Some Issues Related to Chinese Ceramics of the 15th Century

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Abstract: This paper aims to offer a critical examination of problems concerning the dating of Chinese imperial porcelain of the 15th century. In a first instance, the article analyzes the stylistic relationship of reign marks on Yung-le and Hsüan-te imperial wares with the *kuan-ko-t'i* calligraphic style favored at the early Ming court. In a second instance, the author indicates the shortcomings of periodization methods recently developed regarding Yung-le, Hsüan-te and Ch'eng-hua wares unearthed at the Chu-shan site of Ching-te-chen. In a third instance, the author offers a general overview of issues related to ceramics excavated from 15th century tombs, and highlights their significance to both Ming ceramic as well as cultural history.

Key Words: Ching-te-chen, ceramics, imperial kilns, Ming dynasty

The 15th century constitutes the early middle period of the Chinese Ming dynasty (1368-1644). In terms of the Chinese practice of designating periods according to the names of ruling emperors, this century is usually divided into the following reigns: Chien-wen (1399-1402), Yung-le (1403-1424), Hung-hsi (1425), Hsüan-te (1426-1435), Cheng-t'ung (1436-1449), Ching-t'ai (1450-1456), T'ien-shun (1457-1464), Ch'eng-hua (1465-1487), and Hung-chih (1488-1505). Despite internal power struggles within the imperial family and changes of power at court, this was a century marked by flourishing artistic activity. In painting, the Che School rose to its zenith, and significant developments were made in the arts and crafts. The establishment of imperial ceramic kilns, a symbol of imperial autocracy, was an evolution that would exert a dominant influence on Chinese ceramic production for several centuries.

Although a large part of the history of 15th century Chinese ceramics still remains to be written, it is not the intention of this paper to concentrate on one of these unresolved problems, but rather, to review existing research and highlight areas that require further analysis. In consequence, I will indicate some of the breakthroughs and

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insights as well as pitfalls that mark recent scholarship on 15th century ceramics. Where possible, I will make some suggestions as to how some of these problems might be resolved.

Some Issues Related to Imperial Wares and the Establishment of the Imperial Ceramic Factory at Ching-te-chen in the 15th Century.

Historical documents from the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties record the establishment during the early Ming period of an Imperial Ceramic Factory at Ching-te-chen, in Kiangsi province, which operated under supervision of the court and produced ceramics for the exclusive use of the court. Different documents, however, offer different dates for the establishment of this particular ceramic factory, including the second year of Hung-wu (1369); the 25th year of Hung-wu (1392); and the 35th year of Hung-wu (1402 or the fourth year of Chien-wen). Certain scholars have questioned the possibility that the imperial kilns could have been founded as early as the Hung-wu reign, and have tended to support the fourth year of Chien-wen (1402)[1] or even later, the first year of the Hsüan-te reign (1426)[2], as the date of its establishment. This latter date has become a consensus among scholars in Japan in particular.[3] In more recent years, Liu Hsin-yüan has used evidence from historical sources, including the I-hsiu Hall stele-inscription composed in the tenth year of Ch'ung-chen (1637), to confirm the fact that the Ching-te-chen imperial kilns were actually established by the second year of Hung-wu (1369).[4] Liu claims that the different dates mentioned in historical records merely reflect differences in denomination of the same kiln. He suggests that when the kiln was first established in the second year of Hung-wu (1369), it was simply referred to as a "*t'ao-ch'ang*" (ceramic factory), and would only be named "*yü-ch'ang*" (imperial factory) after the 35th year of Hung-wu (1402). Sakuma Shigeo has meanwhile refuted this

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1. Fu Chen-lun (Fu Zhenlun), "Ming-ch'ao Hung-wu mo she kuan-yao shuo," [Regarding the Argument for an Establishment of the Imperial Kilns at the End of the Hung-wu Reign] in *Chung-kuo ku-t'ao-tz'u lun-ts'ung* [Ancient Chinese Ceramics], (Peking: Chung-kuo kuang-po tien-shih ch'u-pan-she, 1994), pp. 59-60.
2. Sakuma Shigeo, "Mindai no Tōji to Rekishi teki Haikei," [Ming Porcelain and its Historical Background] in *Seikai Tōji Zenshu* [Ceramic Arts of the World] (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1976), v. 14, p. 143.
3. Hasebe Gakuji, *Kara—Chūgoku no Yakimono Keitokujin* [Chinese Ceramics from Ching-te-chen] (Kyoto: Dankōsha, 1978), p. 118.
4. Liu Hsin-yüan (Liu Xinyuan), "Mindai Kōbuchō niokeru Yōji to Keitokujin Gyoyōkijō Setsuchi Nendai nitsuite," [On the Use of Ceramics during the Hung-wu Reign of the Ming Dynasty, and the Founding Date of the Chin-te-chen Imperial Kilns] in *Mikami Tsugio Hakasei Kiju Kinen Ronbunshu (Tōjihen)*

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argument by pointing out that the passage from the stele inscription cited by Liu is quite probably a distortion of previous records, and that Liu's conclusions still remain largely conjectural in nature.[5]

New evidence for the dating of early Ming imperial kilns, may be obtained from recent discoveries at excavations on the eastern slope of Chu-shan at Ching-te-chen. At this site, large blue-and-white and underglaze-red porcelain dishes in Hung-wu style have been unearthed along with a black-glazed ceramic tile bearing an inscription reading: "*Chao Wan-ch'u chien tsao*" (Made under supervision of Chao Wan-ch'u). The *Fu-ling County Gazetteer* of the 21st year of the K'ang-hsi reign (1682) indicates that Chao Wan-ch'u was a county official in Fu-ling during the Hung-wu reign. This tile may therefore have been part of the material supplied for the construction of the Altar for the Gods of Soil and Grain in the tenth year of Hung-wu (1377).[6] We know from the excavation of the Chü-pao-shan glass factory in Nanking, as well as from historical sources such as the *Ta Ming hui-tien* (Collected Statutes of the Great Ming), that during the Hung-wu reign, the imperial court established brick and tile kilns in the vicinity of Nanking to provide the capital with construction materials.[7] Since the Ching-te-chen imperial kilns mainly produced porcelain ware, and were therefore fundamentally different in nature from these official brick and tile kilns, the actual date of their establishment will still need collaboration from additional sources. But it remains undeniably a fact that the above discovery reveals how some of the ceramic materials used for official construction during the Hung-wu period were actually produced at Ching-te-chen, under supervision of county officials. On the other hand, the I-hsiu Hall Inscription suggests that the imperial kilns may have ceased production in the 36th year of the Wan-li period (1608), that is, more than ten years earlier than 1619, the date traditionally given for their closure.[8]

As documented in the ceramic section of the *Ta Ming hui-tien*, the Ming court

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[Essays in Honor of Prof. Dr. Tsugio Mikami on his 77th Birthday (Ceramics)] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1985), p. 136.

5. Sakuma Shigeo, "Kōbuyō nitsuite," [A Study of Hung-wu Kilns] *Hakusui*, vol. 12 (1998), p. 17.
6. Liu Hsin-yüan, "Ching-te-chen Chu-shan ch'u-t'u te Ming-ch'u yü Yung-le kuan-yao tz'u-ch'i chih yen-chiu," [A Study of Early Ming and Yung-le Imperial Porcelains Excavated at Chu-shan, Ching-te-chen] in *Ching-te-chen ch'u-t'u Ming-ch'u kuan-yao tz'u-ch'i* [Imperial Hung-wu and Yung-le Porcelain Excavated at Ching-te-chen] (Taipei: Chang Foundation, 1996), p. 30.
7. Chang Cheng-hsiang, "Ming-tai Nan-ching Chü-pao-shan liu-li yao," [The Chü-pao-shan Glass Factory in Ming Dynasty Nanking] *Wenwu* [Cultural Relics] (1960:2), pp. 41-48.
8. Yabe Yoshiaki, "Kasei Banreki no Keitokujin Tōkō no Dōkō to Sometsuke Jiki," [Artisans at Ching-te-chen in the Chia-ching and Wan-li Reigns and Blue-and-White Porcelains] *Kobijutsu*, vol. 69 (1984), p. 96.

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stipulated detailed regulations concerning the design and decoration of imperial porcelain, as well as the calculation of their cost.[9] The fact that imperial wares produced during the 15th century reigns of Hsüan-te, Ch'eng-hua and Hung-chih were often stamped with reign marks, is another concrete illustration of this 'imperial norm' in porcelain production. It is through the appearance of these reign marks that scholars have been able to observe style changes in Ming imperial Ching-te-chen porcelain. These reign marks have also allowed for an easy observation of periodical characteristics of common Ming decorative motifs, such as plantain leaves, cloud and wave patterns, lotus petals and dragons, as well as for an initial analysis of the historical sequences of their evolution. From a combined analysis of these formal characteristics, the following stylistic periods in the development of Ming dynasty ceramics seem to emerge: the Yung-le and Hsüan-te period; the Ch'eng-hua, Hung-chih, and Cheng-te period; and the Chia-ching (1522-1566), Lung-ch'ing (1567-1572), and Wan-li (1573-1619) period. While Hung-wu wares of the early Ming may stylistically be understood either as a continuum of Yüan dynasty Chih-cheng forms, or as an initial stage of Yung-le forms, T'ien-ch'i (1621-1627) and Ch'ung-chen (1628-1644) wares of the late Ming should stylistically be grouped with early Ch'ing porcelain. The period between Hsüan-te and Ch'eng-hua—a period of approximately 30 years, encompassing the reigns of Cheng-t'ung, Ching-t'ai and T'ien-shun —is referred to as the blank period or 'interregnum', since this period is characterized by a total absence of reliable examples of imperial ware bearing reign marks. The stages of development of 15th century Chinese porcelain therefore include three main periods: 1) the period of Yung-le and Hsüan-te; 2) the period of Ch'eng-hua, Hung-chih and Cheng-te; and 3) the so-called blank period.

Amongst 15th century porcelains, the great differences between Hung-wu and Yung-le wares have caused serious difficulties in tracing the stylistic transition that occurred between these two periods. In this respect, it seems necessary to reevaluate traditional definitions regarding the specific content and meaning of the so-called 'Hung-wu style',[10] as well as the dating of extant wares. It is namely possible that wares traditionally attributed to the Hung-wu period, may actually include so-called 'Chih-cheng style' Yüan wares.

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9. The *Ta Ming hui-tien* records: "All artifacts fired for imperial use must be produced according to the norms stipulated for their form and shape, and the cost of labor and material must be calculated." See Shen Shih-hsing et al., *Ta Ming hui-tien*, [Collected Statutes of the Great Ming] (Yung-ho: Wen-hai, 1986), chüan 157, "t'ao-ch'i".
10. The Hung-wu and Chih-cheng styles were first defined in the work of J.A. Pope. See his *Fourteenth Century Blue and White: A Group of Chinese Porcelains in the Topukapu Saray Museum, Istanbul*

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Likewise, late Hung-wu wares may include some transitional specimens that reflect Yung-le style elements. While the former possibility has already drawn some scholarly attention,[11] the latter possibility has not yet been fully addressed due to the lack of reliable means for the dating of related wares.

By analogy, it is equally possible that wares traditionally attributed to the blank period may actually illustrate transitional Hsüan-te–Ch'eng-hua styles. For example, there is one white porcelain dish impressed with a phoenix from the Percival David Foundation which bears the mark "*T'ien-shun nien chih*" (Produced in the T'ien-shun reign) (**Fig. 1**). Although it is catalogued as an artifact made in the T'ien-shun year of the Yüan dynasty (1328),[12] an examination of typical characteristics such as its round foot, would suggest that this piece actually is Ching-te-chen imperial ware from the T'ien-shun reign of the Ming dynasty (1456-1464).[13] Unfortunately, it is difficult to establish this fact with certainty, since this particular piece is unique in its kind, and has therefore naturally been suspected to be a counterfeit.[14] As noted above, therefore, it remains difficult to form an accurate picture of the nature and history of ceramic production in the blank period.

We meanwhile know from authoritative official documents of the Ming period, such as the *Ming shih-lu* (Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty), that imperial wares continued to be produced at Ching-te-chen during the so-called blank period. It is for example documented, that Ching-te-chen produced up to 80,000 pieces of porcelain under court order in the third year of the T'ien-shun reign (1459).[15] The question however still remains, why no single reliable piece among extant wares bears a reign

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(Washington: Freer Gallery of Art, 1952), as well as his *Chinese Porcelain from the Ardebil Shrine* (Washington: Freer Gallery of Art, 1956).

11. Margaret Medley, "The Yüan-Ming Transformation in the Blue and Red Decorated Porcelains of China," *Ars Orientalis*, vol.IX (1973), pp. 89-101. Wang Ch'ing-cheng (Wang Qingzheng), "Ming Ching-te-chen Hung-wu tz'u lüeh-shu," [Some Remarks on Ming Dynasty Hung-wu Wares from Ching-te-chen] *Shang-hai po-wu-kuan chi-k'an* [The Bulletin of the Shanghai Museum], vol. 4 (1987), pp. 292-311.
12. Margaret Medley, *Tōyō Tōji* [Oriental Ceramics], (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982), v. 7: The Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, pl. 22.
13. Ch'en Wen-p'ing, Inue Ryoichi trans., "Ranpatsuyūji Nendai Kō," [Dating White Porcelains] *Tōsetsa*, vol. 403 (1986), pp. 15-24.
14. Liu Hsin-yüan, "Seika no Kigen Oyobi Gendaikanyō nitsuite," [The Origin of Blue-and-White Porcelains and Yüan Dynasty Imperial Kilns] *Tōyō Tōji Gakai Kaihō* [Bulletin of the Oriental Ceramic Society], vol. 18 (1992), p. 4.
15. See: China Silicate Society ed., *Chung-kuo t'ao-tz'u shih* [A History of Chinese Ceramics] (Peking: Wen-wu ch'u-pan-she, 1982), pp. 365-366.

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mark from this period. Various arguments have been put forward on this matter. Some scholars have suggested the possibility that early Cheng-t'ung imperial wares either continued to be stamped with Hsüan-te reign marks, while others surmise that wares of the period did not bear any reign mark.[16] Liu Hsin-yüan has refuted the first argument by pointing out that Hsüan-te marks could not have been stamped on early Cheng-t'ung wares since after Hsien-tsung's death in the tenth year of Hsüan-te (1435), production was interrupted at the imperial kilns of Ching-te-chen.[17] Whichever may be the case, not only official documents suggest that a substantial number of imperial porcelains were produced during this period, but also unofficial sources, such as the *Hsin-tseng ko-ku yao-lun* (New Essential Criteria of Antiquities), amended by Wang Tso, records the production of several kinds of monochrome glazed porcelains at Ching-te-chen during that period.[18]

In more recent years, a discovery of shard heaps at the Chu-shan site has been reported, and tentatively dated by Liu Hsin-yüan to the Cheng-t'ung period.[19] The pattern of a dragon in pursuit of a pearl decorated on a large blue-and-white jar from the excavation **(Fig. 2)** shares some similarities with that of a dragon on a blue-and-white porcelain tablet bearing the inscription: "*feng-t'ien ch'ih-ming*" (On Imperial Order of Heaven) **(Fig. 3)**. Currently in the collection of the Kiangsi Museum, this tablet was offered by the court to local residents in the first year of Ching-t'ai (1450).[20] Though information is insufficient for a Cheng-t'ung dating of the shard heaps at Chu-shan, continued production during the so-called blank period seems to be best explained by the suggestion that wares of this period did not bear any reign mark.

Why then, must we ask, was the standard practice of stamping imperial ware with reign marks discontinued during the Cheng-t'ung, Ching-t'ai, and T'ien-shun reigns?

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16. Ibid., pp. 373-374.
17. Liu Hsin-yüan, "Ming Hsüan-tsung yü Hsüan-te yao," [Ming Hsüan-tsung and Imperial Kilns of the Hsüan-te Period] in *Ching-te-chen ch'u-t'u Ming Hsüan-te kuan-yao tz'u-ch'i* [Hsüan-te Imperial Porcelain Excavated at Jingdezhen] (Taipei: Chang Foundation, 1998), p. 141.
18. Ts'ao Chao, Wang Tso supp., *Hsin-tseng ko-ku yao-lun* [New Essential Criteria of Antiquities] (Peking: Chung-kuo shu-tien, 1987), v. 2, chüan 7, "Ku yao-t'i".
19. Liu Hsin-yüan, "Ching-te-chen tz'u-yao i-chih te tiao-ch'a yü Chung-kuo t'ao-tz'u shih shang te chi-ko wen-t'i," [The Kiln Sites of Ching-te-chen and their Place in the History of Chinese Ceramics] in *Ching-te-chen ch'u-t'u t'ao-tz'u* [Ceramic Finds from Ching-te-chen] (Hong Kong: The Fong Ping Shan Museum, Hong Kong University, 1992), p. 18.
20. Wu Chih-hung (Wu Zhihong), "Ming Ching-t'ai feng-t'ien ch'ih-ming ch'ing-hua tz'u-p'ai," [The *feng-t'ien ch'ih-ming* Tablet from the Ching-t'ai Reign] *Nan-fang wen-wu* [Relics from the South] (1992: 2), pp. 106-107.

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Though I cannot yet offer a concrete answer to this problem, it might prove helpful to take a closer look at the political struggles at court during these periods. Historic sources record how Ying-tsung was taken captive by Mongolian forces during an expedition in the fourteenth year of Cheng-t'ung (1449). As a result, his half-brother succeeded him on the throne as Ching-ti and declared the new reign of Ching-t'ai in the following year. Although Ying-tsung was released after only one year, Ching-ti did not only refuse to cede the throne, but actually restricted Ying-tsung's freedom of movement at court. In the eighth year of the Ching-t'ai reign (or the first year of T'ien-shun, 1457), acting when Ching-ti suffered a serious illness, Ying-tsung finally took his chance to reclaim the throne and declare the new reign of T'ien-shun. In light of these events, one may surmise that power struggles of this kind raised certain scruples regarding the stamping of imperial wares with reign marks, being symbols of imperial authority. On the other hand, one may also surmise that Ching-ti deliberately damaged and destroyed cultural relics from Ying-tsung's reign after he ascended the throne. It is likewise possible that Ying-tsung retaliated with a destruction of Ching-ti's wares upon his return to power.

Whichever may be the case, as a transitional stage between the Hsüan-te and Ch'eng-hua periods, the wares of the blank period possibly shared some stylistic similarities with wares from adjacent reigns. We must therefore address the possibility that if we accept the argument that wares from the blank period remained unmarked, some of the unmarked Hsüan-te or Ch'eng-hua-type imperial wares may actually date to the blank period.

Some Issues Related to Reign Marks on Imperial Porcelains of the 15th Century

Reign marks on Ming imperial porcelains from Ching-te-chen date back as early as the Yung-le period. They initially seem only to have appeared on a limited number of artifacts, such as on the 'monk's cap ewer' and stem cup. Stamping imperial wares with reign marks did in fact not become standard practice until the Hsüan-te period. In exception of the blank period, stamping imperial wares with reign marks remained a standard practice from the Ch'eng-hua period through the late Ming, when the imperial kilns fell into decline. This distinguishing feature of imperial wares was even noticed by Ali Ekber, who traveled through China during the Hung-chih period (1488-1505). In his travelogue written in 1516, titled *Khitainameh*, he records that porcelain used by the emperor was marked with a seal at its base.[21] This statement obviously refers to the

21. Ekber Ali, *Chung-kuo Chi-hsing (Khitainameh)* (Peking: San-lian shu-tien, 1988), p. 98.

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practice of marking the base of imperial ware such as bowls and dishes with reign marks.

Many promising studies have recently been published on reign marks of 15th century porcelain. Initial observation of transmitted and excavated materials reveals that Yung-le reign marks most commonly appear on red or white monochrome glazed wares, while only few are seen on blue-and-white wares datable to that same period. In contrast, Hsüan-te reign marks appear on both monochrome and blue-and-white wares, but fail to be present on exported Hsüan-te style wares in either the Ardebil Shrine or Topukapu Saray Museum collections. Another interesting distinction is that wares from these collections depict three- to four-clawed dragons, whereas imperial wares usually depict five-clawed dragons.[22]

How do we explain differences like these among wares from the same period? Are they related to the so-called '*kuan-ta min-shao*' (official matching of commercial production) activities of Ming imperial porcelain production? Or are they related to *Ch'in-hsien* and *Pu-hsien* porcelain as recorded in the *Great Kiangsi Provincial Gazetteer* of the Chia-ching reign? The most common interpretation of '*kuan-ta min-shao*' by Chinese scholars, is that the imperial ceramic factory produced two different kinds of wares: *Ch'in-hsien* porcelain and *Pu-hsien* porcelain. While the former was for the sole use of the emperor, the latter type was to be used as imperial gift and came very close in nature to commercial wares. By the late Chia-ching reign (1522-1566), however, the production quota became too large to be carried out at the imperial kilns, and commercial kilns were commissioned to produce *Ch'in-hsien* porcelain.[23] Yabe Yoshiaki has recently attempted to go one step further in this interpretation of the appearance of differences among wares of the same period.

Yabe suggests that, if the distinction between *Ch'in-hsien* porcelain and *Pu-hsien* porcelain already existed by the early Ming, marked wares with the five-clawed dragon design may have been *Ch'in-hsien* porcelain made for the use of the emperor, while unmarked wares with three- to four-clawed dragons, bearing no reign marks, must have been *Pu-hsien* porcelain, that is imperial gifts. Given the fact that Yung-le reign marks only appear on red or white glazed porcelain, Yabe contends that blue-and-white porcelains of that time must have functioned as *Pu-hsien* porcelain, inferior to *Ch'in-hsien* porcelain. But by the Hsüan-te period, however, blue-and-white porcelain must

22. Yabe Yoshiaki, "Minchō Zenki no Sometsuke Jiki to Nishi Asia," [Blue-and-White Porcelain from Early Ming Dynasty China and Western Asia] *Kobijutsu*, vol. 68 (1983), pp. 84 & 86.
23. Hsü Wen (Xu Wen) and Chiang Ssu-ch'ing (Jiang Siqing), "Ts'ung Ming-tai Ching-te-chen tz'u-yeh k'an tzu-pen chu-i yin-su te meng-ya," [Ceramic Production at Ching-te-chen during the Ming Dynasty and the Beginnings of Capitalism] in: Chung-kuo tzu-pen chu-i meng-ya wen-t'i t'ao-lun chi

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have risen in status, and occasionally functioned as *Ch'in-hsien* porcelain that was stamped with the Hsüan-te reign mark. This is why, so Yabe argues, specimens with four- as well as with five-clawed dragons have been excavated from Hsüan-te kiln remains at Ching-te-chen. Yabe further maintains that since the distinction between *Ch'in-hsien* and *Pu-hsien* became ambiguous after the middle of the Ming dynasty, wares bearing the reign mark of this period can also be found among export goods of the time.[24] Although these conclusions are novel and interesting, and offer a possible explanation of some of the differences between Yung-le and Hsüan-te wares, they still need to be supported by more conclusive evidence.

On the other hand, careful examination of the meaning and use of the terms *'Ch'in-hsien'* and *'Pu-hsien'* in historical sources, has led Kanazawa Yoh to different conclusions.[25] He suggests that *Pu-hsien* porcelain must have been produced on the basis of an annual quota assigned by the industrial bureau, whereas *Ch'in-hsien* porcelain by imperial decree on a temporary or emergency basis. While I am inclined to agree with Kanazawa, three points in his account remain open for questioning. The first: why did wares with reign marks and wares without reign marks exist at the same time? The second: what do different numbers of dragon claws signify? And the third question: is it possible to distinguish *Ch'in-hsien* from *Pu-hsien* porcelain in terms of style? Moreover, since Yung-le and Hsüan-te wares are stylistically difficult to distinguish, it has become common practice to identify unmarked wares as Yung-le, and to differentiate between these and marked Hsüan-te porcelain on basis of the size and thickness of their bodies. In light of the above discussion, however, it seems necessary to reevaluate the efficacy of this dating method.

The study of the style of reign mark inscriptions on imperial wares has also become a recent focus of scholarly attention. The fact that reign marks of different periods are characterized by a specific style of script, enables connoisseurs to date wares and identify counterfeits. According to the encyclopedia *T'ien-kung k'ai-wu* (Heaven's Craft in the Creation of Things), compiled by Sung Ying-hsing in 1637, the porcelain process included no less than 72 different stages.[26] Although this seems to be somewhat

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[Essays on Early Forms of Capitalism in China] (Peking: San-lian shu-tien, 1957), v. 2, pp. 690-691.

24. Yabe Yoshiaki, *Chūgoku Tōji no Hassennen* [Eight Thousands Years of Chinese Ceramics] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), pp. 330-334.
25. Kanazawa Yoh, "'Bugen Jiki', 'Kingen Jiki' nitsuite no Jakkan no Kōsatsu," [A Brief Consideration of Buxian and Qinxian Porcelain] *Idemitsu Bijutsukan Kenkyū Kiyō* [Idemitsu Museum of Art Journal of Art Historical Research], vol. 1 (1995), pp. 124-135.
26. Sung Ying-hsing, *T'ien-kung k'ai-wu* [Heaven's Craft in the Creation of Things] (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1978), chüan 7, "t'ao-t'ing".

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of an exaggeration, it clearly indicates that meticulous division of labor characterized Ming porcelain production. The fact that reign marks on Ming imperial wares must likewise have been applied by specialized artisans, may explain the appearance of these specific stylistic features in reign marks of different periods. In recent years, Liu Hsin-yüan has proposed a theory regarding the origin of some of these script styles. Liu claims that some of the seal-script marks on Yung-le and of regular script marks on Hsüan-te wares were copied by artisans from calligraphic models by Shen Tu, the Han-lin scholar praised by the Yung-le emperor as 'the Wang Hsi-chih of our dynasty'.[27] In addition, Liu claims that the stylistic features of Ch'eng-hua reign marks probably derive from the early calligraphic style of Hsien-tsung. Liu supports this argument by noting certain similarities between reign marks of this period and an inscription on a painting, dated to the 17th year of Ch'eng-hua (1481), attributed to Hsien-tsung.[28]

It seems to me, however, that Liu's claims rest on feeble ground for two main reasons. First, scholarly opinion varies as to the similarity between the style of the above-mentioned inscription and the reign marks found on Ch'eng-hua wares. Secondly, the calligraphic style we know from two other works attributed to Hsien-tsung, *Tung-chih i-yang t'u* **(Fig. 4)** and *Boddhidharma* in the National Palace Museum in Taipei[29], is markedly different from the style of the inscription. Liu's claims thus appear to be far from convincing, not only because calligraphic writings attributed to Hsien-tsung are extremely rare, but also because it is extremely difficult to establish their authenticity.

There meanwhile exists no doubt about the fact that Shen Tu's calligraphic style was favored by the Yung-le and Hsüan-te emperors. An examination of his *On Not Giving Up* in the National Palace Museum in Taipei[30] and of his *Transcription of Poem by Chu Hsi* in the Princeton University Art Museum[31], not only reveals certain similarities

27. Liu Hsin-yüan, "Ching-te-chen Ming yü-ch'ang ku-chih ch'u-t'u Yung-le, Hsüan-te kuan-yao tz'u-ch'i chih yen-chiu," [Imperial Porcelain of the Yongle and Xuande Periods Excavated from the Site of the Ming Imperial Factory at Ching-te-chen] in *Ching-te-chen Chu-shan ch'u-t'u Yung-le Hsüan-te kuan-yao tz'u-ch'i chan-lan* [An Exhibition of Yongle and Xuande Imperial Porcelain from the Chu-shan Site at Ching-te-chen] (Hong Kong: The Urban Council , 1989), pp. 40-43.
28. Liu Hsin-yüan, "Ching-te-chen ch'u-t'u Ming Ch'eng-hua kuan-yao i-chih yü i-wu chih yen-chiu," [A Study of the Site of the Chenghua Imperial Kiln at Ching-te-chen and Related Archaeological Finds] in *Ch'eng-yao i-chen* [A Legacy of Chenghua] (Hong Kong: The Tsui Museum of Art, 1993), p. 44.
29. National Palace Museum, *Ku-kung shu-hua t'u-lu* [Catalogue of Paintings and Calligraphy] (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1991), v. 6, pp. 297-300.
30. Hsieh Chih-liu (Xie Zhiliu) ed., *Chung-kuo li-tai fa-shu mo-chi ta-kuan* [An Anthology of Chinese Calligraphic Works] (Shanghai: Shang-hai shu-tien, 1992), pl. 51.
31. Nakata Yujiro, et al. ed., *Ōbi Shūzō Chūgoku Hōshō Meiseki Shū* [Masterpieces of Chinese Calligraphy

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with the graceful reign mark inscriptions on Hsüan-te wares, but also with the calligraphy of Hsüan-tsung. This is probably the reason why Liu not only poses that the reign marks on Hsüan-te wares were directly based on a model by Shen Tu, but also occasionally seems to suggest that marks on cricket jars **(Fig. 5)** were derived from Hsüan-tsung's script.[32] It seems more plausible, though, that the actual origin of these styles was of a somewhat different nature.

The so-called *kuan-ko t'i* , or 'Academy style' in calligraphy **(Fig. 6)** favored by the early Ming emperors, was not only widely practiced by Han-lin officials, but was also prerequisite at the official examinations. Basing his calligraphic style on that of Sung K'o (1327-1387), a forerunner of *kuan-ko t'i,* Shen Tu became one of the most notable representatives of the style.[33] I would argue, therefore, that the style of the above-mentioned reign marks reveals more about the influence on the arts and crafts in general of a calligraphic style widely favored at court, than about the direct influence of the personal style of one artist in particular. Indeed, during the second half of the 15th century, *kuan-ko t'i* gradually lost its vitality as well as its popularity and prestige at court. In consequence, different script styles on Hsüan-te and Ch'eng-hua wares seem to reflect this change of stylistic preferences at court. The appearance of the character '*t'ien*' (heaven) on Ch'eng-hua imperial wares is another topic that has caused speculation among scholars in the field. The *Yü-tung hsü-lu* by Ho Meng-ch'un makes note of the fact that use of the character '*t'ien*' was taboo during the Cheng-t'ung and Ching-t'ai reigns.[34] The court may have banned the use of this character because of its reference to the emperor — the son of heaven. In this respect, the famous '*t'ien*' mark on Ch'eng-hua imperial wares **(Fig. 7)** may indicate its function as an additional sign of imperial authority.

The question of influence of the personal taste of the emperor on ceramic production clearly touches upon the larger, and more intricate, topic of imperial influence on the arts of the Ming dynasty in general. Following the analysis of imperial tastes and their influence on Ming dynasty painting by historians of fine art, we have to ask why the decoration on imperial porcelain, as a symbol of imperial authority,

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in American and European Collections] (Tokyo: Chuokoronsha, 1982), v. 4, pl. 69.

32. Liu Hsin-yüan, *Ming Hsüan-te kuan-yao Hsi-shuai kuan* [Cricket Jars in Ming Hsüan-te Imperial Wares] (Taipei: I-shu chia ch'u-pan-she, 1995), p. 50.
33. Fu Shen, "Genmatsu Minshō no Shōhō," [Chinese Calligraphy in the Late Yüan and Early Ming Period] in *Ōbi Shūzō Chūgoku Hōshō Meiseki Shū,* ed. Y. Nakata et al., (Tokyo: Chuokoronsha, 1982), v. 4, p. 127.
34. Ho Meng-ch'un, *Yü-tung hsü-lu chai-ch'ao nei-wai p'ien* (Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng ch'u-pan-she, 1984), chüan 1, p. 5.

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did not reflect related styles and themes.[35] The Che School of painting, for instance, was personally promoted by the emperor, and reached its height during the 15th century. Yet its painting style is not reflected in the decoration on imperial wares of the same period. This apparent disparity is even more striking when one compares the bold and easy style of court painters from the Ch'eng-hua period, such as Lin Liang (1416-1480) and Wu Wei (1459-1508), with the quiet elegance of contemporary imperial wares. How may we explain these apparent differences in taste? Is it possible that the essential features of imperial taste as such have yet to be identified in relation to imperial wares? Or is it because there exists a fundamental difference in nature and function between traditional arts and crafts and the art of painting?

Some Issues Related to Ceramics Excavated from 15th Century Tombs

Provincial ceramics of the 15th century are generally classified into three groups: high-fired porcelains, low-fired glazed ceramics and unglazed ceramics. Apart from a very small number of transmitted wares that feature unstandardized dated inscriptions applied in ink or blue-and-white, these types of wares are usually unmarked, and tend to be dated on the basis of archaeological information from excavated tombs and other historic remains. In recent decades, a number of dated 15th century tombs, ranging from the early Yung-le through the Hung-chih periods, have been excavated. By consequence, these discoveries include tombs datable to the so-called 'blank period'.

Important new information for the study of 15th century ceramics may be obtained from artifacts unearthed from these dated tombs. To begin with, these finds have provided verification of an earlier hypothesis proposed by a number of scholars, including Fujioka Ryoichi. Fujioka has namely suggested that a group of blue-and-white or overglaze enamel wares, decorated with clouds and architectural structures, were probably produced at commercial kilns during the Cheng-t'ung to T'ien-shun years of the blank period.[36] Blue-and-white specimens of this kind were indeed discovered near Ching-te-chen, as noted by Ouyang Shih-pin and Liu I.[37] But on the other hand, the fact that it remains difficult to distinguish stylistically between blue-and-white wares

35. Shih Shou-ch'ien, "Ming-tai hui-hua chung te ti-wang p'ing-wei," [Imperial Taste in Ming Dynasty Painting] *Kuo-li T'ai-wan ta-hsüeh wen-shih-che hsüeh-pao* [Bulletin of the College of Liberal Arts, National Taiwan University], vol. 40 (1993), pp. 3-68.
36. Fujioka Ryoichi, "Genminshō no Sometsuke," [Blue-and-White Porcelain in the Yüan and Early Ming] in *Tōki Zenshū*, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1996), v. 11, pp. 17-18.
37. Ouyang Shih-pin (Ouyang Shibin) et al., "Chieh-shao liang tso Ming Ching-t'ai ch'u-t'u te ch'ing-hua,

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excavated from dated Ch'eng-hua tombs and wares produced during the preceding blank period,[38] seems to imply that there existed a strong continuity in early Ming commercial kiln production.

Although certain scholars claim to be able to precisely date 15th century blue-and-white commercial wares, in default of substantial evidence, their attempts tend only to further complicate an already intricate field of study.[39] Even though archaeological finds from overseas, such as ceramics salvaged from sunken vessels off Pandanan Island in the Philippines[40] and Chinese blue-and-white ceramics unearthed in Japan,[41] have undoubtedly provided a richer understanding of Ming dynasty commercial ceramics, knowledge about commercial kilns still remains very limited. Too little about commercial kiln remains is known to be able to clearly identify regional characteristics of commercial ceramic kiln production, and therefore it remains far too early to ascribe a detailed or fixed chronology to unearthed blue-and-white wares.

On the other hand, however, a comparative study of unearthed wares from dated tombs and transmitted specimens from this period bearing dated inscriptions does reveal certain typical stylistic characteristics of commercial blue-and-white wares from the so-called blank period.[42] Generally speaking, the colour of the blue on the commercial blue-and-whites of the blank period tends to be more gray or dark in shade. The decorative patterns on these wares, such as billowing waves, *t'ai-hu* rocks and

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yu-li-hung tz'u-ch'i," [Underglaze Red and Blue-and-White Porcelains Unearthed from Tombs of the Ching-t'ai Period] *Wenwu* (1981:2), pp. 46-50. Liu I (Liu Yi), "Ming-tai Ching-te-chen tz'u-yeh "k'ung-pai ch'i" yen-chiu," [Research on the "Blank Period" in Ming Dynasty Ching-te-chen Porcelain Production] *Nan-fang wen-wu* [Relics from the South] (1994:3), pp. 55-61.

38. T'ang Ch'ang-p'u (Tang Changpu), "Chin-nien Chiang-hsi ch'u-t'u ku-tz'u ching-p'in chieh-shao," [Introducing Porcelains Recently Excavated in Kiangsi Province] *Wenwu* (1980:2), pl. 9 no.3.
39. For an example of such dating methods, see Huang Yün-p'eng et al., "Keitokujin Minkan Seikajiki," [Commercial Blue-and-White Porcelain at Ching-te-chen] in *Chūgoku Tōji Zenshū*, (Kyoto: Shang-hai jen-min mei-shu ch'u-pan-she and Minomi, 1983), v. 19.
40. Morimura Kenichi, "Filipinas Pandanan Shima Jinbotsusen hikiage Tōjiki," [Ceramics Salvaged from Sunken Vessels off Pandanan Island in the Philippines] *Boeki Tōji Kenkyu* [Trade Ceramics Studies], vol. 16 (1996), pp. 111-114.
41. Ohashi Kouji, "Jugō, Juroku Seiki niokeru Nihon Shitsutō no Seikawan ni kansuru Hennen Shian," [A Study on the Dating of 15th and 16th Century Blue-and-White Bowls Unearthed in Japan (1)] *Hakusui*, vol. 8 (1981), pp. 52-63.
42. As for example the blue-and-white vase with an inscription dating to the 5th year of the T'ien-shun period (1461), and the blue-and-white vat with ink inscription dating to the 2nd year of the Cheng-t'ung period (1437). See Kuo-chia wen-wu chü t'u-lu pien-chi wei-yüan hui [State Bureau of Cultural Relics Catalogue Editorial Board], *Kuo-pao — Chung-kuo li-shih wen-wu ching-hua chan* [National Treasures — Gems of China's Cultural Relics] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1997), pl.

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plantain leaves, display a style that is clearly distinguishable from that of imperial wares. Blue-and-white wares from the blank period moreover display a quite distinctive typology. In addition to bowls and dishes, the most common forms are large wide-rimmed jars **(Figs. 8, 9)**, *mei-p'ing* vases **(Fig. 10)**, and small covered jars of less then 20 cm in height. This last type of blue-and-white jars generally display a bud-shaped finial on the cover **(Fig. 11)**.

The function of these small jars offers interesting material for topical research. Five such pieces were discovered in a niche inside the coffin chamber of the tomb of Chu P'an-shih, buried in the second year of Cheng-t'ung (1437) in Hsin-chien county, Kiangsi province.[43] A similar discovery was made in the tomb of Lo Heng-hsin and his wife, buried in the third year of T'ien-shun (1459), in Tung-wan, Kwangtung province. This latter tomb contained two chambers with each five pieces of these small blue-and-white covered jars, one set arranged in a linear fashion on top of the northern chamber (Lo Heng-hsin's), and another, unglazed, set arranged in a linear fashion on top of the southern chamber (the wife's) **(Fig. 12)**.[44] In addition, the excavation of the crypt under the Hung-chüeh Ssu Pagoda on Niu-shou Mountain in Nanking, built during the Cheng-t'ung period, led to the discovery of four small blue-and-white covered jars, filled with bones and *she-li* (Buddhist relics), and placed at the four corners of a stone pedestal, around a gilded Lamaist pagoda **(Fig. 13)**.[45]

Such discoveries suggest that sets of ceramic jars such as these were funerary objects,

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131; and Sotheby's, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Bronzes and Works of Art*, (London: Sotheby's, 1986), pl. 208. See also the many examples cited in Keng Pao-ch'ang (Geng Baochang), *Ming-Ch'ing tz'u-ch'i chien-ting* [Authenticating Porcelains of the Ming and Ch'ing Periods] (Peking-Hong Kong: Tzu-chin-ch'eng ch'u-pan-she and The Woods Publishing Company, 1993), ch. 4. Further material that deserves our attention, are the blue-and-white *mei-p'ing* and other pieces dating to the first half of the 15th century, unearthed at the storehouse site (SK01), recently excavated in the Kyōnouchi Sacred Area of Shuri Castle, Okinawa, believed to have been demolished by fire in 1459. For the excavation report, see Kinjo Kamenobu, "Shuri Joseki 'Kyōnouchi' Ato Shutsudo no Chūgoku Tōji," [Chinese Ceramics from the Kyōnouchi site of Shuri Castle—The First Underglaze-red Waterdropper Unearthed in Japan] *Tosetsu*, vol. 544 (1998), pp. 33-42.

43. Ch'en Po-ch'üan (Chen Boquan), "Chieh-shao chi-chien Yüan, Ming ch'ing-hua tz'u-ch'i," [Some Blue-and-White Porcelains of the Yüan and Ming Dynasties] *Wenwu* (1973:12), pp. 64-66, & 54.
44. Ch'iu Li-ch'eng (Qiu Licheng) et al., "Kuang-tung Tung-wan Ming Lo Heng-hsin chia-tsu mu ch'ing-li chien-pao," [Excavation Report of the Ming Dynasty Lo Heng-hsin Family Tombs in Tung-wan, Kwangtung] *Wenwu* (1991:11), pp. 43-50.
45. Ts'ai Shu-ch'uan (Cai Shuchuan), "Nan-ching Niu-shou shan Hung-chüeh Ssu T'a nei fa-hsien wen-wu," [Cultural Relics Discovered at the Hung-chüeh Ssu Pagoda on Niu-shou Mountain, Nanking] *Wen-wu ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao* (1956:11), p. 73. Nan-ching Po-wu-yüan [The Nanking Museum], *Nan-*

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associated with religious or popular burial practices. The common occurrence of finds such as these in Ming tombs indeed seems to indicate that an arrangement consisting of five pieces of blue-and-white or unglazed covered jars may have been made especially for burial purposes.[46] In the tomb of Yang Hui, in Tsun-i, Kweichow Province, which dates to the 19th year of Ch'eng-hua (1483), a similar set of five ceramic jars was discovered, but here stored with grains such as paddy, millet and sorghum.[47] According to the *Ta-han yüan ling mi tsang ching*, a canon on funerary rituals compiled between the Chin (1115-1233) and Yüan (1279-1367), there existed a practice of entombing *wu-ku ts'ang* (five-grain granaries) with the deceased.[48] It thus seems fair to say that the five jars commonly found in Ming tombs must have born symbolic connotations to the *wu-ku ts'ang*. On the other hand, a question that remains to be answered, is what is signified by the difference between the blue-and-white and the unglazed jars such as those unearthed in Lo Heng-hsin's tomb.

The decorative themes on blue-and-white porcelains from the blank period constitute another interesting focus for study. *Mei-p'ing* vases, as well as large wide-rimmed jars measuring up to 30 cm in height, are usually decorated with paintings of human figures, clouds and storied buildings **(Figs. 8-10)**. The figures shown on these vases and jars are often depicted as being surrounded by clouds and mist, either reciting

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ching Po-wu-yüan ts'ang-pao lu [Catalogue of the Nanking Museum Collection], (Hong Kong-Shanghai: San-lian shu-tien and Shang-hai wen-i ch'u-pan-she, 1992), pp. 177-179. In recent years, it has been suggested that the crypt under the Hung-chüeh Ssu Pagoda may have been the burial place of some of the Palace Eunuch Cheng Ho's remains. See Ko Hsiao-k'ang (Ge Xiaokang), "Nan-ching Niu-shou shan Hung-chüeh Ssu T'a ti-kung ch'u-t'an," [A Preliminary Study of the Crypt under the Hung-chüeh Ssu Pagoda on Niu-shou Mountain] *Tung-nan wen-hua* [Culture of South and East China] (1996: 2), pp. 110-116.

46. Such as the five blue-and-white small covered jars and black-glazed small jars uncovered from two famous tombs unearthed in Canton in the 1950s, which where initially mistakenly dated to the Sung period, but have since been re-authenticated as mid-Ming tombs. See Kuang-chou Shih wen-wu kuan-li wei-yüan hui [Committee for the administration of Cultural Relics of Canton City], "Kuang-chou hsiao Pei-Sung mu chien-pao," [Excavation Report of a Small Northern Sung Tomb in Canton] *Wen-wu ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao* (1955:10), pp. 50-59. See also Fu Yang, "Kuan-yü Kuang-chou ku mu ch'ing-hua tz'u-t'an shih-tai wen-t'i te shang-chüeh," [A Discussion of the Dating Problem of a Blue-and-White Porcelain Jar Unearthed from a Canton Tomb] *Wen-wu ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao* (1956:6), pp. 60-64.

47. Liu En-yüan, "Tsun-i T'uan-hsi Ming Po-chou t'u-ssu Yang Hui mu," [The Tomb of Yang Hui Excavated at T'uan-hsi, Tsun-i, Kweichow] *Wenwu* (1995:7), p. 61.

48. Hsü P'ing-fang (Xu Pingfang), "T'ang-Sung mu-tsang chung te 'ming-ch'i shen-sha' yü 'mu-i' chih-tu — tu *Ta-han yüan-ling mi-tsang ching* tsa-chi," [The System of 'Funerary Objects and Demon Expellants' and Burial Rituals in T'ang and Sung Tombs — A Note on the *Ta-han yüan-ling mi-tsang ching*] *Kaogu* (1963:2), pp. 94-95.

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verses, burning incense, playing musical instruments, or playing chess. While the figures and images they convey are rarely depicted on imperial wares of the 15th century, they reveal similarities with motifs on 15th to 16th century *cloisonné* porcelains from south China.

The figures on these blue-and-white porcelains are generally portrayed as lofty beings, some with a ring of light or halo around the head, or with one of the thirty-two signs of the Buddha, the *pai-hao,* on the forehead. Some artifacts even clearly depict themes from popular folk stories such as the tales of the Eight Immortals, and of the Mother Goddess of the West.[49] According to the popular Chinese folk saying "*hsien-jen hao lou-chü*" (immortals like to reside in storied (high) buildings), floating clouds and 'high' buildings may be symbolic of some kind of 'fairyland'. While imperial wares of the Hsüan-te period occasionally feature similar themes, the decorative background of mist and clouds are motifs frequently represented on imperial wares throughout the Ming dynasty. It thus appears that porcelains from the blank period display certain stylistic and thematic affinities with wares from adjacent periods, including imperial porcelains.

As noted above, material from dated tombs from the so-called blank period, can contribute to our understanding of the development in ceramic production that took place between the Hsüan-te and Ch'eng-hua periods. In this respect, the porcelains unearthed from Wang Hsi's burial site in P'ing-wu county, Szechwan province, are particularly illuminating. Wang was born in the third year of Yung-le (1405) and died in the third year of Ching-t'ai (1452). He was subsequently buried with his three wives – Ts'ao, Ts'ai and T'ien — in the eighth year of T'ien-shun (1464). The excavation of this particular burial site led to the discovery of a blue-and-white porcelain bowl of the *undode* 雲堂手type, and a *tou-ts'ai* porcelain bowl, all in Ts'ai's coffin chamber **(Fig. 14)**.[50] As is common knowledge, the term '*tou-ts'ai*' refers to wares on which underglaze-blue is used to outline the design, and overglaze-enamel is applied after the underglaze-blue is fired at a high temperature. *Tou-ts'ai* was formerly understood as a feature unique to Ch'eng-hua imperial wares until a recent discovery proved otherwise. The discovery at the Chu-shan Ching-te-chen imperial kilns of a marked Hsüan-te dish featuring a *tou-ts'ai* decoration of mandarin ducks on a lotus pond, has namely proved that *tou-ts'ai* technology already originated at Hsüan-te imperial kilns. While during the Hsüan-te

49. Fujioka Ryoichi e.a. ed., *Seikai Tōji Zenshū* [Ceramic Arts of the World] (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1976), v. 14, pls. 36, 159, & 160.

50. Chang Ts'ai-chün (Zhang Caijun) et al., "Ssu-ch'uan P'ing-wu Ming Wang Hsi chia-tsu mu," [The Ming Dynasty Wang Hsi Family Tombs at P'ing-wu County, Szechwan] *Wenwu* (1989: 7), pl. 4 no. 2 ff.

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period the contours of the design were incised in the body of *tou-ts'ai* ware, artisans of the Ch'eng-hua period executed all contours in underglaze-blue.[51] In other words, *tou-ts'ai* went through a gradual evolutionary process before reaching its final stage of perfection. And if reports from Wang's tomb are indeed without fault, we must assume that this mature stage of the *tou-ts'ai* technique had been reached by no later than the T'ien-shun reign, Ch'eng-hua *tou-ts'ai* simply representing a continuation of this tradition.

I would like to direct our attention to yet another interesting aspect of the study of archaeological material from tombs. Scholars have up till now virtually ignored low-fired ceramics unearthed from Ming tombs, causing valuable information on cultural history provided by low-fired ceramics to be overlooked. We know from archaeological finds that Ming burial customs differed significantly from those of the Sung and Yüan periods, this difference being characterized, amongst others, by the entombment of a large variety of lead-glazed ceramic figurines. More than four hundred figurines were unearthed from the tomb of Chu You-hsün, Prince of Shu, buried in Szechwan province during the ninth year of Hsüan-te (1434).[52] Seventy pieces were discovered in the looted tomb of Yang Hui, buried in Kweichow province during the 19th year of Ch'eng-hua (1483) **(Fig. 15)**.[53] These figurines appear in a wide variety of forms and types, including representations of people playing various musical instruments. It is evident that these figurines provide important information about Ming cultural history, such as the history of musical instruments, clothing styles and equestrian equipment .

It has moreover been suggested that the function and arrangement of such figurines within a burial site offer important clues concerning the occupant's social class, a suggestion supported by textual sources such as the *Ta Ming hui-tien*.[54] Low-fired ceramics from tombs indeed provide many more topics for further research. Beginning in the early Ming, tombs of aristocrats from the Nanking area usually featured a ceramic jar, which occasionally contained a round or octagonal pedestal made of brick, stone or iron. Some tombs, such as that of Lady Hsü, wife of Sung Ch'eng, dated to the 19th year of Yung-le (1421) further revealed pieces of decayed wood inside these ceramic jars.

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51. See Liu, *supra* note 28, at p. 36.
52. Huo Wei et al., *Ssu-ch'uan sang-tsang wen-hua* [Burial Customs in Szechwan Province] (Szechwan: Ssu-ch'uan jen-min ch'u-pan she, 1992), p. 271.
53. See Liu, *supra* note 48, at pp. 52-63.
54. Huang Ssu-en, "Ts'ung ch'u-t'u chih i-chang yung lai-k'an Ming-tai mu-tsang chung te chieh-chi chih-tu," [Class Differences in Ming Burial Customs as Seen from Arrangements of Entombed Figurines] unpublished paper presented at Seminar on Ming Ceramics, The Graduate Institute of Art History, National Taiwan University, 1998.

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Since a wooden figurine was found on an octagonal brick pedestal inside the tomb of Wu Chung, dated to the 23rd year of the Hung-wu reign (1390), it has been argued that these pieces of decayed wood are actually the remains of a weathered wood figurine, and its function, as that of the ceramic jar, may have been to placate the grave spirits.[55] While this line of argument requires further verification, it seems to indicate that ceramics previously disregarded as insignificant may actually prove to open up important areas for future research.

Questions Concerning Recent Periodization Studies of Imperial Wares of the 15th Century

As discussed above, our understanding of the typology of 15th century imperial wares has largely been based upon a comparative analysis of the formal and stylistic characteristics of marked wares. I have already indicated that this practice cannot resolve the dating problem in a conclusive fashion, since it is for example very difficult to clearly distinguish Yung-le from Hsüan-te blue-and-white wares on a stylistic basis. The continued existence of this problem owes much to the absence of tangible dating references. Drawing on information derived from the archaeological excavation of the imperial kilns at Ching-te-chen, Liu Hsin-yüan has attempted to attribute accurate or absolute dates to some Ming imperial wares by chronicling the shard heaps in relation to their stratigraphical context. In a combined analysis with related historical sources, Liu carries out a periodization study based on a precise definition of the production dates of L-shaped white porcelain bricks, of blue-and-white monk's cap ewers, of stem cups with Sanskrit inscriptions of the Yung-le period, of marked Hsüan-te blue-and-white porcelain, as well as of Ch'eng-hua *tou-ts'ai* wares. Although Liu's periodization study is undoubtedly a very valuable attempt at a breakthrough in the field, some issues have to be clarified before his claims may be accepted.

Generally speaking, there is no fundamental problem with dating kiln remains according to their stratigraphical context. The particular stratum in which remains are located, offers a measure of reference for the date of their production: the deeper the stratum, the earlier the date. However, in the case of the remains at Chu-shan, most of the artifacts discovered were deliberately destroyed prior to being discarded, and the

55. Huang Lan-ying, "Ming-ch'u Nan-ching ti-ch'ü mu-tsang ch'u-t'an," [A Preliminary Study of Ming Dynasty Burial Sites in the Nanking Area] unpublished paper presented at Seminar on Ming Ceramics, The Graduate Institute of Art History, National Taiwan University, 1998.

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actual sites of disposal themselves are widely dispersed. In one particular instance, for example, discarded Yung-le wares are covered by wares from the preceding Hung-wu period.[56] This discovery questions the extent to which we can rely on stratigraphical context as an accurate measure of historical age. But, even if we accept that the stratigraphical context of these imperial kiln remains constitutes important reference material for destruction or even production dates of unearthed specimens, there are still a number of issues which need to be addressed. It namely seems necessary to critically review Liu's interpretation of historical and literary sources in relation to the dating of excavated imperial porcelain.

In Liu Hsin-yüan's study, a group of monk's cap ewers with Tibetan inscriptions **(Fig. 16)** serve to date remains excavated from the fifth stratum of a site in the middle section of the Chu-shan road. Liu refers to a passage in the *Ming shih-lu*, which mentions that in the fourth year of the Yung-le reign (1406) a Tibetan lama, Halima, was invited to attend religious services at court, and in the following year (1407), was presented with gifts from the emperor such as *fa-ch'i* (ritual vessels). Liu claims that the monk's cap ewers with Tibetan inscriptions unearthed at Ching-te-chen must have been produced around the fifth year of the Yung-le reign.[57] A closer examination of the *Ming shih-lu* meanwhile reveals at least four occasions when *fa-ch'i* were bestowed by the Yung-le emperor upon Tibetan lamas, namely, in the 5th, 11th, 12th, and 17th year of the Yung-le reign (1407, 1413, 1414, and 1419). While Halima was the first to receive gifts of this kind, the remaining three occasions refer to gifts bestowed on another important lama, Kunzesiba. In view of these historical facts, it seems less plausible to connect the monk's cap ewers uniquely with gifts bestowed upon Halima in the fifth year of the Yung-le reign. Furthermore, examination of historical records on the gifts bestowed upon these lamas, such as a list of gifts to Halima in the sixth year of Yung-le (1408), reveals that a reference to a "white porcelain tea jar with eight auspicious Buddhist symbols" comes closest to a description of the so-called 'monk's-cap ewer'. The term *'ch'a-ch'i'* (tea ware) therefore seems more appropriate as an eventual denotation of the monk's cap ewer than the term *fa-ch'i* suggested by Liu.[58] In addition, the L-shaped white porcelain

56. See Liu, *supra* note 6, at p. 21.
57. See Liu, *supra* note 27, at p. 22. See also his "Eiraku Zenki Kanyō no Hakuji Kenkyū — Eiraku, Sentoku Kanyō Kōshō sono —," [White Porcelain in Early Yung-le Period Imperial Ware – A Study of Yung-le and Hsüan-te Imperial Kilns] *Tōyō Tōji* [Oriental Ceramics], vol. 15, 16 (1988), p. 157.
58. Liu Hsüeh-ying, "Seng-mao hu ch'u-t'an," [A Preliminary Study of 'Monk's Cap' Ewers] unpublished paper presented at Seminar on Ming Ceramics, The Graduate Institute of Art History, National Taiwan University, 1998.

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bricks found in the third stratum of these same remains, may not have been 'deliberate' rejects. According to an entry under the heading '*pao-en t'a*', in Chang Tai's *T'ao-an meng-i*, these 'rejects' were probably spare materials stored for reparation and maintenance of the Pao-en Ssu Pagoda.[59]

With regard to the dating of shard mounts at the Kung-kuan-ling site at Chu-shan, Liu Hsin-yüan suggests that the most significant find are a group of stem cups with Sanskrit inscriptions **(Fig. 17)**. He not only bases his argument on the assumption that stem cups were made for the personal use of the Yung-le emperor, but also claims that cups of this kind were only made after the 17th year of the Yung-le reign. Liu's argument is founded in his understanding that the Yung-le emperor adhered strictly to Confucianism in his early years, and did only convert to Buddhism after the 17th year of his reign (1419). He respectively cites Yü Chi-teng's *Tien-ku chi-wen* and Ho Liang-chün's *Ssu-you chai ts'ung-shuo*, in support of his first and second argument.[60] Leaving aside whether Liu's interpretation of these sources is appropriate or not, Liu Hsüeh-ying has already pointed out that the Yung-le emperor was a very superstitious man throughout his entire life, and engaged in divination practices even before he ascended the throne.[61] In this light, it does not seem meaningful to divide presumed religious affiliations of the emperor into fixed 'periods'or 'stages', and even less, to refer to such 'periods' as factual dating references for the stem cups with Sanskrit inscriptions.

Thirdly, Liu Hsin-yüan dates Ch'eng-hua imperial kiln remains excavated at Chu-shan in a similar way. Ch'eng-hua remains were discovered at three different sites, among which there is no clear stratigraphical connection. In an attempt to establish a chronological link between these three different sites, Liu Hsin-yüan assumes that their stratigraphical depth and geographical vicinity to the imperial factory at Ching-te-chen are relative indications of their date: the deeper the remains, and the closer to Ching-te-chen, the earlier the date. Liu thus argues that wares excavated from the third site, decorated with Sanskrit or Tibetan inscriptions and Buddhist designs, should be post-dated to the 17th year of the Ch'eng-hua reign (1481). He derives this exact dating reference from an entry in the *Ming shih-lu,* which he interprets as indicative of the fact that the period after the 17th year of Ch'eng-hua was marked by a significant increase in

59. Wang Yung-p'ing (Wang Yongping), "Chü-shih wen-ming te Nan-ching Pao-en Ssu Liu-li T'a," [The World-famous Pao-en Pagoda in Nanking] *Chung-kuo ku tu yen-chiu*, vol. 2 (1986), p. 214.
60. See Liu, *supra* note 27, at pp. 25-27.
61. See Liu, *supra* note 58.

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Buddhist ceremonies held at court, and temple-construction in the capital.[62] In conclusion, Liu infers from this that many transmitted Ch'eng-hua wares, including famous examples of Ch'eng-hua *tou-ts'ai*, should be dated to the later Ch'eng-hua period **(Fig. 18)**.

A closer examination of the same historical documents reveals a quite different picture. According to another entry in the *Ming shih-lu*, for instance, during the seventh year of Ch'eng-hua (1471), Han-lin bureaucrats sent a plea to the emperor asking him to redress the situation whereby 'year upon year, new temples are being incessantly built by officials'. This account indicates that many temples were being built already during the early Ch'eng-hua period. Chou Hung-mo, Minister of Rites during the Ch'eng-hua period, even clearly records that approximately 639 temples had been constructed in or around the capital by the 17th year of Ch'eng-hua. Likewise, the fact that already during the early years of his reign, Hsien-tsung offered courteous receptions to monks and bestowed honorific titles upon them, clearly demonstrates his early affiliation with Buddhism.[63] In view of these facts, it seems quite meaningless to insist that the specimens from the Ch'eng-hua remains (88H3) at Chu-shan are necessarily and uniquely connected to the construction of temples and the performance of Buddhist rituals after the 17th year of the Ch'eng-hua reign.

In a fourth instance, with regard to the excavation of Hsüan-te porcelains at Chu-shan in the 1980s, Liu claims that these blue-and-white porcelains, and therefore also marked Hsüan-te blue-and-white wares displaying pronounced Islamic stylistic influences,[64] should be dated between the eighth and the tenth year of the Hsüan-te reign (1433-1435). Liu bases this argument on the assumption that prior to the fifth year of Hsüan-te (1430), the main productive output of the Ching-te-chen imperial kilns consisted of monochrome white wares, and that blue-and-white porcelains were only produced *en masse* after that date.[65] Liu cites the *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄 (Veritable Records of Sejong) in support of this argument, especially an entry for the 19th day of the 7th month of the tenth year of Sejong's reign (1428), which only mentions a small number of blue-and-white wares amongst the porcelains presented by Hsüan-tsung to

62. See Liu, *supra* note 28, at pp. 29-30.
63. Yang Ch'i-chiao (Yang Qijiao), "Ming-tai chu-ti chih ch'ung-shang fang-shu chi ch'i ying-hsiang," [Ming Emperors and their Belief in Occult Practices] originally published in *Hsin ya shu-yüan hsüeh-shu nien-k'an*, vol. 4 (1962), later included in *Ming-shih yen-chiu lun-ts'ung* [Studies in Ming History], ed. Wu Chih-ho, (Taipei: Ta-li ch'u-pan-she, 1981), vol. 1 (1981), pp. 405-414.
64. See Liu, *supra* note 17, at p. 168.
65. See Liu, *supra* note 28, at pp. 33-34.

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the Korean emperor. We may remark that Liu's theory here runs parallel with his Yung-le period dating of Yung-le — Hsüan-te style unmarked blue-and-white porcelains in Near Eastern collections such as the Topukapu Saray Museum. But we only have to turn to an entry for the fifth year of Hsüan-te (1430) in the very same source cited by Liu, to discover an occasion when Hsüan-tsung presented the Korean emperor with three table settings of blue-and-white porcelain.[66] This would rather seem to suggest that a considerable amount of blue-and-white wares were already being produced at Ching-te-chen by the fifth year of the Hsüan-te reign. Moreover, the gifts the Hsüan-te emperor bestowed upon the Korean emperor could much as well have been adapted to the preferences of the recipient. Another Korean historical source of the time, the *Yong Jae Chong Hwa* 慵齋叢話 (Yong Jae's Notes) by Seong Hyeon 成俔 (1439-1504), clearly illustrates Sejong's preference for white porcelain: "Imperial wares of the reign of Sejong mainly constituted of monochrome whites, while those of the reign of Sejo 世祖 also included polychrome wares."[67] Although at the present moment, we lack the necessary evidence either to verify or falsify Liu's claims, Liu's method falls short of being convincing, and calls for a measure of scrutiny toward his conclusions.

By way of conclusion, I would like to briefly mention another topic that relates to the dating of 15th century ceramics. A flower pot **(Fig. 19)** and flower pot stand with drum-nail decoration **(Fig. 20)** unearthed from Ch'eng-hua waste heaps at Ching-te-chen's Chu-shan site, namely show close stylistic resemblance to so-called transmitted Chün wares.[68] It is common knowledge that Chün ware, listed by Ming connoisseurs as one of the five most famous Sung porcelains, can be divided into two main categories. The first group, consisting of articles for daily use such as bowls and plates, were frequently unearthed from Chin and Yüan tombs, while the second group, consisting of ornamental wares such as flower pots and *tsun*, have not yet been discovered in tombs, and are therefore referred to as 'transmitted' wares. Furthermore, Chün wares belonging to the last category generally have a number ranging from one to ten molded or incised at their base **(Figs. 21-24)**. Most Chinese scholars tend to date numbered Chün wares to the Northern Sung period, and sometimes even claim these wares to be no less than imperial ware from the reign of Hui-tsung (r.1100-1125).[69] In a recent study

66. See Jin Hong Seub ed., *Hanguk Misul Sa Ja Lou Jib Sung 3* [An Anthology of Sources in Korean Art History] (Seoul: Ilji Sa, 1991), pp.429-431.
67. Seong Hyeon, *Yong Jae Chong Hwa* (Yong Jae's Notes) in *Han-kuo han-chi min-su ts'ung-shu* [A Compilation of Chinese Literature from Korea], ed. Jen Tung-ch'üan et al., (Taipei: Tung-fang wen-hua shu-chü, 1971), v. 7, chüan 10.
68. See Liu, *supra* note 28, pl. 9/167.
69. Li Hui-ping (Li Huibing), *Sung-tai kuan-yao tz'u-ch'i* [Sung Imperial Porcelains] (Peking: Tzu-chin

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based on a detailed stylistic analysis, Lo Hui-ch'i has offered a critical review of previous research, suggesting that these numbered Chün wares should rather be dated to the late 14th century, or the late Yüan and early Ming dynasties.[70] While I fully support the view that transmitted Chün wares should not be dated to the Northern Sung period, Lo's research presents us with potential evidence that may lead to the solving of the Chün-ware dating problem. Future developments in periodization studies on 15th century ceramics may indeed allow a comparative study of material such as the flower pot with *cloisonné* designs and colored glazes bearing a Cheng-te (1506-1521) reign mark, which reveals stylistic similarities to transmitted Chün wares **(Fig. 25)**,[71] and archaeological evidence from the Chu-shan site, to lead to a breakthrough in the Chün dating problem. Although Chün-type polychrome wares are quite rare amongst 15th century ceramics, a number of Chün-style red-glazed bowls and dishes in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei have been dated to the Ch'eng-hua period by Feng Hsien-ming on basis of their stylistic characteristics.[72] The purple-on-blue glaze of a hexagonal flower pot stand in the Koger collection dating to the 15th-16th centuries **(Fig. 26)**,[73] also comes close to that of transmitted Chün wares. The fact that transmitted Chün wares preserved today display differences in the details of their execution moreover seems to suggest temporal or regional differences in their production. There is furthermore mention of counterfeit-production of Chün wares in the *Tsun sheng pa chien* (Eight Discourses on the Art of Living) by the late Ming connoisseur Kao Lien.[74] It appears therefore that advanced research on the dating of ceramic ware of this kind from the 15th century and adjacent periods, will undoubtedly provide important clues for the eventual solving of the dating problem of transmitted Chün wares, a central topic in the history of Chinese ceramics.

Translated by Dong Dong Wu and Elaine Jeffreys
Revised by Catherine Stuer

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ch'eng ch'u-pan-she, 1992), pp. 38-52.

70. Lo Hui-ch'i, "Ch'uan-shih Chün-yao ch'i te shih-tai wen-t'i," [A Study of the Dating of Transmitted Chün Wares] *Taida Journal of Art History*, vol. 4 (1997), pp. 109-183.
71. Valare Reynolds, *2000 Years of Chinese Ceramics: The Newark Museum Collection* (Newark: Newark Museum Association, 1978), pl. 34.
72. The National Palace Museum and The Central Museum, *Porcelain of the National Palace Museum: Chün Ware* (Hong Kong: CAFA Company, 1961), pl. 33-34; Feng Hsien-ming (Feng Xianming), "Kinyo ni Kansuru Sho Mondai nitsuite," [On the Problems Concerning the Jun Kiln] in *Mikami Tsugio Hakasei Kiju Kinen Ronbunshu (Tōjihen)* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1985), p. 109.
73. John Ayers, *Chinese Ceramics: The Koger Collection* (London: Sotheby's, 1985), pl. 91.
74. Kao Lien, *Tsun-sheng pa-chien* [Eight Discourses on the Art of Living] (Szechwan: Pa-shu ch'u-pan-she, 1988), p. 466.

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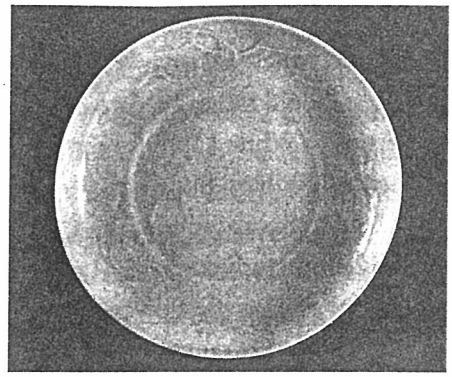


Fig. 1-1

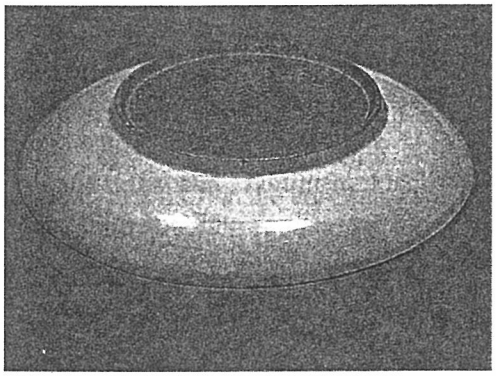


Fig. 1-2

Fig. 1 Dish with impressed floral motifs under a white glaze, marked: "Produced in the T'ien-shun Reign". In the collection of the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art.



Fig. 2 Jar shard with dragon motif in blue-and-white. Unearthed at the Chu-shan site, Ching-te-chen.



Fig. 3 Blue-and-white porcelain tablet, first year of the Ching-t'ai reign (1450). In the collection of the Kiangsi Provincial Museum.



Fig. 4 Inscription on *Tung-chih i-yang t'u*, attributed to Hsien-tsung. In the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

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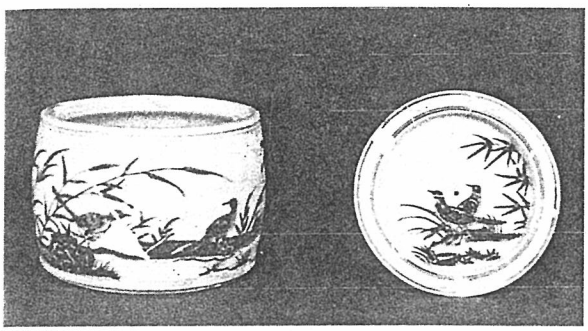


Fig. 5-1

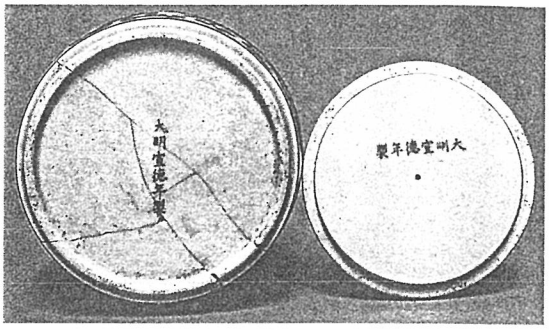


Fig. 5-2

Fig. 5 Blue-and-white cricket jar of the Hsüan-te period. Unearthed at the Chu-shan site, Ching-te-chen.

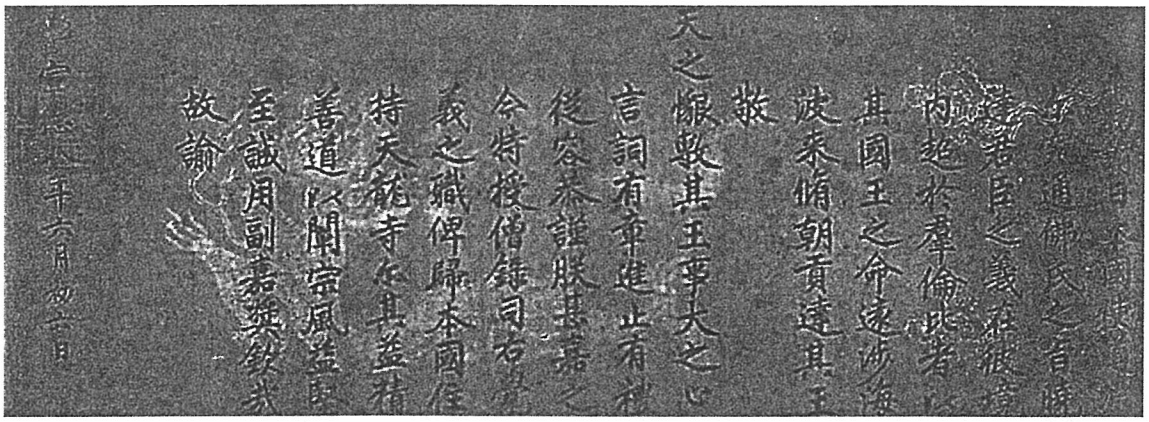


Fig. 6 Imperial edict extended by Hsüan-tsung to Japanese diplomatic delegation. In the collection of the Yurinkan Museum.

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Fig. 7 Jar inscribed with '*t'ien*' mark, Ch'eng-hua period imperial ware. In the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Fig. 8 Jar decorated with figures burning incense in blue-and-white, blank period. Private collection.



Fig. 9 Jar decorated with figures in architectural settings in blue-and-white, blank period. Private collection.



Fig. 10 *Mei-p'ing* vase decorated with figures, blank period. Private collection.

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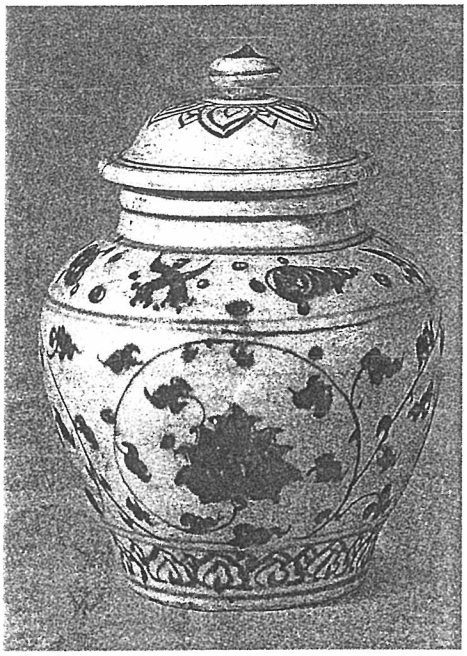


Fig. 11 Small blue-and-white covered jar, datable to the second year of the Cheng-t'ung period (1437), unearthed in Hsin-chien county, Kiangsi province.

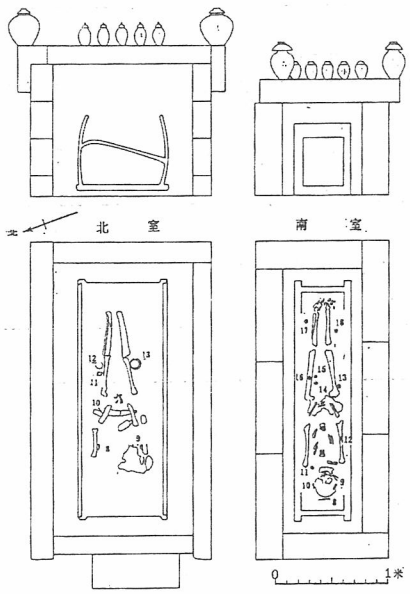


Fig. 12 Plan and section of the Lo Heng-hsin family tomb in Kwangtung province, third year of the T'ien-shun period (1459).

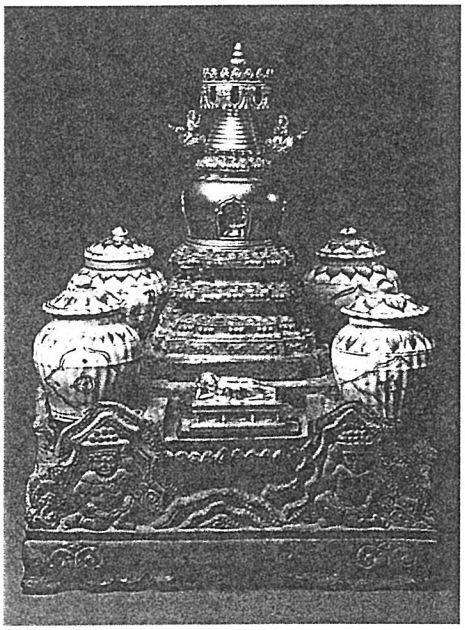


Fig. 13 Gilded Lamaist pagoda and blue-and-white covered jars, unearthed at the Hung-chüeh Ssu on Niu-shou mountain in Nanking.

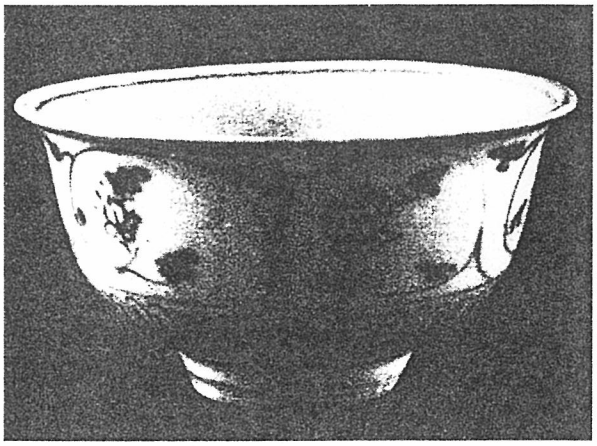


Fig. 14 Porcelain bowl decorated in *tou-ts'ai* enamels, unearthed from the tomb of lady Ts'ai (M5), wife of Wang Hsi, in Szechwan province.

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Fig. 15 Ceramic figurine, unearthed from the tomb of Yang Hui in Kweichow province, nineteenth year of the Ch'eng-hua period (1483).

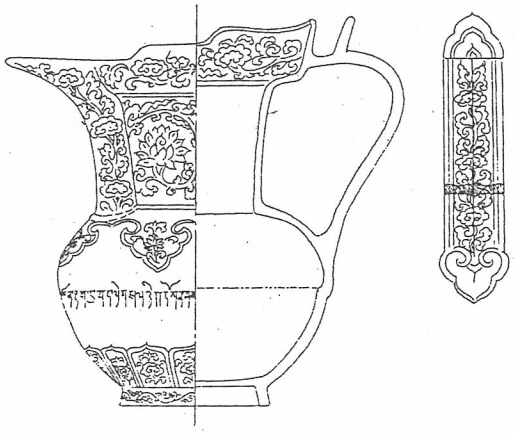


Fig. 16 Blue-and-white monk's cap ewer with Tibetan inscription, unearthed at the Chu-shan site, Ching-te-chen.



Fig. 17-1

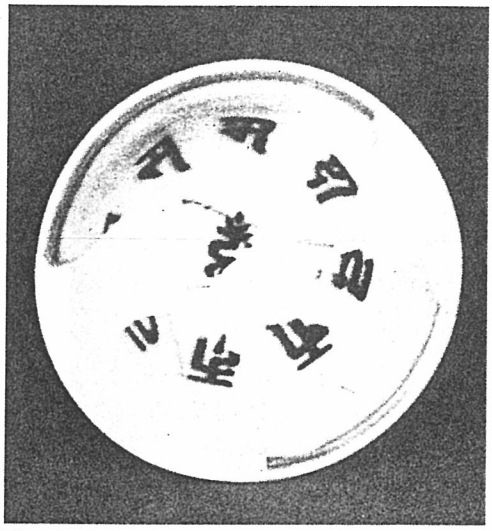


Fig. 17-2

Fig. 17 Blue-and-white stem cup with Sanskrit inscription, unearthed at the Chu-shan site, Ching-te-chen.



Fig. 18 *Tou-ts'ai* bowl with eight auspicious symbols, Ch'eng-hua period, unearthed at the Chu-shan site, Ching-te-chen.

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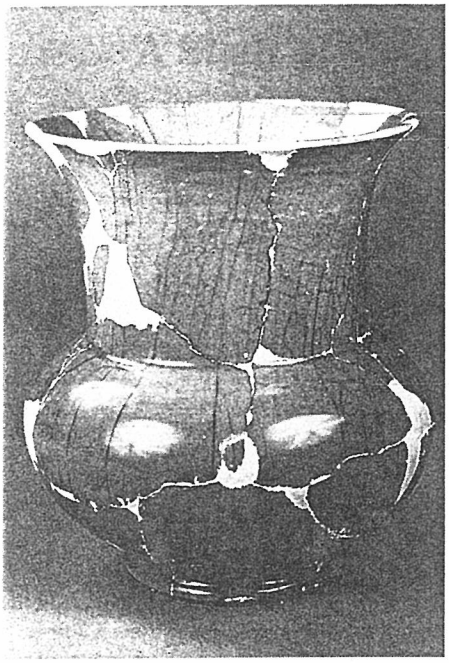


Fig. 19 Flower pot with celadon glaze, Ch'eng-hua period, unearthed at the Chu-shan site, Ching-te-chen.

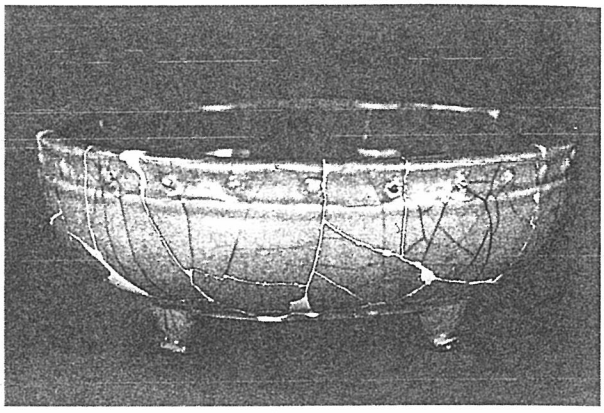


Fig. 20 Flower pot stand with celadon glaze and drum-nail decoration, Ch'eng-hua period, unearthed at the Chu-shan site, Ching-te-chen.



Fig. 21 Transmitted Chün-ware flower vase. In the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Fig. 22 Transmitted Chün-ware flower pot stand with drum-nail decoration. In The Koger Collection.

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Fig. 23 Transmitted Chün-ware bowl. In the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

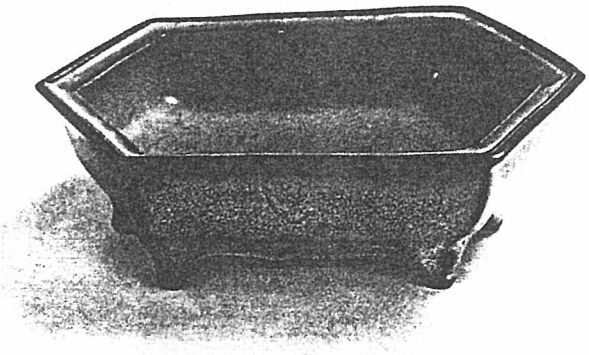


Fig. 24 Transmitted Chün-ware hexagonal bulb bowl. In the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Fig. 25 Flower pot with *cloisonné* designs and colored glazes marked with Cheng-te (1506-1521) reign mark. In the collection of the Newark Museum.



Fig. 26 Hexagonal flower pot stand with *cloisonné* designs and colored glazes, 15th-16th century. In The Koger Collection.

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