were once taken by foreigners. Yet amidst these new collectors still exist older private collections. The owners of these collections are true art connoisseurs as they collect to meet their intellectual curiosity, personal passion, and love of art. Present-day Chinese collectors, however, are in search of a trophy item. With this strong, albeit varied collector base, imperial Chinese porcelain in good condition and with solid provenance never fails to achieve high prices at auction. This thesis presents a study of imperial Chinese porcelain within the Chinese art market and discovers that despite the nuances of porcelain and of its collectors, it is a good long-term investment.

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Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Tom McNulty for being so helpful and encouraging along the way.

Introduction

Through studying the social, cultural, and economic history of China, we are able to see the significant role that imperial Chinese porcelain has played in the art market. These imperial wares represent China's rich heritage and are symbols of wealth and success for Chinese collectors today. For non-Chinese collectors of imperial porcelain, these works of art represent the excellence and beauty of the Far East. The imperial porcelain that proves to be the most prized at auction were created during the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Thus, the exquisite and wide-ranging types of imperial porcelain make for a very interesting market. With this in mind, collectors focus on provenance, rarity, quality, and condition when buying imperial porcelain. Further, the marks on the bases of porcelain pieces prove to be significant indicators of value. Ultimately, the market for imperial porcelain relies on Chinese history, culture, as well as the Chinese economy. Bringing these three components together will allow us to see the great value in owning and investing in imperial Chinese porcelain.

The historical importance of imperial Chinese porcelain drives collecting. Shunned and destroyed under Mao Zedong, imperial Chinese porcelain is now greatly sought after as it represents China's glorious past and imperial heritage. Chinese collectors wish to buy back the imperial porcelain that was once taken from China as a way to reinstate China's tradition and heritage. As the Chinese market grew after the death of Mao Zedong and with the reforms of Deng Xiaoping, so too did the number of Chinese collectors. The Chinese collectors of today are newly wealthy and have greatly benefited from China's opening up to foreign trade under Deng Xiaoping. These

collectors, however, also feel a sense of resentment towards foreigners who possess Chinese antiquities. This sentiment fuels the new Chinese collectors' fervent desire to buy back any antiquity that was once taken out of China. In recent years, this buying back of imperial porcelain has created extremely high sales at auction. Thus, it is quite important to examine the sales of imperial Chinese porcelain and the subsequent results.

Sotheby's and Christie's play a large role in the market for imperial Chinese porcelain as they are the big players within the auction market and sell the most valuable porcelain pieces. Major collectors turn to these auction houses to sell their private collections. Sotheby's and Christie's, especially in Hong Kong, report very successful Chinese porcelain sales and for the purpose of this paper, the results examined here are discussed in United States currency. These quantitative results are intrinsic to the study of imperial Chinese porcelain as it allows us identify important private collection sales, such as the Meiyintang collection, as well as the years where Chinese collectors started to become more and more focused on buying back their country's imperial wares. This strong desire to reclaim imperial antiquities is so strong that it often overtakes the aesthetic value of a piece. In other words, the competition generated in the quest to restore China's glory becomes the primary reason for new Chinese collectors to buy. This race greatly inflates prices and often creates complications that include the prevalence of forgeries and the refusal of a buyer to pay for the work he or she bid on and subsequently won.

The intricacies of the Chinese art market make investing in art a very exciting prospect for the growing collector base in China. Imperial Chinese porcelain is the major focus for these new collectors as it has remained in high demand, both in the West and in

the East, over long periods of time. Further, imperial Chinese porcelain is imbued with such symbolism and detail that it is a sector of art loved and revered by true Asian art connoisseurs. With its historical significance, imperial porcelain has longevity in the art market and proves to be a good long-term investment.

Collecting and Connoisseurship During the Qing Dynasty

The Qing dynasty (Fig. 1) was an illustrious period in China's history, especially with regard to the arts. The great Qing emperors established and expanded a multiethnic empire to its greatest territorial extent, consolidating the peripheries of their realm to include such religiously, linguistically, and politically disparate areas as Taiwan, Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, and Xianjiang, or Chinese Turkestan.¹ The Qing dynasty itself was a non-Han minority as they were the descendants of skilled horseback riding peoples of the northern Altaic steppes.² In order for the Qing emperors to solidify their rule over such a diverse empire, they constructed various identities by creating a universalist emperorship, or a system of rule based on the Mandate of Heaven.³ This universalist emperorship was twofold in that it allowed the Qing rulers to identify with their subjects while also differentiating themselves. One tactic used by the Qing emperors to enforce their power and legitimate authority was to draw upon cultural practices such as collecting and cataloguing art.⁴ The Qing emperors were avid art collectors and as a result, created important documentation and classification systems of their art collection. A pair of hand scrolls of the Yongzheng emperor period called “Guwan tu,” or “Scroll of Antiquities,” reflect the collecting practices of the Qing

¹ Pamela Crossley. *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 12.

² Ibid. 76.

³ Evelyn Rawski. *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 23.

⁴ James Millward. *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.) 54.

imperial court.⁵ These hand scrolls include the depiction of many imperial porcelain as well as jade objects. Further, the scrolls are two of the most famous works dating to this high Qing period and were painted by a member of the Qing royal painting academy. The graphic content of the scrolls is made up of approximately two hundred and fifty assorted antique objects, which can be read as a magnified pictorial record of actual objects that constituted the Yongzheng imperial art collection. In this way, the scrolls act as a catalogue of the Yongzheng emperor's collection. This important pair of hand scrolls include a total of one hundred and three ceramic objects whose dates of creation range from Song period (960-1279) celadon wares to Ming (1368-1644) period blue and white pieces as well as to Yongzheng period (1722-1735) famille-rose enameled jars.⁶

Yongzheng's successor, Qianlong, was also an avid art collector and greatly encouraged the arts during his reign under which the Qing empire reached its widest territorial reach. Qianlong created ceramic-specific catalogues to document his extensive collection.⁷ These detailed catalogues are elaborate works that are meticulously illustrated. They are filled with pictures and descriptions of stoneware and porcelain that resided in the eighteenth century Qing court. The catalogues demonstrate Qianlong's keen engagement with art history, connoisseurship, and collecting. Four of Qianlong's catalogues are currently stored in the museum holdings of the Qing imperial archives at the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Of all the Qing emperors, it was Qianlong's cultural politics that incited the production of a new genre of visual culture

⁵ Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology*, 43.

⁶ Ellen C. Huang, "From Imperial Court to the International Art Market: Jingdezhen Porcelain Production as Global Visual Culture." (*Journal of World History*. Vol. 23, No. 1. Mar 2012) 121.

⁷ Ibid. 125.

that showcased ceramics, which includes porcelain. Qianlong's ceramic catalogues exhibit the emperor's personal commitment to art objects, collecting, and art documentation. Many of the textual descriptions in the catalogues were written in Qianlong's own hand. Further, the textual content of the catalogues reveals Qianlong's meticulous research into ceramic history. Qianlong also wrote more than one hundred poems celebrating the stoneware and porcelain objects in his collection. Thus, Qianlong had an unrelenting passion for art and this care and intensity helped him to create an extensive collection. The manuals created under Qianlong indicate the extreme measures with which the Qianlong court treated art connoisseurship and antiques management. Through examining the practices of the Qing emperors, it is evident that collecting and scholarly practices within art are longstanding traditions in China. It is significant, however, that present-day China has an abundance of newly wealthy collectors who want to buy imperial wares as status symbols and as a way to honor their country. These new collectors, however, do not take the time to study and appreciate the works of art as their ancestors once did. We will see that this is a factor in driving up the current prices of imperial porcelain as the desire for buying is increasingly competitive and oftentimes even unrelated to the actual art object.

In addition to his ceramic manuals that catalogued his collection of stoneware and porcelain, Qianlong is also responsible for the production of thorough painting albums, referred to as "Taoye tu," that were the first to portray porcelain production.⁸ To date, there are three known sets of paintings, originating in Qing court workshops, that depict porcelain production through a series of linked pictures. The most famous set of

⁸ Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions*, 65.

porcelain manufacturing illustrations are now owned by a private collector in Taiwan. This set of paintings consists of twenty painted illustrations on silk, each paired with a separate calligraphic annotation.⁹ These beautiful albums demonstrate the high level of connoisseurship in Qing China. They also had a political purpose as the production of such albums stemmed from a strong imperial interest in documenting the manufacturing of goods that would then be eligible for taxation.¹⁰ These taxes levied on manufactured goods would create a tax base for the empire. Similar to the Qing period, the Chinese government in present times is involved in most aspects of society – including art. Taken together, the ceramic manuals and “Taoye tu” albums illustrate how the production of porcelain served to validate and declare Qianlong as emperor. Qianlong was the longest reigning Qing emperor and used material forms and symbolic power to strengthen his empire. His ceramic manuals and “Taoye tu” albums created an all-knowing and omniscient imperial identity that aided in the creation of universal knowledge of art in China.

The Qing dynasty showcases the history of art in China and especially Chinese porcelain. It is an example of China’s rich culture and heritage as well as sophisticated collecting and connoisseurship. As such an illustrious period in China’s history, it is not surprising that the porcelain created during the Qing dynasty is extremely valuable and sought after by collectors. The porcelain objects created under Qianlong that are inscribed his mark prove to be the most desirable wares at auction.

⁹ Huang. “From Imperial Court to the International Art Market: Jingdezhen Porcelain Production as Global Visual Culture,” 127.

¹⁰ Ibid. 128.

Marks and Decorative Inscriptions on Imperial Chinese Porcelain

The marks on the bases of imperial Chinese porcelain give them value and make them even more desirable to collectors. Barring fakes and forgeries, a mark on the base of an imperial porcelain authenticates the piece. During the Yuan period, only porcelain made in the imperial workshop bears the mark of the imperial house. These marks are often incised and unglazed. During other dynasties, there was a chance that porcelain not made in the imperial workshops had the imperial mark. Thus, it is important to know the porcelain production practices of each dynasty as well as its history before deciding to buy an important imperial Chinese ware. In addition to imperial marks, the Yuan period also produced floral marks in the shape of a cylinder on the bottom of porcelain objects.¹¹ Meanwhile, Ming porcelain present various kinds of marks such as ones deeply engraved in black glaze, impressed marks, and engraved floral marks. The mark of the Yongle emperor of the Ming dynasty is particularly beautiful and rare. Found on the base of the porcelain works, the Yongle imperial seal depicts lions playing with a ball upon which the mark is placed.¹² During the Qing dynasty and under the Jiaqing emperor, the characters of the Jiaqing imperial mark were arranged inside a circle.¹³ In addition to appearing on the bases of porcelain objects, imperial marks also appear on the neck or the body of a piece. Pieces with horizontally written marks are very rare and valuable. Marks of this kind were first used during the Ming dynasty and then subsequently during

¹¹ Perzynski, Friedrich. “Marks and Decorative Inscriptions on Chinese Porcelain.” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*. (Vol. 52, No. 299. Feb 1928) 66.

¹² S.J. Vaniker. *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain: From Prehistory to Present*. (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1991). 32.

¹³ Ibid. 66.

the Qing dynasty. After the Qing dynasty, no more of these horizontal marks are to be found.

The markings on the bases of imperial wares are intrinsic in discerning the value of a porcelain object – be it a vase, dish, or plate. Auction houses and collectors often check the base of a porcelain piece first to see if there is an imperial mark. Thus, an authentic imperial mark greatly heightens the value of porcelain objects. In addition, the quality of the porcelain, the period of its creation, its aesthetic appeal and its decorative symbolism play a large role in the desirability of a certain piece. The imperial marks of the Hongwu, Yongle, and Xuande emperors of the Ming dynasty on porcelain increase the value of the object greatly. Similarly, the imperial marks of the Qing emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong also significantly heighten the desirability and worth of a porcelain piece. Experienced imperial porcelain collectors not only look for the best porcelain produced during each dynasty but they also take great care to find porcelain objects with valid and authentic imperial marks.

Yuanmingyuan: A Historical Event Dictating Chinese Collecting

The Yuanmingyuan was a summer retreat for six generations of emperors, from Kangxi (r. 1662-1722) to Xianfeng (r. 1851-1861) (Fig. 1). The looting and burning to the ground of this palace caused the destruction of many Chinese antiquities and the movement of imperial works of art from China to Europe. In present day, the destruction of the Yuanmingyuan and the works of art stolen from it stand as a reminders for the Chinese of a wrong done to their society. The once illustrious palace also serves to incite nationalistic fervor and pride among Chinese art collectors as they look to buy back important imperial works from foreign hands.

The Yuanmingyuan was located in the northwestern outskirts of Beijing. It was comprised of Chinese-style gardens, buildings, and artificial islands built on a natural lake. These islands were carefully arranged according to the important Chinese cosmology system and the main palace gates were adorned with the characters “Yuan Ming Yuan” in the emperor Kangxi’s own calligraphy.¹⁴ The Yuanmingyuan was comprised of an enormous palace and vast grounds that were roughly five times the size of Beijing’s Forbidden City and as another comparison, eight times the size of the Vatican City. The building and architectural style of the Yuanmingyuan progressed during the Qing dynasty and reached its highest level under the reign of the emperor Qianlong (r. 1836-1895) (Fig. 1). With the help of Jesuits who worked in the imperial court, Qianlong designed and constructed European-inspired palaces at Yuanmingyuan. Giuseppe Castiglione, a Jesuit court painter who the Chinese called Lang Shining, can be

¹⁴ Audrey Wang. *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*. (Burlington: Lund Humphries, 2012) 23.

credited with distinctive style of each building at the impeccable and richly adorned summer retreat. This Yuanmingyuan style is described as “Sinicized Baroque.”¹⁵ It blended Western motifs and finishes with the elliptical stylization of Chinese painting that originated during Song dynasty. Further, the interiors of the various palaces on the grounds were highly decorated and aligned more with the extravagant taste of the Manchu rulers than with that of the more conservative style of the Han Chinese –the ethnic group that makes up the majority of the Chinese population.¹⁶

In 1860 British and French emissaries destroyed the gardens and palaces of the Yuanmingyuan. After a group of British and French officials were tortured and executed by the Qing emperor Xianfeng, British and French forces retaliated by looting the contents of the Yuanmingyuan and by burning each building to the ground so that all that remains today are ruins. Before the complete decimation of the Yuanmingyuan buildings, art was moved out of the palaces and transported to France and Britain. Many of these works from the Yuanmingyuan were incorporated into the décor of the “Salon Chinois” at the palace at Fontainebleau, located outside of Paris.¹⁷ The rooms of the Fontainebleau served as a fitting backdrop for the Chinese imperial wares from the Yuanmingyuan. The foreign dignitaries who visited the Fontainebleau Palace would have seen the exquisite Chinese works of art. Accordingly, these pieces came to symbolize France’s economic, military, and political power over the Asian nations. The Chinese objects also represented France’s involvement in imperialist politics. The famous animal bronze fountainheads of the Yuanmingyuan, called the Haiyantang

¹⁵ Ibid. 25.

¹⁶ Craig Clunas. *Art in China*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1997) 15.

¹⁷ Ibid. 34.

fountainheads, were also transported to France. Each of the Hiayantang fountainheads depicts a different animal from the Chinese zodiac – thus, there were twelve in total. At the Yuanmingyuan, the animal heads were arranged in two groups of six and each animal spouted water in turn every two hours.¹⁸ At noon, all twelve Haiyatang fountainheads issued water at the same time.¹⁹ Many believe that the Haiyatang fountainheads were actually designed by Giuseppe Castiglione. The English, meanwhile, preferred the porcelain and cloisonné enamels from the Yuanmingyuan. Alfred Morrison, an English collector, amassed a great collection of porcelain and cloisonné enamels from the Yuanmingyuan. Morrison's collection became known as the Fonthill heirlooms after it was installed at Fonthill House in Wiltshire, England.²⁰ This type of provenance, such as being in Alfred Morrison's collection, makes a piece of imperial porcelain even more valuable as its journey from China to England was thoroughly documented and known. Furthermore, these Yuanmingyuan works of art are even more valuable to Chinese collectors as they represent Chinese tradition, heritage, excellence, and beauty. Chinese collectors are desperately trying to buy back the exquisite works of art that were once taken from the Yuanmingyuan. They want to reclaim the stolen works of their country, honor their country's heritage, and restore the pride that was shattered during China's highly resented colonial past.

¹⁸ Ibid. 38.

¹⁹ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 24.

²⁰ Ibid. 24.

A Close Look at the Haiyantang Fountainheads

The Haiyantang fountainheads have become important examples of the Chinese nationalistic passions and the will of the Chinese to bring back imperial treasures to their homeland. The sales of the Haiyantang fountainheads form a great case study with which to examine the progression of behavior of Chinese collectors. First, the Haiyantang monkey head was sold at Sotheby's New York in 1987. The ox head was sold at Sotheby's London in the same year. The ox head was again sold in 1989 at Sotheby's London. Further, in the same 1989 sale at Sotheby's London, the tiger head was sold. During these three auctions, China and its collectors made no mention of the Yuanmingyuan and the sale of works from that originated from the Yuanmingyuan. When Christie's Hong Kong had its sale on April 30, 2000, however, there was a great uproar from Chinese collectors. At this point in time, Yuanmingyuan and the Haiyantang fountainheads were beginning to become a very controversial issue. During this April sale, Christie's offered two of the Haiyantang fountainheads, the monkey and the ox, along with other works of art in the imperial Yuanmingyuan style.²¹ During this same auction season, Sotheby's offered the tiger Haiyantang fountainhead and a Yuanmingyuan vase in its May 2, 2000 auction in Hong Kong. At this time, the Chinese government took great effort to insert itself in the press to criticize and denounce the auction houses in saying that Christie's and Sotheby's were defying China and insulting the Chinese people. Further, the Chinese government said that the auction houses were taking

²¹ Christie's Hong Kong. *The Imperial Sale, Yuanmingyuan.* (Hong Kong: Christie's, 2000) 12.

advantage of Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems”²² autonomy as they were holding the sales in Hong Kong. China demanded that Christie’s and Sotheby’s halt their Yuanmingyuan sales and return the objects to China. As a result of these protests, Christie’s and Sotheby’s reversed their marketing strategies by not emphasizing that the objects originated at the Yuanmingyuan. Without the vociferous objections and complaints from China, an esteemed provenance such as being from the Yuanmingyuan would have been something to highly publicize as it would have garnered very high prices. Christie’s and Sotheby’s refused to acquiesce to the demands of the Chinese government and did not remove the Yuanmingyuan items from their sales. According to their business terms and conditions, they were not lawfully obligated to take the Yuanmingyuan items out of the sale because their consignors obtained them legally.

Sotheby’s Hong Kong continued to auction off works of art from Yuanmingyuan in October 2007. This sale included imperial porcelain from the Yuanmingyuan and yet another Haiyangtang fountainhead. The Haiyangtang fountainhead in this sale was that of a horse and was expected to sell for more than \$7.7 million.²³ The imperial porcelain of the sale with the highest value was a pair of flower petal moon flasks that sold for close to \$3 million. The Haiyangtang fountainhead never made it to the sale, however, as it was sold in a privately. The consigner of the fountainhead sold it to Stanley Ho, a casino mogul from Macau. Ho then donated the horse head to China – thus, honoring China and further solidifying his status in Chinese society. In 2002, Ho also bought the boar fountainhead and donated it to China. Ho is a Chinese citizen that many collectors wish

²² Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 25.

²³ Christie’s Hong Kong. *Yuanmingyuan: The Garden of Absolute Clarity and Imperial Peking, The Last Days.* (Hong Kong: Christie’s, 2007). 16.

to emulate because of his patriotic acts of returning two of the treasured Haiyantang fountainheads to China. The irony of these fountainheads is that they were most likely designed by Giuseppe Castiglione and not a Chinese artist. Despite this fact, the Haiyantang fountainheads represent Chinese glory and heritage.

The story of the Haiyantang fountainheads continued into 2009 with the sale of the collection of Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé at Christie's Paris. The last two existing Haiyantang fountainheads at the time – the rabbit and the rat – were to be auctioned off at this sale.²⁴ Just as before, the Chinese government demanded that the two bronze fountainheads be returned to their homeland. To lessen the controversy incited yet again by the Haiyantang fountainheads, Christie's did not highlight the rabbit and rat fountainheads in an attempt to quiet and quell the protest of the Chinese government. Moreover, Pierre Bergé refused to take the bronze heads out of the sale unless the Chinese government would agree to buy them back. Not surprisingly, the Chinese government asserted that it would not buy back the rabbit and rat fountainheads as doing so would legalize the looting that occurred at the Yuanmingyuan in 1860. A group of Chinese lawyers, allegedly not working for the government, also tried to halt the sale of the Haiyantang fountainheads but were not successful.²⁵ Thus, the Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé auction at Christie's commenced and the two fountainheads were sold. The buyer was Cai Mingchao, a prominent Chinese collector. Yet Cai Mingchao never paid for the fountainheads as his plan was to somehow obtain them without submitting payment and then return them to China. Cai Mingchao's actions were

²⁴ Souren Melikian. "Returned to the Homeland." *Art + Auction*. (Vol. 34, Issue 10. June 2011) 70.

²⁵ Ibid. 67.

criticized and denounced by Chinese collectors as he affirmed the stereotype of many new Chinese collectors as being unreliable and dishonest. Since the two bronze Haiyantang fountainheads were not actually sold, they were still the possessions of the Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé estate. Subsequently, the rat and rabbit fountainheads were put into storage under Pierre Bergé's ownership as Yves Saint Laurent was deceased. The long saga of the bronze Haiyantang fountainheads illustrates the resolute and unwavering patriotism that fuels the Chinese art market. Chinese collectors intensely feel that many of their country's imperial porcelain and other imperial art objects were wrongfully taken out of China – such as during the destruction of the Yuanmingyuan. They now feel that it is their duty to bring these works back to their homeland as they are symbols of Chinese glory, wealth, and superiority. While imperial porcelain and art objects, such as the works of art from the Yuanmingyuan, are revered and desired in present day, it is significant that these imperial objects were once shunned during the period of Mao Zedong's leadership in China.

China After 1949: The Strengthening of the Economy and the Art Market

The twenty first century signifies the first opportunity for the People's Republic of China (China), under the single party rule of the Chinese Communist Party, to assert a leading position on the global stage – both politically and economically – since 1949. The last two hundred years of China's history did not promote or encourage economic growth. In fact, the ruling powers wanted to restrict and contain any such evolution or progress. This extreme restriction and control served to limit any type of trade, including that within the art market. The Qing dynasty, once an illustrious period for China, began to decline through the 1800s under a series of corrupt and incompetent rulers.²⁶ This decline reached a point in 1911 when China's feudal dynastic system of rule came to an end.²⁷ Yet, the power struggle within China continued on into the mid-twentieth century as the Nationalists and Communists fought for control of the country. This struggle came to an end in 1949 when the Communist Party came to power. Starting in 1949, China was once again ruled by a powerful central government. At this time Mao Zedong and other high level Chinese Communist Party members desired to promote social equality and economic order. Thus, the Chinese Communist Party began to try to empower peasants and workers while also limiting the influence of landlords, intellectuals, capitalists, and foreigners in China. This state of affairs signified a period where China was largely removed from the rest of the world. It was a time where China turned inward and closed itself off as a result of the rules of the Chinese Communist Party. During this time, Mao Zedong implemented a campaign to destroy what he called “the Four Olds”:

²⁶ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 20.

²⁷ Ibid. 20.

old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. The movement was launched in 1966 and caused the destruction of many monuments, temples, and other ancient structures across China.²⁸ Further, family heirlooms and art collections, which included imperial porcelain, were seized by the Communist Red Guard and stored in government warehouses. These confiscated art and antique objects were not safe and protected as government officials often stole them out of the warehouses. Moreover, unclaimed works of art were auctioned off on behalf of the state. Thus, this period of the destruction of “the Four Olds” ruined and demolished important parts of Chinese culture as well as Chinese works of art. The Communist Party suppressed China’s glorious past that was full of prosperity, tradition, and beautiful art. Today, the beautiful imperial objects that were once shunned are now revered and greatly sought after. China’s booming economy has infused its art market and given its collectors the means to participate in the global art market. Further, China’s participation and large stake in the art market would not have been possible without the reforms of Deng Xiaoping.

Deng Xiaoping began to change China’s position on the world stage in the late 1970s and early 1980s through commencing reforms that would demonstrate China’s true potential and make it a formidable market force. Deng Xiaoping described his reforms as “crossing the river by feeling the stones” and his gradual opening up process of the country would take China from a planned economy to one with freer markets.²⁹ The reforms undertaken in the late 1970s and early 1980s were endeavors to revive the Chinese economy as well as aid in its recovery from the low point of Mao Zedong’s last

²⁸ Ibid. 22.

²⁹ Ruben Lien. “China.” *The International Art Markets*. Ed. James Goodwin. (London: Kogan Page Limited, 2008) 103.

years in power. The goals of these reforms were to revitalize party personnel, agricultural production, industrial development, foreign trade and investment, military and defense, and science and technology.³⁰ The late Qing dynasty rulers, who were corrupt, had rejected foreign trade, technology, and investment. Similarly, the Chinese Communist Party prohibited any foreign interaction and instead promoted self-sufficiency. In contrast, Deng Xiaoping reversed China's old and unsuccessful economic policies through accepting foreign trade, technology, and investment.³¹

As part of his plan to transform his country, Deng Xiaoping instituted price reforms in China so that pricing was based on supply and demand instead of production costs. He also made changes to ownership rights and greatly encouraged entrepreneurship. With these actions, Deng Xiaoping opened and increased the opportunity for private enterprise and also allowed market forces to take hold.³² Even though Deng Xiaoping took measures to increase individual opportunity in China, the Chinese Communist Party still controls and owns the key industries of the country. In addition, it manipulates the stock market, employs its Party members in very important positions in the financial sector, and directs the overall progress of economic growth in China. China has been growing under this state-controlled capitalism for over thirty years.³³ It has been said, however, that the intensity of this government control has decreased over time. With this positive and successful growth in the economy, many more Chinese people have come to be high net worth individuals. With money to spend,

³⁰ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 22.

³¹ Ibid. 22.

³² Roman Kraeussl and Robin Logher. "Emerging Art Markets" *Emerging Art Markets Review*. (Vol. 11 Issue 4. Dec. 2010) 311.

³³ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 21.

these Chinese people have infused their country's economy as well as the global economy. In particular, the new Chinese high net worth individuals seek luxury goods and art proves to be a major part of this sector of the market. During the two-year period from 2008 to 2010, the market for luxury goods fell in the United States by 16 percent, decreased in Japan by 10 percent, and lessened in Europe by 8 percent compared to the levels in 2008.³⁴ Meanwhile during this same period in China, the market for luxury goods rose by 12 percent.³⁵ Art and antiques are two of the major items that the newly wealthy Chinese high net worth individuals invest in and take pride in displaying.

Sotheby's moved to capture this emerging group of collectors in 1973 by creating salerooms in Hong Kong – it was the first international auction house to do so.³⁶ In 1986, Christie's followed Sotheby's and set up its own salerooms in Hong Kong.³⁷ With these new outposts for the art trade, Hong Kong took over the established markets in London and New York in becoming the primary center of the Chinese art market. The success in Hong Kong for Sotheby's and Christie's has been consistent. Bonham's, on the other hand, has not been as successful in tapping into the Chinese market. The global reach of Sotheby's and Christie's and the caliber of the works of art they sell greatly attract the newly wealthy Chinese as they wish to purchase trophy pieces that will act as signals of their newfound wealth.

In addition to Sotheby's and Christie's setting up outposts in Hong Kong, almost two thousand local Chinese auction houses have been founded in mainland China since

³⁴ Bain & Company. *Bain Luxury Study 9th Edition*. (Boston: Bain & Company, 2010). 19.

³⁵ Ibid. 19.

³⁶ Lien, "China," 104.

³⁷ Ibid. 104.

1992. Yet many of these businesses have been short-lived due to mismanagement. The two most reputable auction houses now operating in mainland China are China Guardian and Hanhai.³⁸ Although China did officially open its doors to foreign competition in 2004 to fulfill its obligations as a member of the World Trade Organization, which it joined in 2001, its government regulations still exclude outsiders from buying and selling in the mainland market. Strict import and export rules limit foreign participation in the art market for Chinese antiquities in China. There are no restrictions for works of art made after 1911.³⁹ Consequently, the lack of restrictions for these works makes it easier to trade them in the international market. There are many laws, however, restricting the export of Chinese antiques. Under the “Cultural Relic Protection Law,” the Cultural Relics Bureau prohibits the export of cultural relics, including imperial porcelain, created before 1911.⁴⁰ The rationale behind this law is that it protects against theft from historical and archaeological sites for international sale. This rule applies to all artworks, including those that are sold at auction or in private sales on mainland China. The law does not apply, however, to auction lots that have come from outside of China with the proper import documentation. Thus, the Chinese government takes great care to limit what leaves the country as well as what comes into it. Consequently, policies are in place to restrict the flow of antiquities through China and the trade of antiquities. The goal of Chinese trade regulations is to preserve and keep important Chinese works of art within the country. The Cultural Relics Bureau revised and expanded its “Cultural Relic Protection Law” in 2007. The extended law now includes any antique that is considered

³⁸ Ibid. 105.

³⁹ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 22.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 22.

to be an “important relic” of the country. Further, with this amended law an object is prohibited from export if it was made before 1949.⁴¹ The adjusted law also states that any object that is thought to be important to the heritage of an ethnic minority group in China must stay in the country.⁴² If a work of art is directly linked to the heritage of an ethnic minority group, such as the Miao people, and was created before 1966, then it is prohibited from being sold and shipped out of China. These types of rules that ban the export of Chinese antiquities, such as imperial porcelain, serve to fuel the nationalistic fervor among the Chinese and validate their strong desire to buy back their cultural heritage that comes in the form of imperial antiquities.

Amidst these trade restrictions in China, Sotheby’s was able to secure a position in mainland China through the planned Beijing freeport, called the Tianzhu Free Trade Zone. In 2012, Sotheby’s committed to a ten year agreement with the Chinese state-owned, Beijing-based GeHua Art Company to invest \$1.2 million for 80% ownership of a new joint venture between the two companies in the Tianzhu Free Trade Zone.⁴³ According to Chinese law, foreign auction houses are allowed to do business in Hong Kong but are prohibited from doing business on mainland China unless they partner with a domestic firm located on the mainland. Sotheby’s did just that in seeking an agreement with the GeHua Art Company in Beijing. Sotheby’s hopes to enhance its business and capture a leading stake in the Chinese art market with its role in the Tianzhu Free Trade

⁴¹ Vimalin Rujivacharakul. *Collecting China*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011). 15.

⁴² Ibid. 15.

⁴³ Charlotte Burns. “Sotheby’s Gains Foothold in Mainland China.” *The Art Newspaper*. (Web Only 10 September 2012) <<http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Sotheby's+gains+foothold+in+mainland+China/27176>>.

Zone. Further, the agreement with GeHua allows Sotheby's to capitalize on the opportunities within the mainland Chinese art market without any obstacles. Chinese high net worth individuals who live and work in mainland China will most likely be attracted to the "Sotheby's brand" as it signifies status, luxury, and wealth. According to the agreement, the Tianzhu Free Trade Zone will act as a location for the Sotheby's auctions as well as be a setting for private selling exhibitions for non-cultural relics. The free trade zone will also be a tax-advantaged storage location. Under its agreement with Sotheby's, Gehua will not allow any other company to conduct auctions or exhibitions for sale within its authorized areas of the Tianzhu Free Trade Zone.⁴⁴ Further, under the agreement, GeHua is prohibited from forming partnerships with certain auction house competitors. Even though the Tianzhu Free Trade Zone has not yet been built and no date has been set for the start of its construction, Sotheby's agreement with the GeHua Art Company gives it a competitive advantage within the art market and opens its access to Asian art as well as to an even larger Asian client base.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The Chinese Economy and Art Market in the Twenty-First Century

The Chinese art market has shown resilience amidst the global financial crises of the past few years. Just as other art markets around the world, the Chinese art market is tied to larger economic events such as the expansion and distribution of global wealth. There are a rapidly growing number of wealthy consumers in China as well as a continuously growing middle class. These societal changes create a population with a very high purchasing power that serves to infuse the economy with activity and help it to grow. Yet, although the Chinese economy is one of the ten largest economies in the world, the growth rates in China have dropped as of late.⁴⁵ In addition, many economists believe that China's growth has reached its peak in recent months.⁴⁶

From 1993 to 2007, China had an average GDP growth rate of 10.5 percent per year.⁴⁷ By 2007, China's economy expanded by 14.2 percent.⁴⁸ The International Monetary Fund, however, now believes that China will grow by just 7.8 percent in 2013.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, other economists point to China's lack of financial transparency when they say that China's GDP growth in 2012 was only 3 percent to 4 percent. While the Chinese economy went through a period of rapid growth for many years, it seems now that it has reached a point where it is relatively constant. In addition, poor and variable economic growth and political uncertainties around the world have encouraged

⁴⁵ "When Giants Slow Down." *The Economist*. (27 July 2013 Web 7 August 2013) <<http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21582257-most-dramatic-and-disruptive-period-emerging-market-growth-world-has-ever-seen?zid=306&ah=1b164dbd43b0cb27ba0d4c3b12a5e227>>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

investors to seek the low risk areas of many asset markets in the past year.⁵⁰ These areas include bonds and blue-chip stocks. This type of safe, low risk investment was translated into the art market through cautious buying and selling in select areas. Furthermore, this led to a polarization of the art market with the best performances seen at the top end with the best quality works and the most well known artists.⁵¹ In the Chinese market, the prevalence of smaller incomes coupled with recent excessive prices led to less participation by mainstream buyers and risk-averse investors.⁵² This shows that the Chinese market is dominated by extremely high net worth individuals who are buying almost exclusively top tier works of art. Further, the new and extremely wealthy class of collectors in China buy art, especially the most valuable works, for the prestige of owning a trophy or as an expression of their recent ability to connect with China's history and heritage and bring it back to their homeland. These collectors are mostly entrepreneurs who have made their money from China's booming manufacturing industries.⁵³ Their collecting pattern displays the characteristics of new collectors, which includes buying pieces that are ostentatious and decorative for the thrill and ability to boast – and not for the historical or pleasing aesthetic value. Moreover, these new collectors are also keen to leave their mark in Chinese society and culture. This type of self-glorification comes in the form of private museums. This behavior is similar to the art market boom that happened Japan in the 1980s and was fueled by newly rich Japanese who went on art-

⁵⁰ McAndrew, Clare. "U.S. Retakes Top Spot in Art Sales from China." *The Art Newspaper*. (14 March 2013 Web 7 August 2013) <<http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/US-retakes-top-spot-in-art-sales-from-China-29104>>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Lien, "China," 104.

buying sprees.⁵⁴ In 2006, it was reported that China had more than two thousand museums – this number is up from eight hundred and thirty a decade ago.⁵⁵

Auction house sales in China increased significantly for two years until 2012 when this growth slowed. In 2013, the value of sales in the Chinese art market decreased by 24 percent to \$14 billion as lower priced works of a lesser quality came to the market and demand decreased.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, sales in the United States experienced an increase of 5 percent over the past year, reaching a high of \$19 billion.⁵⁷ Thus, the United States regained the top spot in art sales in 2013 through both the slowdown of the Chinese art market and strong sales within the United States.⁵⁸ Art sales in the United States accounted for 33 percent of the overall art market in 2012 and this was an increase of 4 percent from 2011.⁵⁹ Art sales in China, on the other hand, took a 25 percent share of the overall market in 2012. Meanwhile, in 2011, China held a 30 percent share of the overall art market.⁶⁰ The United Kingdom comes in at third place in art sales with a market share of 23 percent in 2012.⁶¹

Many of China's periphery economies continue to benefit from China's economic growth. These periphery economics include Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea – all of which share some racial or cultural affiliation with China.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 104.

⁵⁵ Rujivacharakul, *Collecting China*, 44.

⁵⁶ McAndrew, Clare, "U.S. Retakes Top Spot in Art Sales from China."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "Shaken, Not Stirred: The Breadth of the Latest Slowdown is disconcerting." *The Economist*. (11 May 2013. Web. 7 August 2013)

<<http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21577430-breadth-latest-slowdown-disconcerting-shaken-not-stirred?zid=306&ah=1b164dbd43b0cb27ba0d4c3b12a5e227>>.

⁶¹ McAndrew, Clare, "U.S. Retakes Top Spot in Art Sales from China."

Despite the political tension and ambiguity surrounding the cross-strait relationship between Taiwan and China, Taiwan is responsible for over \$200 billion in investment in China.⁶² Further, the rise of the Taiwanese economy in the 1980s was one of the principal driving forces of the Chinese art market. In addition, the Japanese economy also had a strong impact on the Chinese art market. Furthermore, some of the most important collections of Chinese art, not to mention the world-class National Palace Museum collection, are found in Taiwan.⁶³ Thus, China and Taiwan are closely linked when it comes to the art market and collecting.

The Chinese art market remains the most important of the emerging markets, both in terms of the size of its domestic sales and the international significance of its buyers. Furthermore, China's rich cultural heritage of art and antiques has produced a large market that succeeded in ending the fifty-year art market duopoly held by New York and London. China's economy and its new class of high net worth individuals have bolstered the art market tremendously. These new collectors have a strong desire to buy and bring back important imperial porcelain to China.

⁶² Lien, "China," 104.

⁶³ Ibid. 104.

Repatriation, Restitution, and Nationalistic Fervor: The Race to Buy Back China's Cultural Heritage

The desire to buy back China's cultural heritage is a major driving force for buyers of imperial Chinese porcelain. This buying back can be called a "race" as the competitive nature of this trend is exhibited through the extremely high prices in the market. It is now newly wealthy Chinese buyers who make up the collector base for imperial porcelain. This dramatic shift in the art market from principally foreign buyers of Chinese porcelain to the current state of the Chinese buying back their treasures has incited a revolution in the art market over the past five to ten years. Further, this change has led to a corresponding drastic increase in prices of imperial porcelain in the market.⁶⁴ All auction houses and dealers report an extraordinary interest shown by wealthy mainland Chinese people in buying back the finest examples of their heritage.⁶⁵ This trend of Chinese regional patriotism started to become increasingly important in 2009 and was evident in the Christie's New York September 2009 sale of fine Chinese ceramics and works of art.⁶⁶ During this sale, there was an unprecedented ninety-seven percent success rate in auctioning one hundred and fifteen lots formerly owned by Arthur M. Sackler.⁶⁷ This event demonstrated the bold and urgent nature of Chinese buyers as they seek to buy back pieces representing the glory of Chinese heritage, regardless of the price. For most Chinese buyers of imperial porcelain, and especially those who are high

⁶⁴ Emma Crichton-Miller. "Collector's Focus." *Apollo: The International Magazine for Collectors.* (Vol. 174, Issue 3. Nov 2011) 80.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 80.

⁶⁶ Souren Melikian. "The Irresistible Surge of China." *Art + Auction* (Vol. 33 Issue 4. Dec. 2009) 49.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 49.

net worth individuals, extremely high prices do not deter the desire to purchase. In the realm of imperial Chinese porcelains, high and extravagant prices are the norm. In the 2009 Christie's auction in New York, an imperial famille-rose bowl with the Yongzheng mark that was once broken in half and glued together sold for \$314,500.⁶⁸ The bowl had an estimate of \$12,000 to \$18,000 and would not have been sold a few years earlier as it would have had little value in the eyes of a collector, from the East or from the West.⁶⁹

Another series of auctions that served as indicators for the rise of the market for imperial Chinese porcelains were the October 2010 Chinese works of art sales at Sotheby's Hong Kong. During the six sessions that occurred between October 5, 2010 and October 8, 2010, Sotheby's Hong Kong realized total sales of \$209 million.⁷⁰ For the collectors at these sales, the primary focus was the acquisition of an object that once belonged to an emperor, such as Qianlong, and that represented Chinese heritage, skill, and glory of past dynasties. During the Sotheby's sales, the combined appeal of imperial ownership and the heightened enthusiasm of recovering emblems of national pride from former enemy hands proved to be a very powerful incentive to buy. This motivation served to drastically increase the prices of imperial Chinese porcelain throughout the art market. During this sale, an 18th century vase of double gourd shape sold for \$32.4 million.⁷¹ The vase was decorated in a hybrid style with scrollwork motifs in addition to more traditional themes. The catalogue for the sale indicates that the vase once belonged to the famous English collector Alfred Morrison and prior to Morrison, the prominent art

⁶⁸ Ibid. 54.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 54.

⁷⁰ Souren Melikian. "New China's Imperial Passion." *Art + Auction*. (Vol. 34, Issue 4. Nov 2010) 53.

⁷¹ Ibid. 54.

dealer J.T. Tai.⁷² Morrison was one of the most important nineteenth century English collectors of Chinese art. His collection was quite important as he primarily bought porcelain made for the imperial palace. In other words, his collection is comprised of many objects that were once looted from the Forbidden City or from the Yuanmingyuan, the Summer Palace.⁷³ The porcelain in Alfred Morrison's collection has a heightened value as a result of the fact that the objects once resided in the Yuanmingyuan. Chinese buyers seek works with this type of well-documented provenance. Another example of solid and compelling provenance during this auction comes in the form of a pair of Qianlong vases once owned by Alfred Hippisley.⁷⁴ Hippisley was an American who served as commissioner of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service of China between 1876 and 1884.⁷⁵ One of the vases in the pair at auction suffered from a vertical crack and so the pair could not be presented as being in mint condition. As a tactic to drive a higher price for the cracked vase, Sotheby's decided to sell the two vases separately and not as a pair. This plan worked very well as the vase with the crack sold for \$2.4 million, more than two and a half times the estimate.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, the vase in mint condition sold for \$10.5 million – an amount seventy-five percent above the high estimate.⁷⁷

This patriotic buying continued from 2010 into 2011 as many Chinese buyers continued their quest to buy back cultural and heritage artworks that were taken out of China during the 1800s and 1900s. At the March 2011 auctions of Asian art, the Chinese bid as if they were determined to buy up every work that ever left China – fakes included.

⁷² Rujivacharakul, *Collecting China*, 67.

⁷³ Melikian, "New China's Imperial Passion," 54.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 56.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 56.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 56.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 56.

At this point, many believed that market entered into a new phase where prices were beginning to be dictated by considerations unrelated to art.⁷⁸ Such considerations unrelated to aesthetic pleasure include an unwavering desire to buy a trophy piece, the idea that the work of art is a representation of China's past glory and heritage, and the strong belief that the work of art for sale at auction was once stolen. Another element that dictates these increasingly high prices is provenance. The December 2010 sales at Christie's Hong Kong of important Chinese ceramics and works of art were comprised of three important single owner sales along with a wide array of objects across multiple categories.⁷⁹ These Hong Kong sales were made up of about 400 objects of imperial porcelain, glass, lacquer, bamboo, imperial furnishings, Buddhist art, cloisonné, and jade carvings.⁸⁰ These auctions had a combined estimate in excess of \$71 million. One of the three single owner collections presented at these sales was the Greenwald collection. The Greenwald collection is noteworthy as it features exquisite Ming and Qing imperial porcelains.⁸¹ Gerald Greenwald is a passionate collector of Chinese ceramics and has been growing his important collection for thirty-five years. His collection includes fine and very rare porcelains as he initially focused on the wares of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Greenwald gradually broadened his collecting to include ceramics from earlier periods. The sale of the Greenwald collection was made up of thirty-two imperial porcelains from the Ming and Qing dynasties, ranging in estimates from \$10,000 to \$645,000.⁸² The lot of the Greenwald collection that sold for the highest amount was an

⁷⁸ Melikian, "Returned to the Homeland," 67.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 68.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 68.

⁸¹ Ibid. 68.

⁸² Ibid. 69.

exquisite Ming-style blue and white moon flask (Fig. 2).⁸³ This object bears the Qianlong six-character mark of the period (1736-1745) and so it is very valuable. Markings such as these (Fig. 3)⁸⁴ authenticate a piece and give it an exponentially higher value than one without an imperial mark. This piece sold for \$2,402,400 – a value four times higher than the highest estimate. The next highest lot sold at the Greenwald collection auction was a very rare pair of doucai water pots from the Yongzheng period. These water pots are finely painted and enameled around the sides with swirling clouds in soft and refined tones of green, blue, aubergine, and yellow (Fig. 4).⁸⁵ The clouds in the design represent good fortune in Chinese culture and from this representation, it can be inferred that these water pots may have once been gifts. The water pots were previously in the collection of the Tsui Museum of Art in Hong Kong and are elegant examples of the decorative technique known as doucai.⁸⁶ In this doucai method, underglaze blue outlines are filled with color overglaze enamels.⁸⁷ Further, the pots each have the Yongzheng emperor six-character mark of the period (1723-1735) within double circles (Fig. 5). These doucai pots sold for \$1,678,318 – an amount that surpassed the highest estimate. The Kangxi reign was also well represented in this sale as an exceptional pair of polychrome enameled ruby wine cups with the Kangxi six-character mark of the period (1662-1722) within double circles (Fig. 6) sold for \$1,197,321. The seeds and fruits that decorate the interior of the cups (Fig. 7) were carefully selected for their auspicious symbolism that emphasizes the birth of sons and grandsons, successful

⁸³ Christie's Hong Kong. *For Imperial Appreciation: Fine Chinese Ceramics from the Greenwald Collection.* (Hong Kong: Christie's, 2010) 34.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 34.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 30.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 30.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 30.

careers, and wealth and good fortune.⁸⁸ With such symbols, the cups were most likely originally an imperial wedding gift.⁸⁹

Another important sale of a private collector during these Christie's Hong Kong auctions was that of the collection of J.T. Tai. J.T. Tai was another important collector of imperial Chinese porcelain and was a legendary figure in the Chinese art trade.⁹⁰ Known originally as Tai Jun Sei, J.T. Tai began his career in the art world as a gifted young dealer in Shanghai. He began calling himself J.T. Tai in the United States when he opened his gallery in New York called J.T. Tai & Co.⁹¹ During his career in the United States as a prominent art dealer, Tai sold much art to many important American collectors of Chinese works of art. Such collectors include Avery Brundage, whose collection makes up most of the objects at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, and Arthur Sackler, who bought a tremendous amount of Chinese works of art that can now be seen at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.⁹² Thus, Tai facilitated and promoted Asian art in the United States. His imperial Chinese porcelain collection as well as his bronze and jade collections were exquisite and Sotheby's held two sales – one in 2010 and another in 2011 – solely devoted to J.T. Tai's extraordinary and vast collection.

The October 7, 2010 sale at Sotheby's Hong Kong was called "Masterpieces of Qing Imperial Porcelain from J.T. Tai & Co." and consisted of thirteen lots. Though only made up of thirteen lots of Qing imperial porcelain, this sale was extremely sought after

⁸⁸ Ibid. 38.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 38.

⁹⁰ Souren Melikian. "Returned to the Homeland." *Art + Auction*. (Vol. 34, Issue 10. June 2011) 69.

⁹¹ Ibid. 70.

⁹² Giuseppe Eskenazi. *A Dealer's Hand*. (London: Scala Publishers Ltd, 2012) 56.

and it shows in the results. The total for the sale amounted to around \$53 million with all lots, except for one that did not sell, exceeding their highest estimates. The highest lot was a fine famille-rose floral medallion bottle vase that was enameled in Qianlong's palace workshops (Fig. 8). It sold for over \$18 million – an amount well over the highest estimate. The vase bears the blue enamel Qianlong mark (Fig. 9). Further, the vase is extremely detailed and full of symbolic images. Each of the four white medallions on the vase contains finely enameled flowers such as yellow day lilies, pink and red poppies, and pink and red roses. These medallions are set on a blue background with pink and yellow bats flying amidst multi-colored clouds. In Chinese culture, bats are very auspicious animals. They symbolize good fortune and happiness. Above the four medallions, green and pink dragons circle the shoulder of the vase (Fig. 10). The dragon is another auspicious animal for the Chinese. As one of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac, dragons represent benevolence, prosperity, longevity, and the renewal of life. The next highest lot of the October 2010 sale consisted of a pair of famille-rose landscape vases marked with the seal of Qianlong. These vases sold for well over \$12 million. The body of each vase is painted with an idyllic landscape made up of small thatched-roof cottages overlooking a lake and surrounded by trees and rocky blue-green hills (Fig. 11).⁹³ Further, the neck and foot of each vase are adorned with large lotus blossoms and hibiscus flowers on a pink background (Fig. 12). The interior and bases of both vases are glazed in turquoise. Meanwhile, the six character Qianlong reign mark is inscribed in red on a white square (Fig. 13). The extreme detail of this vase, the many

⁹³ Sotheby's Hong Kong. *Masterpieces of Qing Imperial Porcelain from J.T. Tai & Co.* (Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2010). 14.

auspicious animals depicted, and the mark of Qianlong make it an exquisite example of imperial Chinese porcelain.

The second sale of the J.T. Tai collection occurred on March 22, 2011 when Sotheby's New York auctioned off the stock of his New York gallery called J.T. Tai & Co. This sale was called "Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co." and consisted of 328 lots. The sale total amounted to over \$32 million over a two-day period. These lots were made up of bronzes, jade pieces, Buddhist objects, and most importantly, imperial porcelain. The most valuable lot of this sale was an important gold-decorated vase of the Qianlong period, which sold for over \$18 million. The pear-shaped body of the vase is decorated with two circular medallions showing exotic birds amidst beautiful peonies, magnolia, and prunus blossoms (Fig. 14). Surrounding these medallions is a cobalt background with gold foliate scrolls, which is also repeated in a band encircling the neck of the vase. Also on the neck are celadon green wanfret bands (Fig. 15) flanked by arched gilt painted ruyi-scepter handles. The wanfret pattern signifies ten thousand and the use of this pattern in a vase would grant the owner the fulfillment of ten thousand wishes.⁹⁴ Each of the ruyi-scepter (Fig. 16) handles holds a yellow twisted rope tassel strung with two fish, the wan symbol (Fig. 17), and chimes. The wan symbol represents good fortune and prosperity in Chinese culture.⁹⁵ The interior and base of the vase are glazed in turquoise (Fig. 18). Meanwhile, the Qianlong mark (Fig. 19) on the base of the vase is inscribed in the usual iron-red color. The two next highest lots of the sale were also imperial Chinese

⁹⁴ Sotheby's Hong Kong. *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* (Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011). 22.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 22.

porcelain. A rare blue and white Ming dynasty bowl sold for over \$1.5 million – a value above the highest estimate. The interior of the bowl is decorated with floral and fruiting images as well as with a chevron border at the top (Fig. 20). The outside of the bowl is adorned with floral scrolls with a band of lingzhi⁹⁶ – mushrooms – on the upper portion (Fig. 21). The base of the bowl bears the sticker of the J.T. Tai & Co. Gallery (Fig. 22). This sticker is very important in authenticating the bowl and its provenance. It gives the bowl a higher value and makes it even more desirable – any experienced collector would know to never remove the sticker. The third highest lot of the sale, a vase of the Republican period, surpassed its \$8,000 high estimate and sold for over \$1 million. The vase is decorated with a prunus tree, peonies, narcissus, and lingzhi growing out of rocks (Fig. 23). The base of object bears a *Yanghe Tang zhi*, or *Hall of Nurturing Harmony*, seal mark (Fig. 24). One can see that the characters in this mark are very different from those previously discussed. The characters represented here are less geometric and more rounded, thus demonstrating the progression of style and calligraphy in China.

It is significant to note that Sotheby's chose to have two separate sales devoted to the extensive collection of J.T. Tai. In having these two sales, the auction house made sure that the market was not flooded with Chinese wares. In starting off with the small but immensely important “Masterpieces of Qing Imperial Porcelain from J.T. Tai & Co.” sale, Sotheby's set the tone for the next J.T. Tai sale – and it was an incredibly profitable one. Sotheby's was able to capture the demand of the market through having its first J.T. Tai sale in Hong Kong and then having the second one in New York. The auction house gave the imperial Chinese porcelain collector base a peek of the impressive J.T. Tai

⁹⁶ Ibid. 83.

collection with its first sale in Hong Kong, which was comprised of thirteen objects. This sale captured the attention of Chinese collectors who are keen on buying back the treasures of their homeland. Sotheby's knew that these motivated Chinese collectors – both new and experienced – would have a strong interest in traveling to New York for the second J.T. Tai sale see and buy the rest of the J.T. Tai collection.

Specialist Commentary on Imperial Chinese Porcelain

Chinese imperial porcelain bearing the mark of an emperor proves to be the most sought after pieces at auction. Auction house specialists are sure to highlight of imperial porcelain when it has the mark of an emperor such as Qianlong. Colin Sheaf, the Chairman of Asian Art at Bonhams, emphasizes the importance of a porcelain object having the Qianlong mark when he says: “Qianlong imperial ‘mark and period’ porcelain in outstanding condition, fresh to market and from a good collection, will fetch top prices.”⁹⁷ We have seen these top prices for Qianlong-marked wares at the sale of the Greenwald collection and also at the sale of the J.T. Tai collection. High value Qianlong porcelain with the imperial mark is sold for prices well over the high estimate on a consistent basis. Furthermore, using the terms “mark and period” when describing an imperial porcelain object confirms the emperor and that the piece was actually made in that time period.

Other sought after pieces in addition to those with the Qianlong mark are porcelain with the Kangxi mark or with the Yongzheng mark. Pedram Rasti, the head of Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art at Christie’s London, indicates that these three imperial reigns produced high value and much sought after porcelain when she says: “[Brightly enameled pieces from] the Golden Age of the three emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong are most popular.”⁹⁸ The “Golden Age” that Rasti is referring to is the Qing dynasty. Specialists agree that famille-rose pieces are of the “imperial

⁹⁷ Emma Crichton-Miller. “Collector’s Focus.” *Apollo: The International Magazine for Collectors.* (Vol. 174, Issue 3. Nov 2011) 81.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 81.

taste”⁹⁹ and quite sought after by Chinese collectors. Famille-verte objects, on the other hand, are considered export wares and thus, are less desirable by mainland Chinese collectors. These specifications of mark, period, and type of ware all contribute to the value of imperial porcelain as do the provenance and condition of the object. If the combination of these elements is just right, a porcelain piece will sell for a very high price. Yet the astronomical prices of imperial Chinese porcelain are often cancelled-out by non-payment. Auction houses deal with elusive buyers who do not pay for the works they bid on and won quite frequently, especially when a premium lot registration form is not required. Even with extremely high value pieces, however, this non-payment occurs. At Bainbridge Auctioneers, located outside of London, this non-payment situation happened in 2010.¹⁰⁰ The auction house sold a Qianlong vase for over 51 million British pounds – this was a world record at the time. The buyer, however, never came forward to pay for the vase. Thus, this world record price must be cancelled as the transaction, or transfer of money, never occurred. David Priestly, of the established London gallery that specializes in early Chinese art, discusses the fairly recent wealth of Chinese buyers and their tastes as he says: “There has always been a bedrock of interest among the Chinese, but now they have money. It is very regional – so people from Beijing prefer northern white wares and people from Shanghai, celadons.”¹⁰¹ Further, Priestly goes on to say that Chinese porcelain has always had a three-pronged appeal to Western, Chinese, and Japanese collectors.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 80.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 81.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 81.

Forgeries and Art Crime Regulation in China

Just as other types of art, imperial Chinese porcelain works are often imitated and many forgeries are sold throughout the world. The act of imitation is interpreted at many levels in China and often with positive connotations. The prevalence of imitations and forgeries creates a very complex market for imperial Chinese porcelain as it is often hard to discern what is real and what is counterfeit. Chinese art education is based on copying the work of a great master in order to perfect a skill or technique.¹⁰² It is tradition in Chinese culture for painting and calligraphy students to first copy their masters' works before expressing their own personal style. Meanwhile, Chinese craftsmen imitate the essence of antiques as a way of paying tribute to the past. This form of emulation is honorable and not intended to mislead as making exact copies of the object is not the goal. Further, archaism is a noble aesthetic tradition in China that pays tribute to the glory of the past through imitation.¹⁰³ Under this tradition of archaism, porcelain pieces are inscribed with a reign mark of a previous era even though they were not made at that time. This is done not with the intention to deceive, but rather as a tribute or a reference to the tradition and prosperity associated with wares produced in a specific period. This spurious marking can often be found on porcelains of the late Ming and Qing periods.

The two most popular marks that are applied to wares made in later periods are those of the Xuande and Chenghua emperors – both of the Ming dynasty.¹⁰⁴ These two

¹⁰² Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 12.

¹⁰³ Lien, "China," 105.

¹⁰⁴ Rosemary Scott and Stacy Pierson. *Flawless Porcelains: Imperial Ceramics from the Reign of the Chenghua Emperor*. (London: Sir Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 1995) 19.

reign marks are often imitated and marked on the bases of porcelain of later periods because the ceramics from the Xuande and Chenghua periods are regarded as high points in porcelain production. A forger would use these marks to give status and worth to a porcelain piece. Meanwhile, a potter with no intention to deceive would apply the mark of an imperial period on his or her work in a complimentary sense, or in the spirit of archaism. The level of imitation and of archaism can further be seen through examining the influence of Chenghua porcelains. As one of the high points of porcelain production, the Chenghua period is followed by one in which wares closely imitate those of the Chenghua reign. These porcelains can be divided into three groups. The first group is comprised of those that reproduce both the style and the mark of the Chenghua period.¹⁰⁵ The second group includes those that precisely imitate the style of the Chenghua period but bear the reign mark of the period in which they were made.¹⁰⁶ Finally, the third group is made up of those pieces that are decorated in a style related to that of the Chenghua period and bear a spurious mark.¹⁰⁷ These various levels of imitation can create confusion and much aggravation in the market for imperial Chinese porcelain, especially for collectors.

While the imitation of porcelains in China may not always be with the intent to mislead and deceive, forgers in China have become extremely competent in their craft with modern technological advancement and easy access to information on porcelain production. Forgers have various methods to make pieces look ancient such as rubbing the pieces of porcelain with chemicals, ash, banana leaves, or other organic materials to

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 19.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 19.

dull the surface or to create a patina consistent with the “age” of the forgery.¹⁰⁸ It is believed that the most skillful forgers are those that copy Ming and Qing porcelain.¹⁰⁹ The designs of porcelain from these two periods have to be precisely painted and the colors and iridescence of the enamels and glazes have to match the originals exactly. According to many specialists, collectors of antiquities face a serious problem today from the overwhelming amount of high-quality forgeries that have flooded the market.¹¹⁰ Art fraud is a big business in China as the country has a booming art market and further, reproductions are not illegal.¹¹¹ With various levels of imitation and interpretation, it can be confusing for collectors to navigate the imperial Chinese porcelain market. Thus, collectors must focus on provenance when purchasing a piece of imperial Chinese porcelain. If there is any doubt with regard to the porcelain’s authenticity, there are methods to test the ware. One such method is the Thermoluminescence (TL) test where a very small sample of powder from the object is taken and then sent to a lab to be tested through light signal emission.¹¹² The TL test allows one to know the period of time since the object was fired in a kiln. The range of dates predicted by TL tests spans about 500 years.¹¹³ Further, the TL test is only suitable for objects from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) or earlier.¹¹⁴ Other methods, such as ultra-violet light (black light), help to identify restoration or over-painting on porcelain.¹¹⁵ Imperial Chinese porcelain is especially susceptible to fakes as these wares were often made in multiples. In addition, while

¹⁰⁸ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 12.

¹¹⁰ Lien, “China,” 105.

¹¹¹ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 12.

¹¹² Ibid. 13.

¹¹³ Eskenazi, *A Dealer’s Hand*, 43.

¹¹⁴ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 13.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 13.

palace inventories may record the number of bowls of a certain design ordered or received from the imperial workshop, there is no evidence of exact numbers made and how many have survived.¹¹⁶ Further, ownership history is hard to establish for certain pieces, especially through China's tumultuous history. Provenance has become an important factor for collectors as forgeries flood the market. As with other art objects, a traceable history of imperial Chinese porcelain gives assurance as to the authenticity of an object.

Collecting imperial Chinese porcelain in China becomes even more complex as there are no regulations that deal with forgeries.¹¹⁷ As a result of a loophole in the 1996 Auction Law in China, auction houses bear no responsibility for lots that are found to be fakes.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, art theft is another rampant problem throughout China. In rural areas of China, farmers often dig up ancient art objects by accident while they are tending their fields. As a result of high demand for these objects, farmers and others capitalizing on the art market now deliberately dig up any ancient relics to sell on the black market. This practice has destroyed many important historical sites. Further, urbanization in China is another problem in the preservation of important archaeological sites. Construction companies in China are required to report any archaeological findings during excavation and construction. Yet these construction companies often do not report the discovery of archaeological finds and instead destroy these sites so that

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 13.

¹¹⁷ McAndrew, Clare. "The International Art Market 2007-2009: Trends in the Art Trade during Global Recession." (The European Fine Art Foundation, the Netherlands, 2010) 73.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 73.

building can continue without disruption.¹¹⁹ China is struggling between heritage protection and its growing economy. In antiquities auctions in China that include works of art over 200 years old, there are rules regulating the export of certain items and this means that overseas buyers are prohibited from buying those lots.¹²⁰ Yet these rules are ambiguous and the highest bidder, whether Chinese or foreign, wins the highest lot – thus, it is apparent that corruption is prevalent in China.¹²¹ The Chinese government believes that foreign buyers are fueling the trade in illegally excavated objects and it makes a point to publicize this supposed fact. As a result of this belief, the Chinese government signed a bilateral agreement in 2009 with the United States to try to halt the flow of illicitly exported objects from China to the United States.¹²² This agreement is called the Memorandum of Understanding (MU) and lasts for five years. The agreement restricts the importation to the United States of cultural and archaeological materials from the Paleolithic period through the Tang Dynasty as well as monumental sculpture and wall art that are at least 250 years old.¹²³ Further, it states that archaeological material originating in China can only come into the United States if accompanied by a valid export permit or other appropriate documentation from the Chinese government. The efforts of the Chinese government to protect its cultural heritage and monitor exported objects create another level of complexity in the Chinese antiquities market.

¹¹⁹ Roman, “Emerging Art Markets,” 316.

¹²⁰ Melikian, “New China’s Imperial Passion,” 57.

¹²¹ Wang, *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*, 33.

¹²² Ibid. 33

¹²³ Ibid. 33

The Meiyintang Collection: A Study of a Major Imperial Chinese Porcelain Collection

The Meiyintang collection is of great interest to Chinese collectors because of its quality and the secrecy surrounding its creation. The collection, made up of two thousand pieces, has rarely been seen in its entirety despite its fame in the art world. Further, only a small number of works from the collection have been exhibited at the British Museum in London and in Monte Carlo in 1996.¹²⁴ The brothers who formed the Meiyintang collection, Stephen and Gilbert Zuellig, maintain a low profile and do not publicize their collection. The name “Meiyintang” means “hall of rosebuds” in Mandarin.¹²⁵ The only public record of the Meiyintag collection is an immense catalogue by a German scholar named Regina Krahel.¹²⁶ Yet, the seven-volume catalogue makes no mention of Stephen Zuellig or his brother Gilbert.

Stephen Zuellig is the brother who is most involved with the collection.¹²⁷ He is a Swiss businessman who was born in Philippines. Zuellig and his brother, Gilbert, spent sixty years growing and building up their father’s small trading house based in Manila. Today, the Zuellig Group is the leading provider of healthcare services and pharmaceuticals in Asia.¹²⁸ The company is also one of Asia’s biggest agribusinesses. Thus the Zuellig Group is very prosperous and this success has allowed Stephen and

¹²⁴ “Meiyintang Marvels: Imperial Chinese Porcelain.” *The Economist*. (19 March 2011) 92.

¹²⁵ Sotheby’s Hong Kong. *The Meiyintang Collection: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelain*. (Hong Kong: Sotheby’s, 2011) 4.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 92.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 92.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 92.

Gilbert Zuellig to buy important works of art. These important works include a vast array of imperial Chinese porcelain.

The Zuelligs began to buy Chinese works of art in the early 1950s through Helen Ling, the American wife of their Singapore associate, who traded Chinese porcelain in Shanghai. Ling introduced Stephen and Gilbert Zuellig to Edward Chow.¹²⁹ Based in Hong Kong and Switzerland, Chow was the dominant Chinese collector-dealer of the post-war years. Chow greatly influenced the Zuellig brothers and advised them on Chinese works of art. The Zuellig brothers were always interested in collecting a range of Chinese art including archaic bronzes and late imperial porcelain. The brothers divided their own personal specialties by date. Gilbert focused on early ceramics from the Neolithic period to the Song dynasty. Meanwhile, Stephen focused on the porcelain of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties (Fig. 1). The Zuellig brothers sought out the best specialist dealers from whom they could buy these important imperial porcelain objects. Such dealers included Priestley and Ferraro as well as Giuseppe Eskenazi. For over a quarter century, Eskenazi either sold or bought on behalf of the Zuelligs over one hundred and sixty pieces of Chinese ceramics.¹³⁰

The Zuellig brothers were diligent and educated collectors. They used three fundamental critieria to guide their buying and collecting: a work's rarity, the quality of its decoration, and the condition of the piece. These are three criteria that high-level collectors must consider and evaluate before buying imperial porcelain. For the Zuelligs, complex and three-dimensional Qing dynasty porcelains, such as vases, took precedence over more utilitarian objects such as cups and bowls. Flat plates were the least desirable

¹²⁹ Eskenazi, *A Dealer's Hand*, 120.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 121.

objects for the Zuelligs. They sought to acquire the most important objects from each dynasty. While staying true to their tastes and their desire to buy the best imperial porcelain, the Zuelligs formed an impeccable collection. Furthermore, the brothers were known to be very rigorous in applying their principles when buying Chinese ceramics. The brothers were well aware of forgeries, fakes, and deceitful dealers and their general principles of buying helped them to avoid any trickery or the purchase of a false imperial ware. Despite their general principles in buying, Stephen and Gilbert also only bought a work if it appealed to their personal aesthetics. Thus, the brothers were successful in purchasing not only for investing purposes but also for personal enjoyment. They prove to be true art connoisseurs, or more appropriately true connoisseurs of imperial Chinese porcelain.

In 2011, the Zuelligs decided to sell their collection. The first of five Meiyintang auctions occurred on April 7, 2011 at Sotheby's Hong Kong. This first sale, called "The Meiyintang Collection – An Imperial Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelains," was comprised of Stephen's portion of the collection that focused on Yuan, Ming, and Qing porcelain. For the sale, Stephen Zuelling curated the objects to be put up for auction so that they represented a microcosm of his entire imperial porcelain collection.¹³¹ These objects ranged from blue and white wares of the Yuan dynasty to vases created under the illustrious Qianlong emperor's reign. During this sale, seventy-seven lots of imperial Chinese porcelain were sold. The sale total for this portion of the Meiyintang collection reached over \$53 million. The highest lot sold for over \$6 million. This highest lot was a blue and white fish pond brush washer with the mark and period of Xuande, an emperor

¹³¹ Sotheby's Hong Kong, *The Meiyintang Collection: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelains*, 4.

of the Ming dynasty (Fig. 25). The center of the brush washer is decorated in cobalt blue with an image of a carp and a mandarin fish swimming amidst lotus and waterweeds (Fig. 26). The second highest lot of the sale was a chrysanthemum dish of the Ming dynasty and period of the Hongwu emperor. The dish sold for over \$5 million – an amount above the highest estimate. It is significant that this dish ultimately sold for an amount over the high estimate since it does not have a seal marking its base (Fig. 27). The dish was able to reach such a high price because its provenance is sound and documented with great detail. In addition, it is a very rare piece. The interior of the dish is painted with chrysanthemums in a light copper red color (Fig. 28). Meanwhile, the exterior of the dish is decorated with a pattern of lotus sprays. The third highest lot of the sale sold for just under \$3 million. This lot was comprised of a pair of famille-rose dishes with the mark of the Yongzheng emperor, of the Qing dynasty. The dishes have matching exteriors that are decorated with asymmetrical compositions of a blooming hibiscus branch and a weed. The hibiscus branch, which starts on the exterior of each dish, spreads to the interior where it bears two large and exquisite flowers as a dragonfly lingers in the scene (Fig. 29). The mark of Yongzheng on the base of each dish has six characters within a double square (Fig. 30). The stickers on the base of the dishes also give it a heightened value as they indicate the previous owners as well as previous auctions in which they were sold. The sticker with the initials “H.M.K.” shows that these delicate dishes were once part of the collection of H.M. Knight in the 1950s.¹³² Meanwhile the smaller round stickers that are quite faded denote that these dishes were sold at Christie’s Hong Kong in 1988 where they were lot 363 of the sale.

¹³² Sotheby’s Hong Kong, *The Meiyintang Collection: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelains*, 23.

The second Meiyintang sale, “The Meiyintang Collection Part II: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelains,” occurred on October 5, 2011 and consisted of 42 lots of imperial Chinese porcelain. The total for this sale reached over \$72 million. The highest lot was a blue and white vase decorated with fruit images (Fig. 31) that sold for over \$21 million. It bears the mark of the Yongle emperor who ruled during the Ming dynasty. Further, the provenance of this piece is documented very well and the esteemed dealer Giuseppe Eskenazi once owned it. Eskenazi then sold it to the Zuellig brothers.¹³³ Just as the first Meiyintang sale, this second sale is filled with exquisite pieces that represent the major Chinese dynasties. The third Meiyintang sale on April 3, 2012 was another great success as it garnered a sale total close to \$40 million. The highest lot of this third sale was a blue and white dragon stem bowl (Fig. 32) with the mark of the Xuande emperor of the Ming dynasty (Fig. 33). The fourth Meiyintang sale was also successful and finally, the fifth and last Meiyintang sale occurred on April 8, 2013. The total for this sale, called “The Meiyintang Collection Part V: An Imperial Selection of Chinese Porcelains,” reached over \$10 million. The highest lot, a yellow famille-rose vase, sold for over \$1 million. The body of the vase is decorated with a symmetrical flower design in detailed tones of rose pink, green, blue and red on a pale lemon yellow background with finely engraved sgraffiato scrollwork (Fig. 34). The interior and underside of the vase are glazed in bright turquoise with the base of the vase bearing the six character seal of the Qianlong emperor (Fig. 35).

The Meiyintang collection represents a superb assortment of imperial Chinese porcelain. Further, the Zuellig brothers stand as important examples of collectors with

¹³³ Eskenazi, *A Dealer’s Hand*, 203.

scholarly knowledge and a passion for Chinese art. Today, collectors like the Zuellig brothers are rare as most Chinese collectors who are interested in imperial porcelain buy these works of art because it is fashionable and expensive. The Zuellig brothers are the type of collectors that the new high net worth Chinese collectors would benefit in studying and emulating. If the Chinese collectors of today were to take the time to study imperial porcelain and its symbolism before buying, they would be honoring their country even more.

Conclusion

Imperial Chinese porcelain proves to be a good long-term investment as it represents China's past and commands a steady flow of demand in the market. With each new dynasty, emperor, and establishment of a palace workshop came a variation in imperial porcelain and so, there is a range of imperial wares within the art market. What prove to make this sector special, however, are the intricacies of each imperial porcelain piece. Having a porcelain with the mark of Qianlong, for example, makes it even more valuable as do special decorations that point to the provenance of the piece, such as stickers, affixed to the base, of past galleries that once owned it. Thus, provenance, rarity, quality, and condition are the main elements a knowledgeable collector considers when evaluating porcelain. Using these criteria will allow one to discern the value of the work. Further, placing porcelain in a historical context also provides more meaning to a certain piece. Porcelain made in a Qing dynasty imperial workshop signifies this illustrious dynasty and its advancements.

The Chinese art market is full of collectors who link imperial Chinese porcelain with the past glory of China – and it is this connection that incites their purchasing. These collectors are enthusiastic buyers who will pay any price for imperial porcelain. This type of competitive and highly emotional buying is seen at almost all Chinese works of art auctions and creates a market with very high prices. This cycle continues as these high prices attract newly wealthy Chinese collectors as they are looking for prestige and fame through buying back a glorious Chinese antiquity. In contrast, older collectors of

imperial Chinese porcelain, such as J.T. Tai and the Zuellig brothers, were true connoisseurs and had a vast knowledge of Chinese antiquities.

The current state of the Chinese art market is not as strong as previous years but China still proves to be resilient in the art world. There are many new and exciting art events and innovations in mainland China, such as the Tianzhu Free Trade Zone. As a mainstay of the Chinese art market, imperial Chinese porcelain will always be in demand. It appeals to collectors of the West as well as those of the East. Just as any economy or market, the Chinese art market will go through cycles. China has the means and the collector base for its art market to hold its positive course on the global stage. In addition, if mainland China opens up to more foreign trade in the art market and if the government lessens its control of this trade, then the Chinese art market will grow even more. Imperial Chinese porcelain will remain a very strong force within the Chinese art market as it is closely tied to China's history and spirit and is greatly prized by Eastern and Western collectors alike.

Illustrations

SONG DYNASTY	960-1279 Northern Song (960-1127) Southern Song (1127-1279)
YUAN DYNASTY	1279-1368
MING DYNASTY	1368-1644 Hongwu (1368-1398) Jianwen (1399-1402) Yongle (1403-1425) Hongxi (1425) Xuande (1426-1435) Zhengtong (1436-1449) Jingtai (1450-1456) Tianshun (1457-1464) Chenghua (1465-1487) Hongzhi (1488-1505) Zhengde (1506-1521) Jiajing (1522-1566) Longqing (1567-1572) Wanli (1573-1619) Taichang (1620) Tianqi (1621-1627) Chongzhen (1628-1644)
QING DYNASTY	1644-1911 Shunzhi (1644-1661) Kangxi (1662-1722) Yongzheng (1723-1735) Qianlong (1736-1795) Jiaqing (1796-1820) Daoguang (1821-1861) Xianfeng (1851-1861) Tongzhi (1862-1874) Guangxu (1875-1908) Xuantong (1909-1911)
REPUBLIC OF CHINA	1912-1949
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA	1949-present

Fig. 1. Chart of discussed dynasties; Wang, Audrey. *Chinese Antiquities: An Introduction to the Art Market*. Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2012.



Fig. 2. Lot 2826, *A Fine Ming Style Blue and White Moonflask*; from *For Imperial Appreciation: Fine Chinese Ceramics from the Greenwald Collection*. Hong Kong: Christie's, 2010.

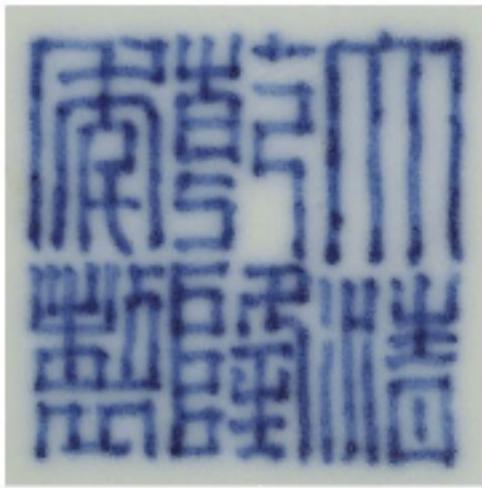


Fig. 3. Lot 2826, Qianlong mark and seal detail; from *A Fine Ming Style Blue and White Moonflask*; from *For Imperial Appreciation: Fine Chinese Ceramics from the Greenwald Collection*. Hong Kong: Christie's, 2010.



Fig. 4. Lot 2816, *A Fine and Very Rare Pair of Doucai Water Pots*; from *For Imperial Appreciation: Fine Chinese Ceramics from the Greenwald Collection*. Hong Kong: Christie's, 2010.



Fig. 5. Lot 2816, Yongzheng six-character marks within double circles detail; from *For Imperial Appreciation: Fine Chinese Ceramics from the Greenwald Collection*. Hong Kong: Christie's, 2010.



Fig. 6. Lot 2813, Kangxi six-character marks within double circles detail; from *For Imperial Appreciation: Fine Chinese Ceramics from the Greenwald Collection*. Hong Kong: Christie's, 2010.



Fig. 7. Lot 2813, *An Extremely Rare Pair of Polychrome Enamelled Ruby-Back Winecups*; from *For Imperial Appreciation: Fine Chinese Ceramics from the Greenwald Collection*. Hong Kong: Christie's, 2010.



Fig. 8. Lot 2123, *A Fine and Exquisit Famille-Rose Floral Medallion Bottle Vase Enamelled in the Palace Workshops*; from *Masterpieces of Qing Imperial Porcelain from J.T. Tai & Co. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2010*.

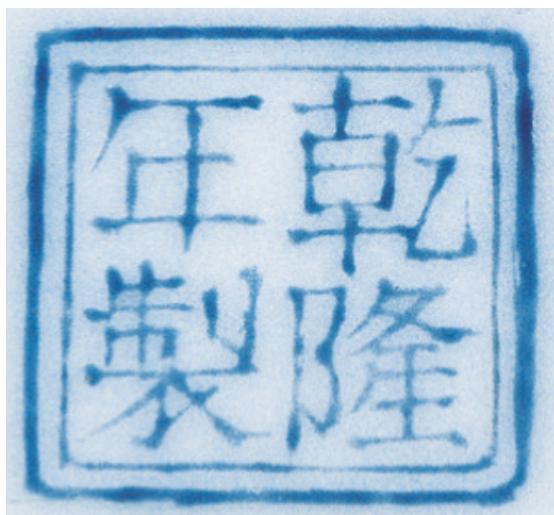


Fig. 9. Lot 2123, blue enamel mark of Qianlong detail; from *Masterpieces of Qing Imperial Porcelain from J.T. Tai & Co. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2010*.



Fig. 10. Lot 2123, detail of decoration on shoulder of vase; from *Masterpieces of Qing Imperial Porcelain* from J.T. Tai & Co. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2010.



Fig. 11. Lot 2130, *A Superb Pair of Pink-Ground Famille-Rose Landscape Vases* detail; from *Masterpieces of Qing Imperial Porcelain from J.T. Tai & Co. Hong Kong: Sotheby's*, 2010.



Fig. 12. Lot 2130, *A Superb Pair of Pink-Ground Famille-Rose Landscape Vases*; from *Masterpieces of Qing Imperial Porcelain from J.T. Tai & Co. Hong Kong: Sotheby's*, 2010.

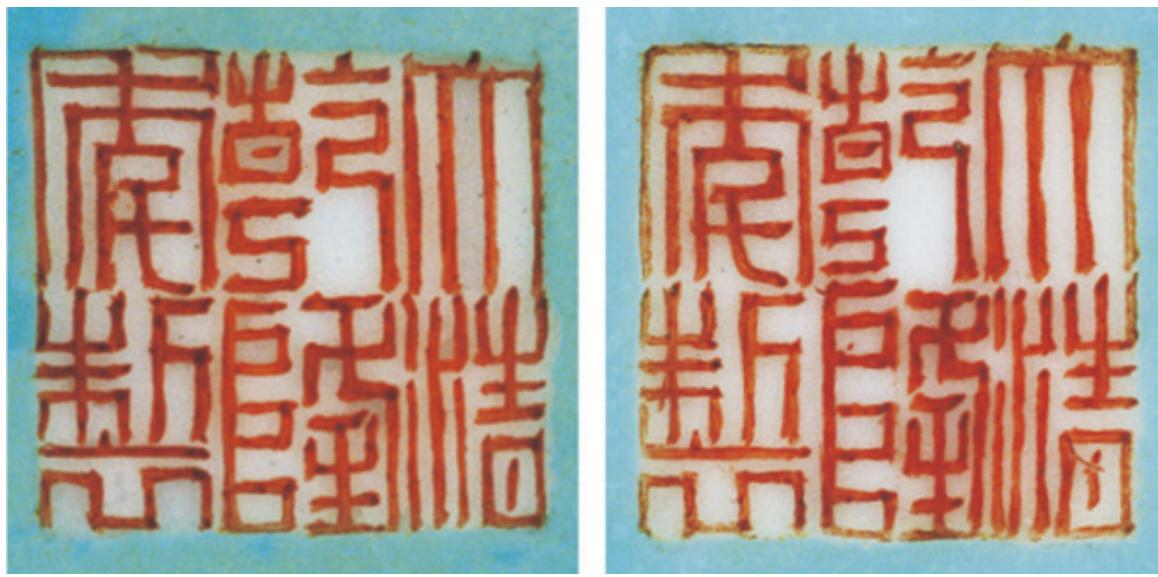


Fig. 13. Lot 2130, Qianlong mark detail; from *Masterpieces of Qing Imperial Porcelain* from J.T. Tai & Co. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2010.



Fig. 14. Lot 120, *An Unusual Famille-Rose and Gold-Decorated Vase with Molded Design*; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 15. Lot 120, *wanfret* band detail; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 16. Lot 120, *ruyi*-scepter handles detail; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 17. Lot 120, *wan* symbol detail; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 18. Lot 120, turquoise glaze base detail; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.

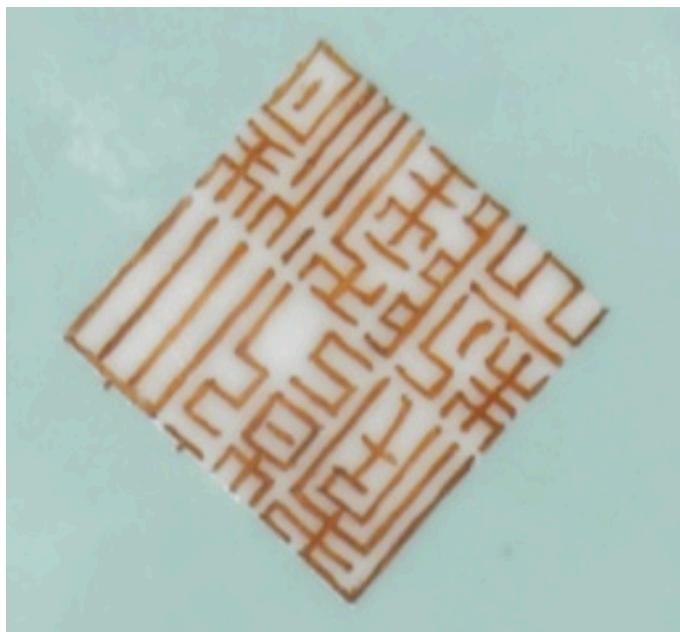


Fig. 19. Lot 120, Republican Period mark detail; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 20. Lot 88, *A Fine and Rare Blue and White Bowl* interior; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 21. Lot 88, *A Fine and Rare Blue and White Bowl* exterior; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 22. Lot 88, base of *A Fine and Rare Blue and White Bowl*; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 23. Lot 119, *A Famille-Rose Vase*; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 24. Lot 119, *Yanghe Tang zhi* seal mark detail; from *Informing the Eye of the Collector: Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art from J.T. Tai & Co.* Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 25. Lot 54, mark of Xuande detail; from *The Meiyintang Collection: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelain*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 26. Lot 54, *An Exquisite Blue and White Fish Pond Brush Washer*; from *The Meiyintang Collection: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelain*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 27. Lot 43, base detail; from *The Meiyintang Collection: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelain*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 28. Lot 43, *An Outstanding Underglaze-Red Chrysanthemum Dish of the Hongwu Period*; from *The Meiyintang Collection: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelain*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 29. Lot 14, *A Very Fine and Rare Pair of Famille-Rose Dishes*; from *The Meiyintang Collection: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelain*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 30. Lot 14, mark of Yongzheng detail; from *The Meiyintang Collection: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelain*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 31. Lot 11, *An Outstanding Blue and White Vase with Fruit Sprays*; from *The Meiyintang Collection, Part II: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelains.*" Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2011.



Fig. 32. Lot 29, *An Outstanding Blue and White and Anhua Dragon StembowII*; from *The Meiyintang Collection, Part III: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelains*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2012.

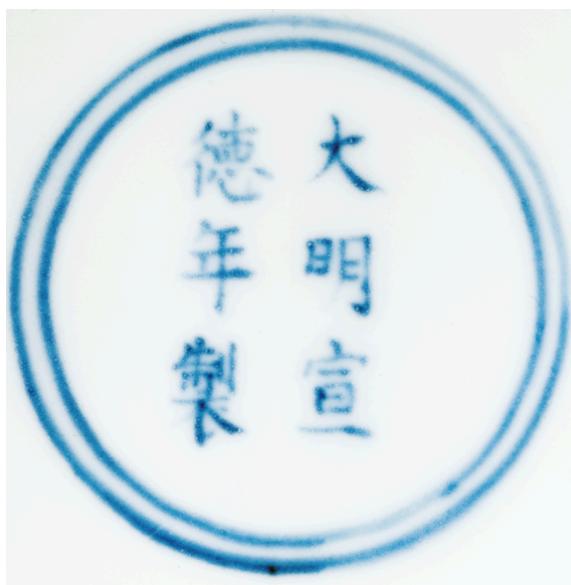


Fig. 33. Lot 29, mark of Xuande detail; from *The Meiyintang Collection, Part III: An Important Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelains*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2012.



Fig. 34. Lot 15, *An Exquisite Yellow-Ground Famille-Rose Sgraffiato Miniature Vase*; from *The Meiyintang Collection, Part V: An Imperial Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelains*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2013.

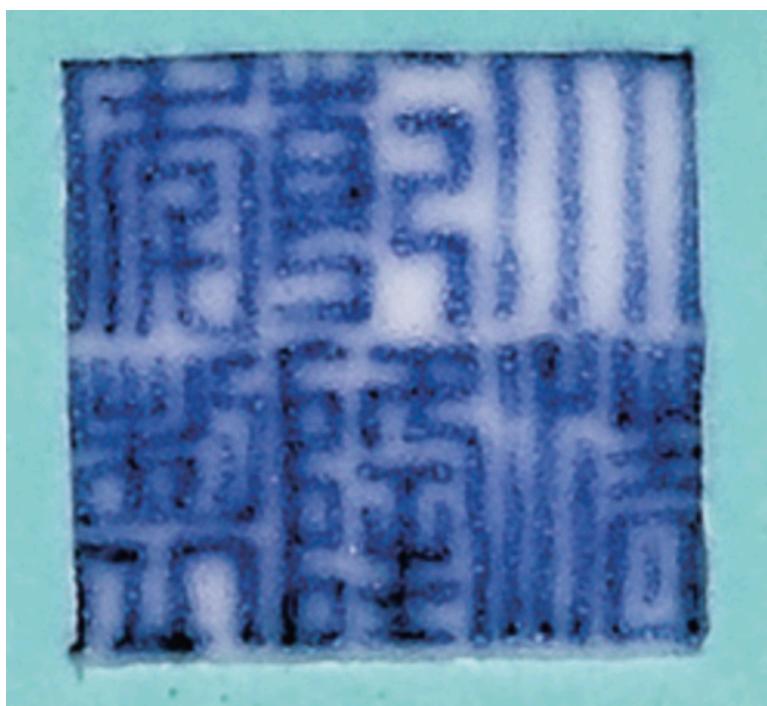


Fig. 35. Lot 15, mark of Qianlong detail; from *The Meiyintang Collection, Part V: An Imperial Selection of Imperial Chinese Porcelains*. Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2013.

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