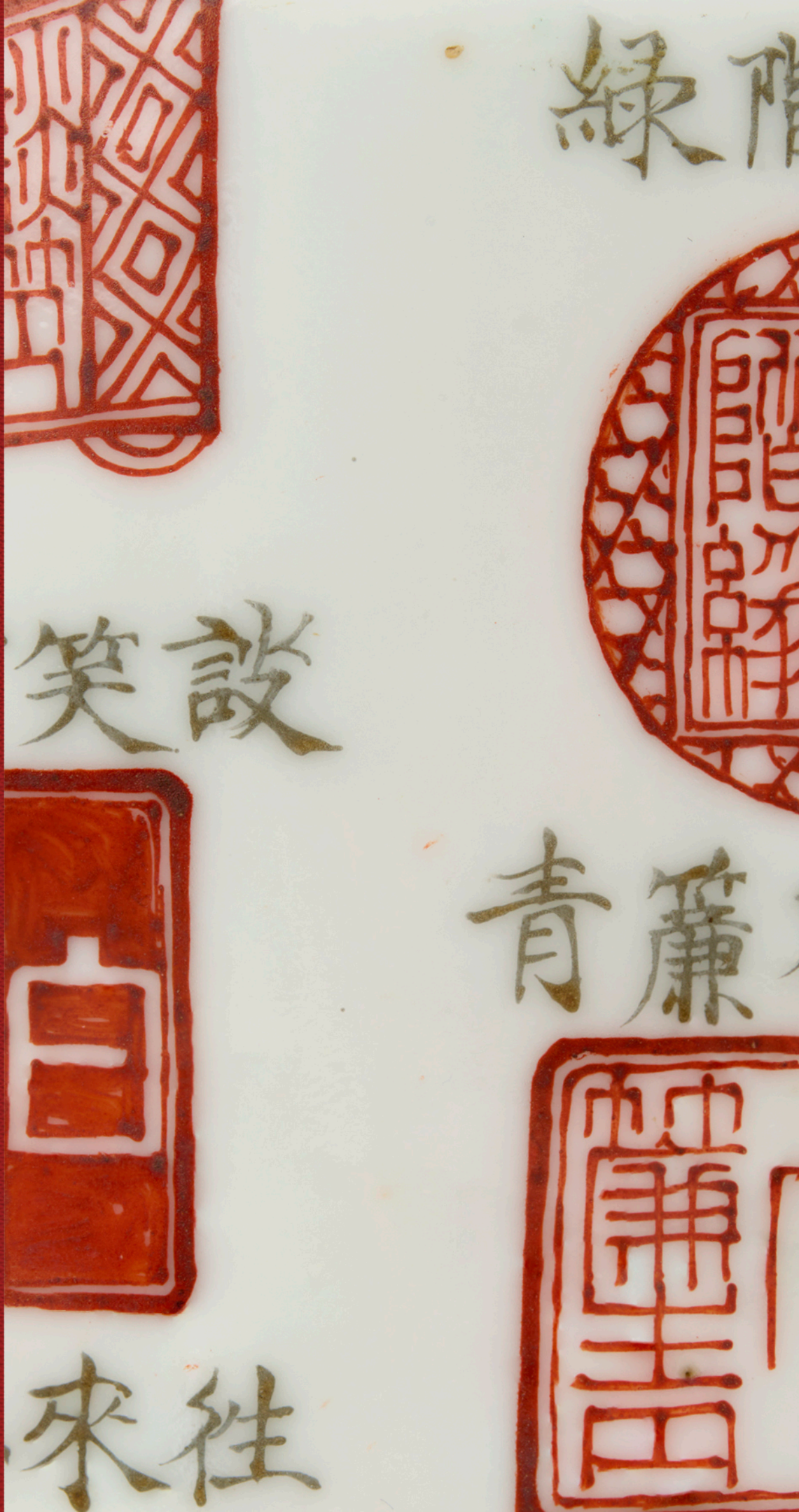
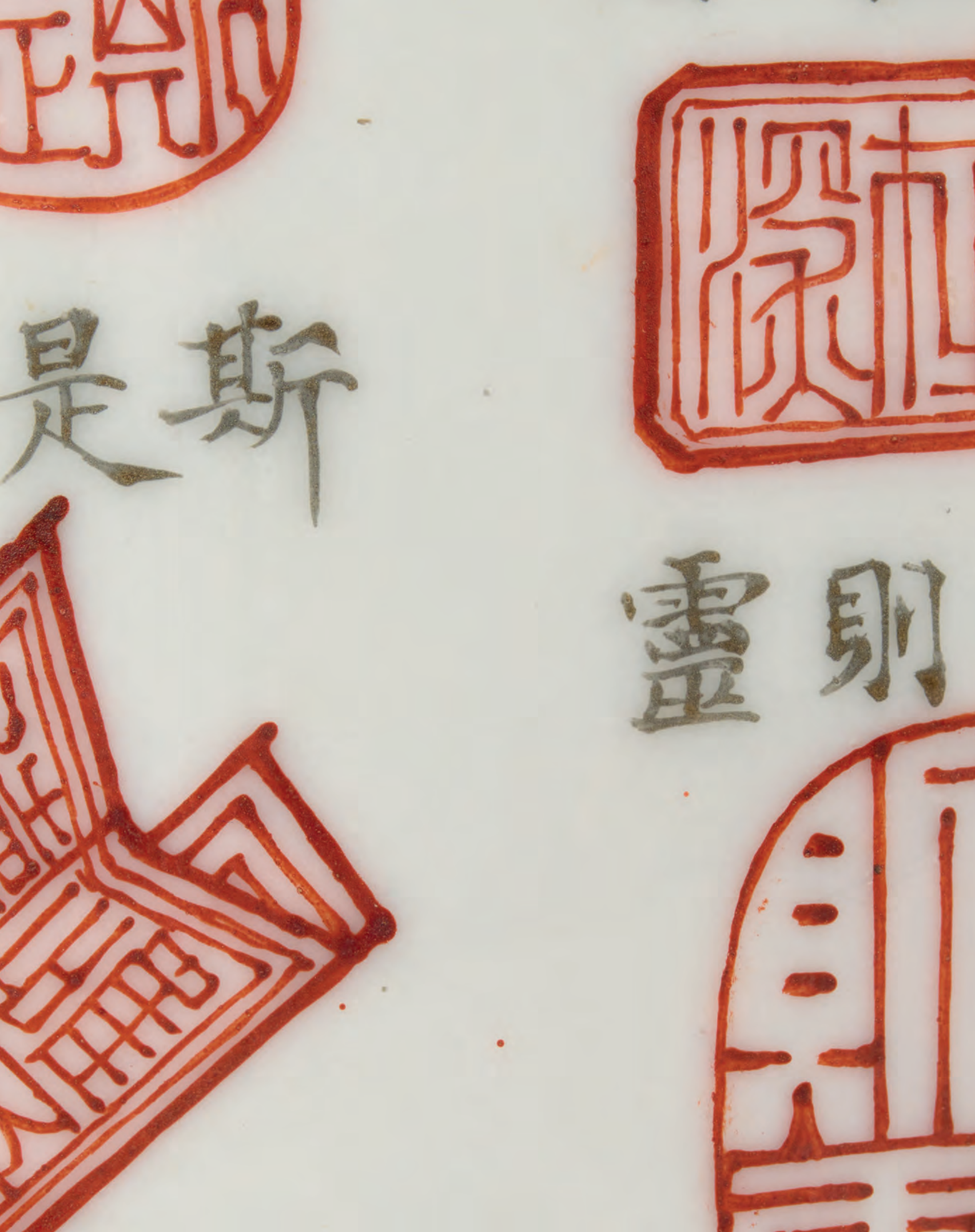
I

PAULINE NGAI

A Thousand Auspicious Meanings

CHINESE PORCELAIN TEAPOTS FROM THE SAPIENTIA COLLECTION FOR THE DOMESTIC MARKET




是斯
盡則

PAULINE NGAI

A Thousand Auspicious Meanings

CHINESE PORCELAIN TEAPOTS FROM THE SAPIENTIA COLLECTION FOR THE DOMESTIC MARKET

VOLUME ONE

Introduction: Teapots for the Domestic Market

This book would not have been possible without the support from the Sapientia Foundation

1st Edition, 2022
Jorge Welsh Research and Publishing

AUTHOR
Pauline Ngai
EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
Dr Martin Ng, Wang Han, Wei Cheao-ling, Zhang Li-min
EDITING
Luísa Vinhais, Jorge Welsh

EDITORIAL COORDINATION
Alice Stilwell
ADVISORS
Li Zong-yang, Shang Xuedong
RESEARCH
Duan Xin (Porcelain after 1949), Ge Lin, Han Ying, Wang Han
TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH
Dr Nicholas Morrow Williams
PROOFREADING CHINESE
Dr Martin Ng, Wang Han, Wei Cheao-ling
PROOFREADING ENGLISH
Carolina Ferreira, Rose Kerr, F. Orichuia, Davina Thackara
PHOTOGRAPHY
Afredo Matacotta Cordella (deceased), **Eduardo Nascimento, Richard Valencia, Liu Xiao-nan**
DESIGN
Panorama, www.panorama.pt, Portugal
PRINTING
Norprint, Portugal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Professor Albert S. C. Chan (Academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, former President of Hong Kong Baptist University)
Professor Zhi Chen (Executive Vice President: Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University, United International College)
Professor Peter Lam Yip-keung (member of Hong Kong Palace Museum Ltd, former Director of the Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong)
Weng Yanjun (Director of the Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum)

First Published 2022

1st Edition
ISBN 978-1-8382163-4-4

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

CONTENTS

VOL. I

VOL. II

Through the long course of history, Chinese ceramic vessels have always maintained a unique appeal as a kind of ambassador for Chinese culture. Through this process, they have worked as a bridge or intermediary between China and the West, and inspired new understanding and progress in all the nations of the world. They are the distillation of millennia of human experience, and are decorated with images of global significance: most of the images on these teapots are related to their historical context, including social and political developments, and exhibit styles and designs that are either uniquely Chinese, or Western, or are a combination of both. They are a concrete embodiment of China's exchange with the West throughout history.

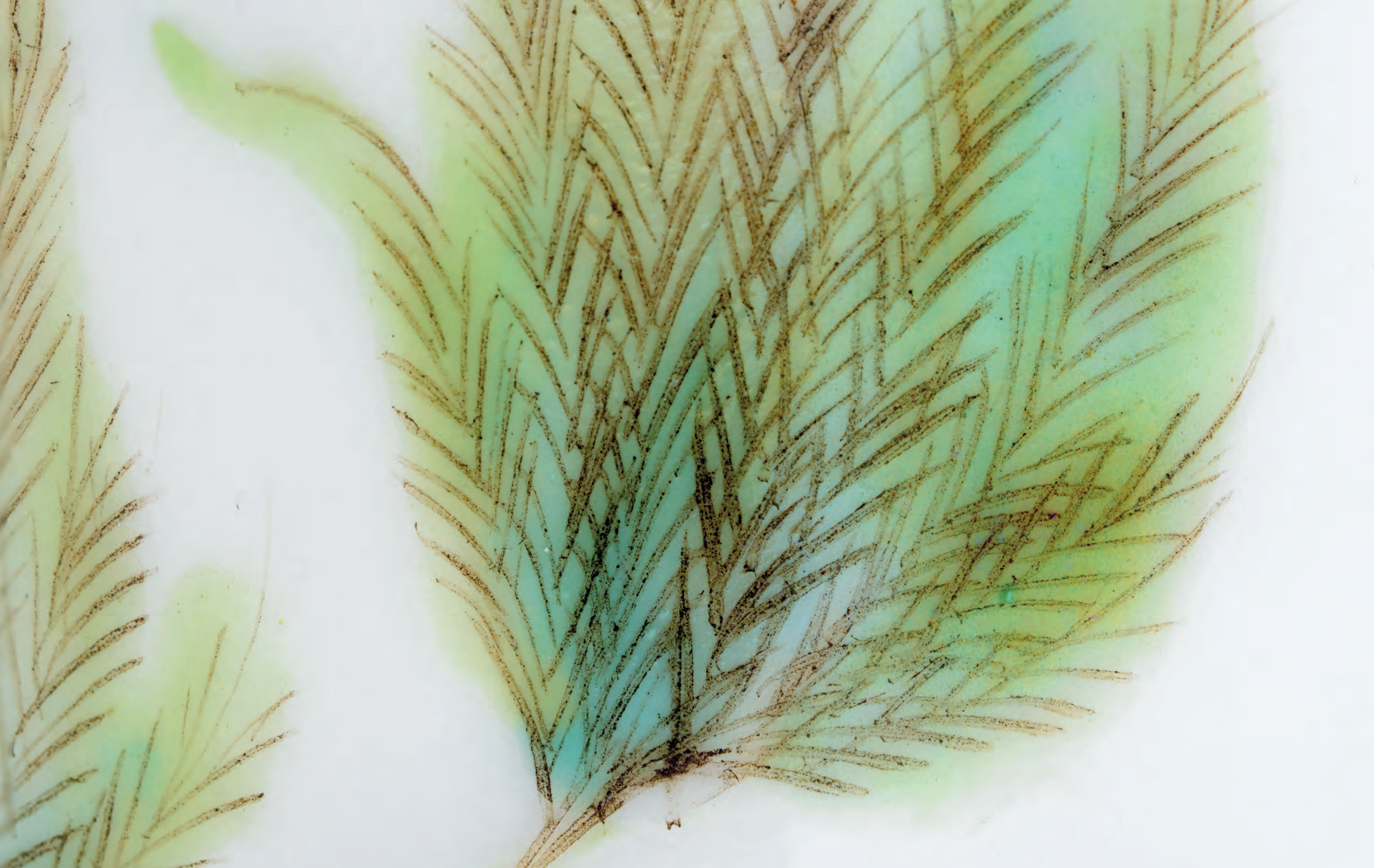
The porcelain teapots included in this book date from the late sixteenth century to the 1980s, and are classified into domestic and export porcelain. One special set of teapots produced during the Cultural Revolution is included in the domestic porcelain section, since these are an invaluable reflection of more recent history. During that period even daily life was politicised, leading to new images, slogans, and other kinds of propaganda, all of which are reflected in the decorations. These vessels were therefore not just wares for preparing tea, they also had other more important functions, as tools for political and commercial propaganda.

When one stops to look back from the busy turmoil of life, one can't help but think fondly of the past. Living today, what can we do to produce even happier memories for the future? This is an age that primarily values material success, when most of the ethical ideals and humanistic spirit embodied in traditional culture have been forgotten. However, our collection at home is waiting for these ideals to be understood and appreciated. A teapot initially serves as just an ordinary vessel for daily use, but it manages to contain a rich historical message regarding Chinese culture from remote antiquity. I hope that readers can use this book to understand Chinese culture, and find in it reflections of their identity, and even the materials to refine their own sense of morality and taste. This is the larger aspiration for this publication.

In the process of writing this book, I was honoured to receive assistance from the former director of the Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Peter Lam. I also had the good fortune to receive help from Martin Ng, Wang Han, Ge Lin, and Han Ying, who compiled valuable research. In this process, we worked passionately and determinedly, learning from one another, and investigating and pursuing together. We have built a friendship through these teapots. Now that the book is complete, I am pleased to share it with all of you.

The contents of this book touch on a diverse set of subjects and collect insights from many different sources. I hope readers will point out any limitations that it may contain.

Pauline Ngai



Historical Figures

ENTRY NOS. 2 TO 11

→ FIG. 19

Detail of *famille rose* teapot, Vol. II, entry 11, pp. 40-41

Figures from ancient history were often chosen to depict Confucian virtues of loyalty, filial piety and adherence to duty, as well as to reinforce the hierarchy of human relations and teach moral education. For instance, the story of the Duke of Zhou (born ca.1100 BC),[5] who helped his older brother consolidate the Zhou, conveys the virtue of loyalty. The story of Zeng Shen (505–435 BC), in the Warring States period, exemplifies the virtue of filial piety, while the story of Jing Ke's failed attempt to assassinate the King of Qin illustrates courageous spirit.[6] Liu Xiang's (77–6 BC) *Biographies of Virtuous Women* records numerous stories of wives, daughters and other female characters who exemplified Confucian virtues for women. Portraits of human figures were therefore closely linked to popular moral values, and are evidenced in the art of the Han dynasty (202 BC–AD 220), particularly its stone murals.

During the Tang and Song dynasties (618–1279), new topics arose for historical figures involving secular forms of religious stories. In the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), many historical figures acquired distinctive styles. For instance, in the 'Twenty-Four Examples of Filial Piety' by Guo Jujing, there are illustrated figures of stories and poems proclaiming the Confucian virtue of filial piety, of which styles gradually developed into formulaic patterns that were especially influential in popular art, as historical topics became adapted to the conventions of literary culture. Another example is Cui Zizhong's (1574–1644) painting of the *Goddess of the Luo River*, which shows numerous distinctive new figures. Other topics, such as Han general Su Wu herding sheep, Han princess Wang Zhaojun being sent to marry a Xiongnu (Hun) prince,[7] the poet Li Bai drinking wine, the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, and so on, all became highly conventionalised. Hence, in the late imperial period (1271–1912), depictions of human figures grew more secular, formulaic and literary.[8]

There is a popular Chinese idiom: 'Past things are not forgotten, but serve as the teacher of things to come.' Numerous events from antiquity were used as models and inspiration for the future. Famous names from history, such as Jiang Ziya (1156–1017 BC), Duke Huan of Qi (716–643 BC), Bing Ji (ca. 55 BC), Zhang Gongyi (578–676) and Guo Ziyi (697–781), were real historical figures whose achievements were recorded for posterity in history books. Duke Huan of Qi was devoted to seeking out worthy ministers throughout the kingdom; brilliant and talented, Bing Ji could perceive the general trend from one tiny clue; Guo Ziyi devised numerous clever martial stratagems and won countless victories. Through these images, people could sip tea while reflecting on the great achievements of the past and their implications for the present. •

[5] The Story of the Duke of Zhou: Duke Zhou, formerly known as Zhou Gongdan, King Wu's younger brother, played a major role in consolidating the kingdom.

[6] Assassination of King of Qin: During the late Warring States period (475–221 BC), Qin's army successfully annihilated the Five Warring States. Prince Dan of Yan would become the next target. For the nation's survival, Yan recruited a warrior of Chu, Jing Ke, in 227 BC, to assassinate the King of Qin (259–210 BC). Unfortunately, the operation failed, and Jing Ke was killed.

[7] Zhaojun Departs for the Frontier: Wang Zhaojun (52–15 BC) was formerly a palace maid of the Western Han dynasty. Xiongnu, who was friendly with Han, was willing to cement the relationship through marriage. Wang Zhaojun volunteered and was made a princess. After going to the Xiongnu, she became queen.

[8] Li Gen, 'On Ancient Chinese "History Painting"' (中國古代「歷史畫」論略), *Journal of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University*, no. 2, 2010, pp. 95-98.

Martial Arts Characters

ENTRY NOS. 12 TO 19

← FIG. 20

Detail of *famille rose* teapot, Vol. II, entry 14, pp. 48-53

These characters were heroes who tried to achieve peace for the country in a time of anarchy and war, and were idolised by the Chinese people as symbols of the desire for peace. In Chinese, these kinds of decorative figures are known as 'sword, horse, and hero' (*daomaren*) motifs, and normally draw on martial scenes from popular fictions and dramas. Some of the key motifs refer to the contest of the Five Hegemons of the Spring and Autumn period (770—476 BC); the war of Chu and Han (207—202BC), the Battle of Red Cliff, and the Three Heroes combating Lü Bu. The designs reflect the spirit of ancient folklore, featuring figures who perform glorious and heroic actions. Such themes were already popular in the late Ming dynasty, on both underglaze blue and polychrome porcelain, but achieved greater heights of popularity and sophistication in the Kangxi period (1661–1722) of the Qing dynasty.[9]

Towards the end of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the Jurchens, ancestors of the Manchu people, frequently made incursions into Chinese territory, threatening the stability of the dynasty and eventually overturning it. In this continual state of war, demand for heroic literature grew rapidly. Popular woodblock-printed fiction was decorated with illustrations of various martial scenes, appealing to the widespread admiration for these heroes. After the Manchu conquest and the founding of the Qing dynasty (1644), peace returned to China and, from then onwards, these martial figures were not merely a nostalgic reminder of wars long past, but also symbolised the joy of a new peaceful age. Porcelain painters directly copied woodblock prints onto the teapots, so users could enjoy a fanciful recollection of historical events alongside a cup of tea, while also perceiving their deeper messages. When Emperor Kangxi ascended the throne in 1662, the Qing emperor had undergone numerous major military campaigns to establish and extend his rule. These included the pacification of the Revolt of the Three Feudatories, the recovery of Taiwan, and the counterattack to the Russian invasion in the northeast, the battle of Zhunga'er (Dzungar, now in Xinjiang Province). These experiences all imbued Emperor Kangxi with the conviction that it had not been easy to achieve domination of the realm, and that he could not destroy this achievement by enjoying peace. He made a point of cautioning his progeny about the fragility of the empire, and indeed the Manchus maintained the same state of military alert long after their conquest. At the same time, Kangxi revered Han Chinese ethics and culture, and officially declared the necessity of ruling by moral principles. Paintings of warriors include all kinds of heroes, wielding various weapons and showing off their martial skills. Yet they also possess traditional Chinese virtues, such as loyalty and trustworthiness, and play a role in inculcating social virtues such as the foundation of self-discipline, serving the lord and ruling the country. These kinds of images were widely admired, not just among the people, but also by the ruling classes.

The figures and war scenes on the teapots included under this theme are decorated with the 'sword, horse, and hero' motifs that are drawn from the stories of the *Yang Saga*, the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and the *Water Margin*. •

[9] liu Le-jun: 'On Martial Arts Characters in Kangxi Period', in *Art Review*, no. 12, 2009, p. 112.

Stories of Romance

ENTRY NOS. 46 TO 50

Depictions of romantic stories from popular literature on porcelain show true-to-life figures in classic scenes that narrate the joys and sorrows of love. Most famous love stories in traditional Chinese culture have a tragic dimension, like *Palace of Everlasting Life* (a play about emperor Tang Xuanzong and his love for Yang Guifei), *The Legend of White Snake* (a popular legend about the love between a white snake spirit and Xu Xian), *Peony Pavilion* (a complicated love story by Tan Xianzu (1550–1616) of the Ming dynasty), *Romance of the West Chamber*, *Oxherd and Weaving Maid*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber,* and so on. Of course, there are also more optimistic or comic stories that celebrate the love of husband and wife, like that reflected in the idiom, 'to lift the tray to eyebrow level', which means mutual respect in a marriage, but these have never been as popular as the tragic stories. Why would this be?

Love stories have been popular throughout history, but it is the tragic twist that attracts people's sympathies and increases their broader resonance. For instance, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* portrays the complex destiny of Jia Baoyu and the Twelve Hairpins of Jinling. An old metaphor for a woman was the gold hairpin, so the twelve gold hairpins refer to twelve women, as depicted on a bowl with cover that belongs to this collection (Fig. 72).

Ⓐ Qin Keqing
The wife of Jia Rong, nephew of Jia Baoyu, Qin Keqing has a delicate and refined appearance but is unrestrained in private life, and has an affair with her father-in-law, Jia Zhen. Feeling deep guilt and remorse, she develops a serious depression, becomes ill and dies young.

Ⓑ Miaoyu
Originally from an official's family, Miaoyu is a practising nun, highly talented and keen on music, but conceals her ability. Although virtuous, she is arrogant and not appreciated by people, and later takes refuge with the Jia clan. She admires Baoyu but cannot express her desire, and continues living in the Grandview Garden. In the end she is kidnapped by bandits and sent to a brothel, her final fate unknown.

Ⓒ Li Wan, Jia Lan
Li Wan is the wife of Jia Zhu, elder brother of Jia Baoyu, and has a son named Jia Lan who is here shown nestling against her. When her husband dies young, she remains unmarried. Her personality is gentle and compliant, but she has a strong sense of family and of the importance of chastity. She is the most motherly of all female figures in *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Ⓓ Xue Baochai
Eldest daughter of the Xue clan, Xue Baochai is generous, caring and talented. She becomes Jia Baoyu's wife, but since she can never replace Lin Daiyu in his heart, Baoyu becomes a monk and Baochai lives out her life in solitude.

→ FIG 72

12 details of *famille rose* covered bowl, Tongzhi period (1862-1874)
H. 9.4 cm

CHAPTER II

FLOWERS, BIRDS, FISH, AND INSECTS

ENTRY NOS. 69 TO 109

Human figures are the most popular auspicious motifs, while flowers and birds rank second. Traditional Chinese flower-and-bird paintings are compact, elegant and symbolic, and, rather than depicting the physical shapes of flowers or birds as in Western paintings, seek to merge the natural world with human nature by alluding to emotion through pattern and design.

Flower-and-bird images originated on painted ceramics as early as the Neolithic era, and various types of animal and plant figures can be found on the silk paintings of the Warring States period (475–221 BC) and the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220). In ancient times, people used personification as a way to express their hopes and desires. For example, through observing the seasonal migrations of the geese, they understood that even birds keep their promises, and, on hearing the shouts of chicks to their parents while searching for food, they concluded that animals also have family relationships. Hence, each kind of animal or plant gradually acquired its own cultural connotations.

From the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties, bird-and-flower paintings became an independent genre. Literati particularly admired plants that seemed to possess a lofty and unsullied character, such as the plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, or chrysanthemum, whose natural attributes became associated with qualities of nobility, honour and resilience, similar to those of the ideal gentleman. Hence, these four plants are acclaimed as the Four Noble Gentlemen. Similarly, the hibiscus and peony, because of their gorgeous appearance, came to represent wealth and luxury.

As a result of improved paper-making and printing technology, flower-and-bird paintings gradually also became more commercialised and popular, taking on new meanings and associations. For instance, the lotus blossom became invested with Buddhist symbolism and developed into the *baoxiang* rosette, which for over a millennium has represented good fortune and perfection. Partnered with fish, insects, or fruits, the lotus can also form different combinations to signify different kinds of auspicious symbolism. The meanings of specific decorative motifs, both singly and in combination, such as flowers and plants, flowers and fruits, flowers and birds, fish, and butterflies, will be discussed in the respective teapot entries. •

Auspicious Inscriptions

ENTRY NOS. 127 TO 129

Auspicious words and phrases are a major component of traditional Chinese design and can appear independently or in conjunction with other decorative motifs. For example, the bronzes of the Shang (1600–1046 BC) and Zhou (1046–221 BC) dynasties have inscriptions like 'auspicious sheep', 'longevity extending 10,000 years without end', and so on. The bronze mirrors of the Han dynasty were also decorated with inscriptions such as 'wealth and prestige flourishing and succeeding', and with long-lasting wishes for good fortune, both for individuals and their sons and grandsons. Similarly, Chinese popular art is full of expressions of desire for good fortune, career success, longevity, happiness, wealth, peace, and cultivation.

The inscriptions in decorative motifs may be written in various types of calligraphy, exemplifying the union of sound, meaning and form in Chinese characters. Compositions involving Chinese characters may adopt various structures, including separation, repetition, continuity, concentration, distribution, or symmetry, which show off the pictographic element of Chinese writing, and also indicate explicitly the symbolic content of the design. Thus, there is a dramatic interaction between the sense indicated and the visual form of the characters. Other types of auspicious design have changed their significance with the passage of time, and have sometimes posed obstacles to understanding by later people, but auspicious inscriptions are generally streamlined and easily comprehended. Some of the characters used in inscriptions are also made into abstract decorative patterns, such as *fu* (福 good fortune), *lu* (祿 blessings), *shou* (壽 longevity), and *shuangxi* (雙喜 double happiness).

DOUBLE HAPPINESS MOTIFS

ENTRY NOS. 127 AND 128

This is an extremely common motif in traditional Chinese aesthetics, and consists of a compound of two 喜 *xi (*happiness) characters, meaning 'double happiness on the threshold', or 'happiness following happiness'. It is frequently used to celebrate marriages and various other happy occasions and, though not a standard Chinese character, is often seen on porcelain, fabrics, engravings, clothing, silverware, and other objects, to convey the idea of celebration and jubilation. The motif was said to have originated in the Song dynasty on the wedding day of Wang Anshi (1021–1086), news arrived that he had ranked first in the imperial examinations and Wang immediately wrote a pair of 'happiness' characters on the door. Since the mid-Qing Dynasty to today, the double-happiness character has been used frequently.

LONGEVITY (*SHOU*) MOTIFS

ENTRY NO. 129

'Longevity' (壽 *shou*) is one of the Three Star Gods of traditional popular culture. The ancient dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* defines *shou* as 'long lasting', and also implies a prayer for longevity. The *shou* character as a decorative motif is usually applied on porcelain and silk fabrics, with a lot of variation in its written forms. Often, a single *shou* character is depicted so elaborately that it forms its own pictorial composition, and a number of *shou* characters in seal script can also be arranged in parallel lines to form an auspicious motif. A rounded *shou* in the form of a medallion stands for 'union and long life', while the elongated strokes of *shou* also stand for 'long life'. The 'hundred *shou*' design, which was popular in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), combines 'longevity' written in 100 different calligraphies in one scroll, and became an art piece. *Shou can also be* combined with other characters, such as 福壽 *fu shou (blessing and longevity)* and 萬壽 *wan shou (ten thousands of longevity),* and with flowers, birds, fish, and insects to form a complex motif, widely used by ordinary people as an auspicious symbol. •

↖ FIG. 95

Detail of teapot with 'double happiness' character, Vol. II, entry 128, pp. 286-87

↑ FIG. 96

Detail of teapot with longevity motif, Vol. II, entry 129, pp. 288-89