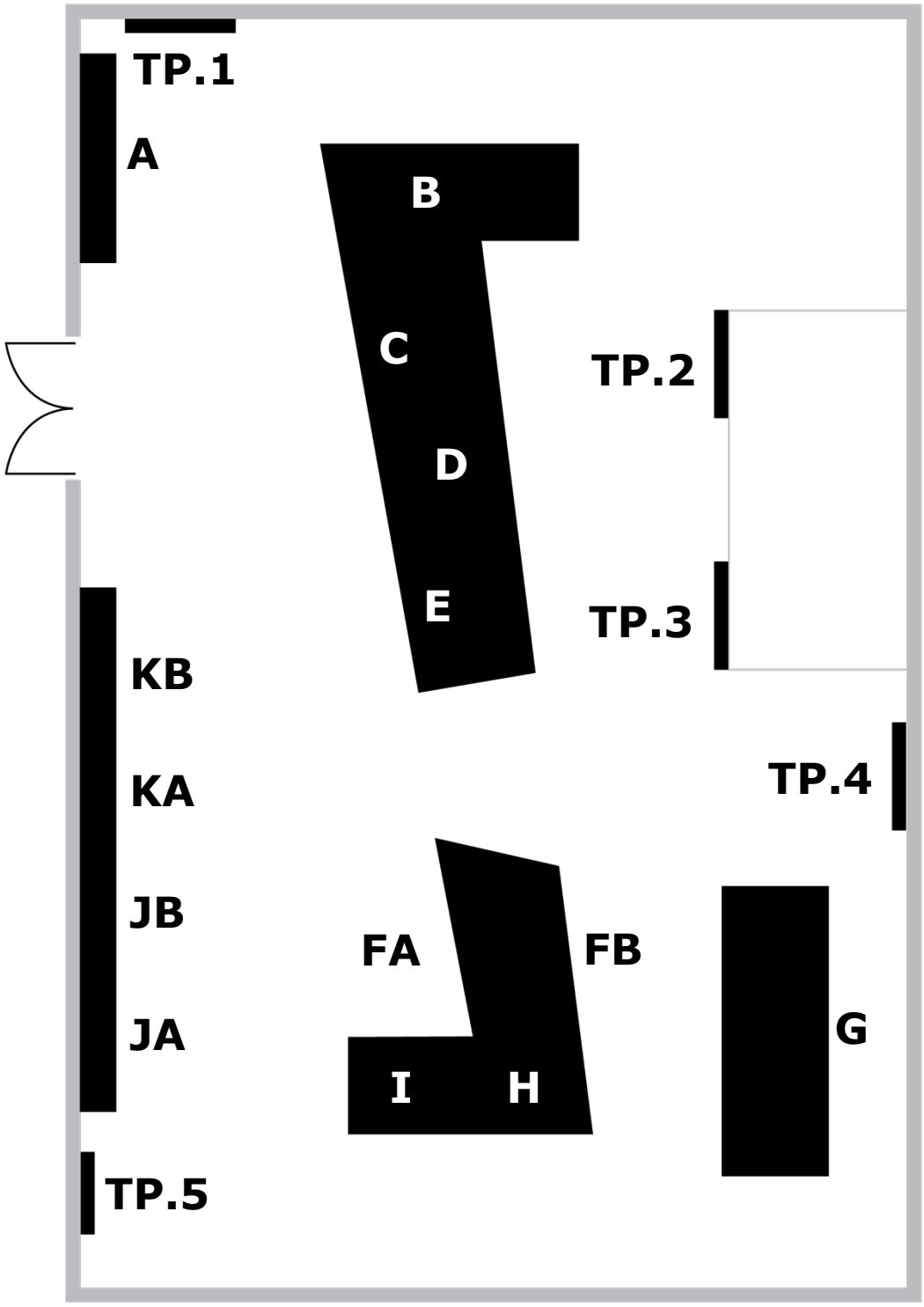
Large Print Guide

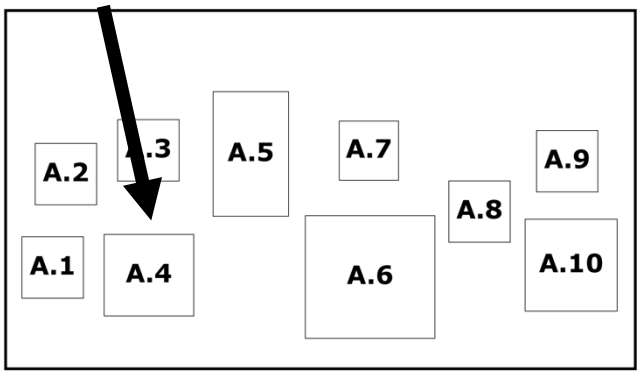
Ceramics

Level 3
Permanent Galleries
Materials & Design

Floorplan of Gallery and User Guide



How to read display case and floorplans



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A.4

Teapot with openwork decoration

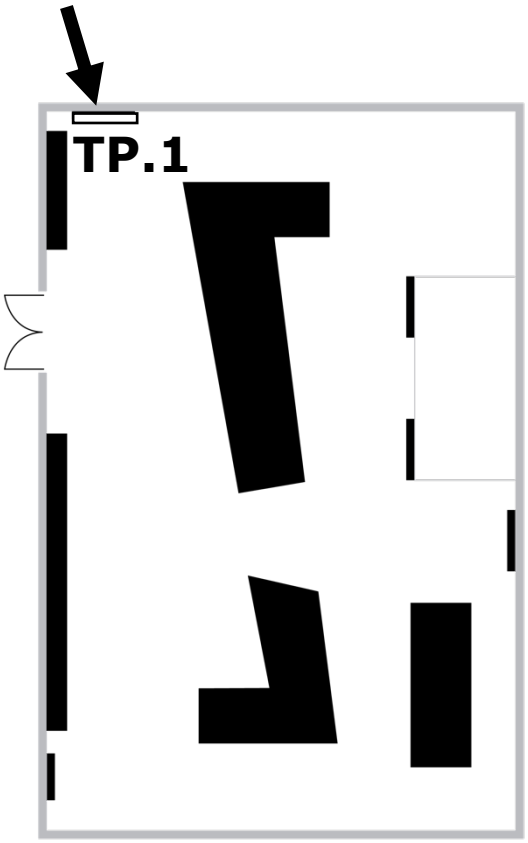
China, Jiangsu province,

Yixing, 18th century

Stoneware

2014-00544

How to read text panels and floorplans



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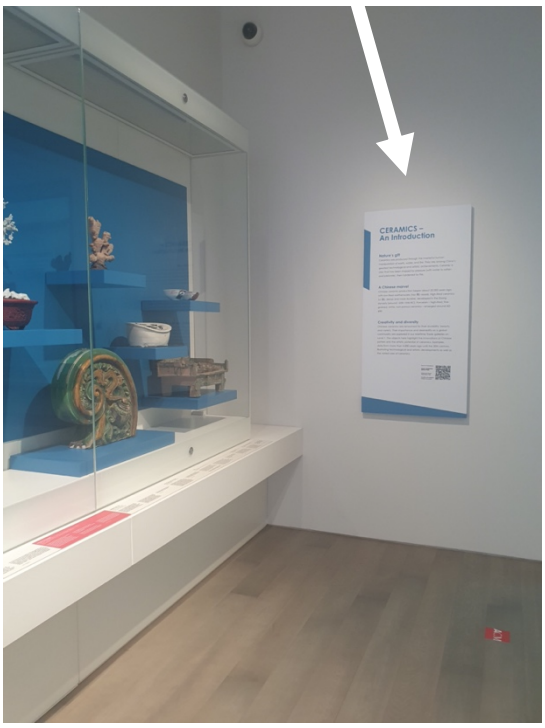

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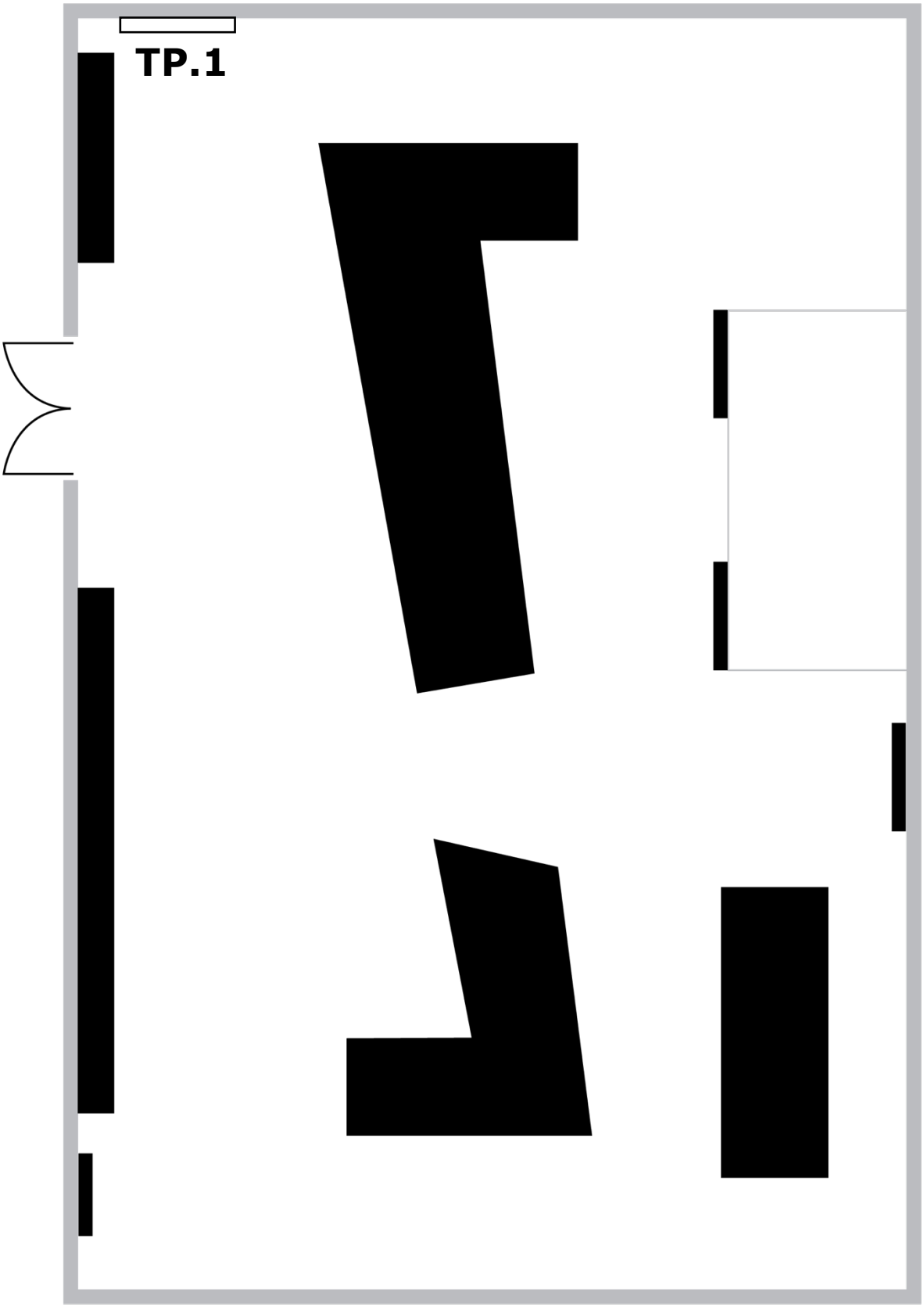
CERAMICS – An Introduction

Nature's gift

Ceramics are produced through the masterful human manipulation of earth, water and fire.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Ceramics – An Introduction

Nature's gift

Ceramics are produced through the masterful human manipulation of earth, water, and fire. They are among China's greatest technological and artistic achievements. Ceramic is clay that has been shaped by pressure (with water to soften and lubricate), then hardened by fire.

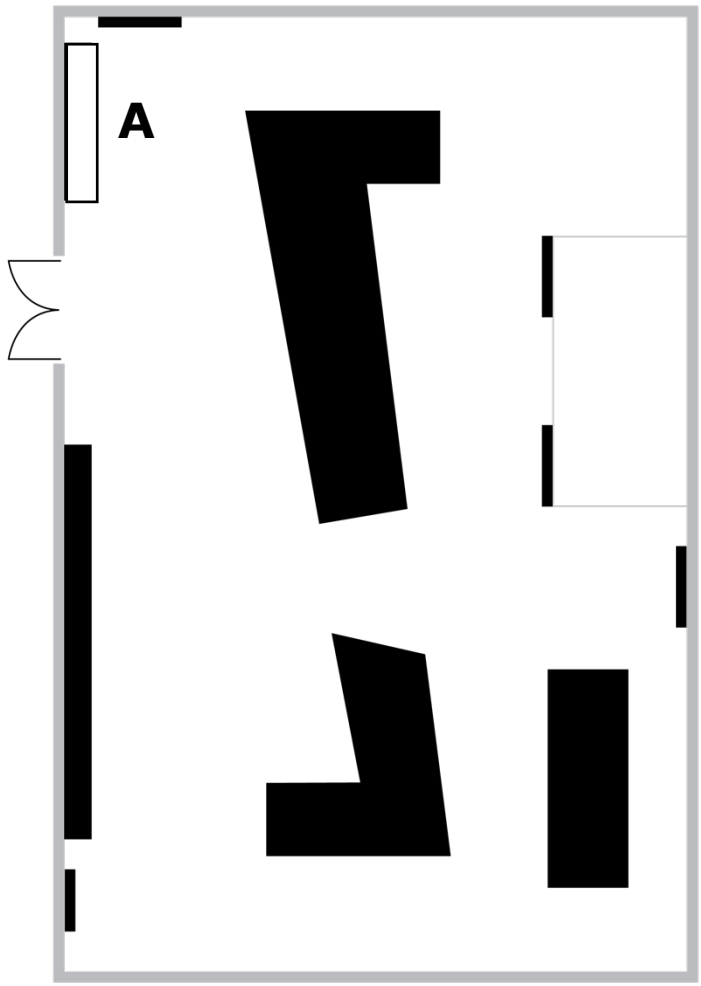
A Chinese marvel

Chinese ceramic production began about 20,000 years ago, with low-fired earthenware (tao 陶) vessels. High-fired ceramics (ci 瓷), dense and more durable, developed in the Shang

dynasty (around 1600–1046 BC). Porcelain – high-fired, fine-grained, white, non-porous ceramics – emerged around AD 600.

Creativity and diversity

Chinese ceramics are renowned for their durability, beauty, and variety. Their importance and desirability as a global commodity are explored in our Maritime Trade galleries on Level 1. The objects here highlight the innovations of Chinese potters and the artistic potential of ceramics. Examples date from more than 4,000 years ago until the 20th century, illustrating technological and artistic developments as well as the varied uses of ceramics.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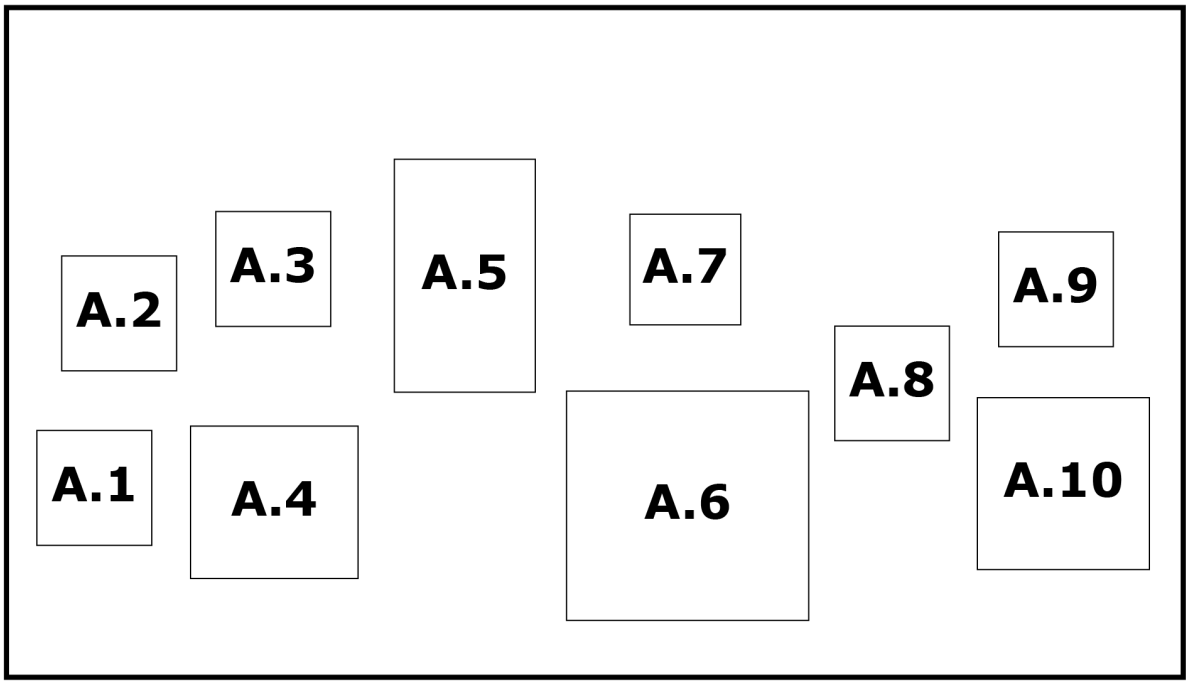
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A

Introduction

This introductory display highlights the diverse properties, decoration, and functions of Chinese ceramics. An integral part of Chinese culture, ceramics serve this world and the next, adorn private interiors and external facades, and are a canvas for personal and political expression.

The Chinese broadly divide ceramics into two groups – tao 陶 and ci 瓷. Tao 陶 – earthenware – are ceramics with porous bodies fired at relatively low temperatures (less than 1000 °C). Ci 瓷 refers to wares with dense, hard bodies fired at around 1100 °C or higher. Western scholarship further divides these higher-fired wares into “stoneware” and “porcelain”. Porcelain wares have white bodies, which are translucent when thinly potted. They are fired at temperatures higher than stoneware.

These three objects represent the three main ceramic bodies. The Chinese refer to both the rabbit and hare as 兔子 tuzi. One of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac, it is a symbol of fertility and longevity in Chinese culture.

A.1

Hare

China, Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220)

Earthenware

2013-00567

Rabbit or hare pottery figures from the Han dynasty are almost unknown but they probably served the same function as other clay animal figures made in the period. Domesticated animals represented an abundant supply of food for the deceased in the afterlife.

A.2

Rabbit dish

China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen, early or mid-17th century

Porcelain

1997-02629

This dish was made for the Japanese market and is known as ko-sometsuke, referring to the "old blue and white" wares imported from China in the early 17th century. This is a sweetmeat dish (mokuzuke) that formed part of a set of five or ten, and was used in the Japanese tea ceremony.

This dish has "worm-eaten" edges (mushikui), where the glaze has flaked away. The Japanese considered these imperfections natural and saw beauty in them.

A.3

Teapot with openwork decoration

China, Jiangsu province,

Yixing, 18th century

Stoneware

2014-00544

The rise of Yixing teapots can be attributed to the new method of tea preparation that was introduced in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The practice of steeping tea leaves in hot water led to the widespread use of teapots, and Yixing ones were among the most sought after for their superior ability to retain the flavour and fragrance of tea.

This was due to the properties of the fine-grained clay found in Yixing, known broadly as zisha 紫砂 (purple clay). Zisha ware possesses the traits of both earthenware and stoneware. It has a reddish-brown hue and porosity like earthenware

but is fired to stoneware temperatures of around 1200 °C, which gives it strength and durability.

A.4

Table screen

China, Zhejiang province,
Longquan kilns, 15th or 16th century
Stoneware
2016-00636

In Ming China, screens were a standard piece of furniture found in wealthy households, and table screens were commonly used in the study to provide privacy, or to serve as a shield from wind and dust.

A.5

Jardinière with tree

China, Fujian province,
Dehua, 19th century
Lacquer and porcelain
2014-01177

Ceramics are sometimes paired with other materials to create fascinating new objects. Here a porcelain model of a prunus tree stands in a lacquered jardinière (ornamental flowerpot), with the lacquer's deep red providing a striking contrast to the white tree.

In the 18th and 19th century, it was popular to use faux penjing 盆景 (miniature landscapes in pots) as interior decoration in the Qing court. Instead of actual plants, this type of penjing was fashioned out of materials like jades and other hardstones, cloisonné enamel, and gilded metal.

This porcelain-lacquer piece was likely influenced by the more extravagant courtly examples.

A.6

Roof ornament with conch shell

China, Ming dynasty (1368–1644)

Earthenware

1999-00793-004

Architectural ceramics – bricks, drainage pipes, roof tiles – have been used in China for over 2000 years. This lead-glazed piece is one of four sections of a wing-like tile ornament called chiwen 鴟吻. A chiwen was placed on either end of the main roof ridge of a palace or temple hall. As a roof was the highest point of a building, it was seen to be a conduit between the celestial and earthly realms. They were often beautifully decorated with motifs that held symbolic significance in a bid to attract blessings and repel negative forces.

A.7

Ginger-form teapot

Lu Wenxia 陆文霞 (born 1966), Lu Jianxing 卢剑星 (born 1958)

China, Jiangsu province, Yixing, late 20th century

Stoneware

2019-00534

The high malleability of zisha clay enabled Yixing potters to create all kinds of ceramic designs and forms. Modelled as a tall piece of ginger growing from the earth, this artwork belongs to the long tradition at Yixing of fashioning teapots in naturalistic shapes. This highly realistic ginger highlights the skill of the potters, while underscoring their interest in creating whimsical pieces.

Yixing ware is one of the few types of Chinese ceramics that bear the signatures or seal marks of the potter. The seals on this teapot indicate

that Lu Wenxia and her husband, sculptor Lu Jianxing, collaborated on this piece. Lu Wenxia is regarded as one of the most creative potters among the third generation of 20th-century Yixing potters.

A.8

Pillow

China, Cizhou kilns, around 12th century

Stoneware

C-1305

Ceramic pillows have been used in China since the Sui dynasty (581–618). They were thought to be cooling, especially when used on a hot summer night, and to have health benefits (such as improving one's vision). They have also been found interred with the dead in tombs.

Pillows were a popular type of Cizhou ware. Though the name is derived from the city 磁州

(modern Cixian 磁县) in southern Hebei province, Cizhou-type ware was made at various kilns across northern China (including in Hebei, Henan, and Shanxi provinces) from the 10th century. The term Cizhou covers a broad range of stoneware vessels with painted, incised, and sgraffito (scratched to reveal contrasting colours below the surface) designs, but they are typically heavily potted and have bold and fluid decoration.

Painted examples like this pillow are first covered with a creamy-white slip before designs are applied with iron-brown or -black pigments.

A.9

Pair of bowls with Cultural Revolution motifs

China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen, 1969

Porcelain

1994-05777, 1994-05780

The working-class heroes of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–76) dominate the designs on these bowls. The dynamic postures of the figures, the stark red, black, and white palette, as well as the characters written in red seem intended to stir anyone who sees these bowls into action. The slogans, drawn from the Quotations from Chairman Mao (the "Little Red Book"), exhort people to criticise and attack "counterrevolutionaries", to continue with the revolution and the class struggle.

A.10

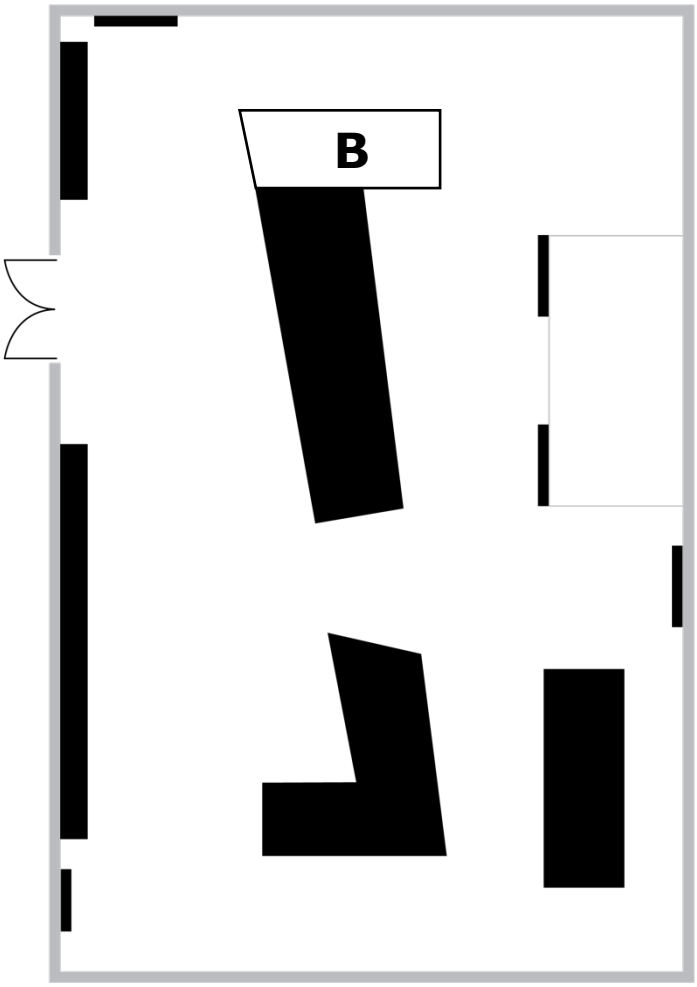
Model bed with offerings

China, Ming dynasty (1368–1644)

Earthenware

C-1304

In China, one of the historically popular uses of ceramics was for fashioning burial objects. This partially glazed miniature daybed is fully laid out with bowls and dishes filled with an assortment of food. The raised bottle placed amid the dishes may have held wine. This lavish spread was to ensure that the deceased would be well provided for in the afterlife.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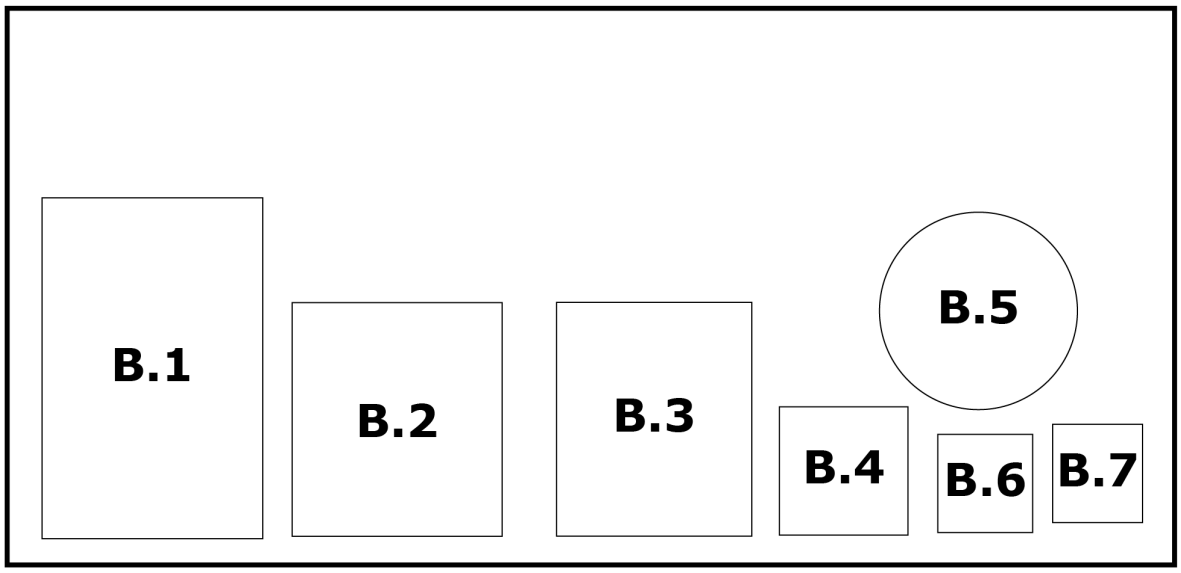
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B

Funerary Ceramics

The afterlife was perceived to be an extension of worldly life. Thus for thousands of years, the Chinese buried precious objects in graves to provide for the departed. This also signified devotion to one's ancestors, who were believed to influence the fortunes of the living. The terracotta warriors from the tomb complex of the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, died 210 BC) are perhaps the most spectacular of these grave goods.

Mingqi

Tombs in later periods, including the Han (206 BC–AD 220) and the Tang (618–907), continued to be furnished with pottery made specifically for burial. These are called mingqi (明器 "spirit objects"). Confucius stated that they should be unsuitable for actual use, to set them apart from the world of the living. Potters

deliberately made objects that were too small, distorted, or too coarse to be functional.

Valuable Historical Records

These tomb ceramics provide important glimpses into the past. They show different aspects of life, from military retinues and scenes of entertainment to architectural structures.

B.1

Pair of tomb guardian beasts

China, Tang dynasty (618–907)

Earthenware

Purchased with funds from The Shaw Foundation

1995-00957

Tomb figures constitute a significant proportion of Tang earthenware. This pair of figures called zhenmushou 镇墓兽 (beasts that guard the tomb) were placed in niches along the passageway to the tomb, or stood guard outside the tomb

chamber. Their fearsome appearance was intended to repel evil forces that might disturb the deceased.

Both figures are covered in polychrome lead glazes, a representative style of Tang pottery decoration. Although it is called sancai 三彩 (three colour), the pottery could have been painted in three or more colours. Nevertheless, the typical sancai palette consisted of brown, green, and buff-cream. The use of lead glazes coloured by different metallic oxides enabled brighter and stronger colours to be created. The striking visual quality, together with the relative durability of lead glazes, spurred their popularity.

B.2

Tower with a moat

China, Eastern Han dynasty

Earthenware

Purchased with funds from The Shaw Foundation

C-1684

Symbolising wealth and rank, multistorey pottery towers are one of the most fascinating examples of Han burial wares. The basin, filled with a lively assortment of animals, likely represents a moat or pond. Figures of dancers and musicians crowd the upper level, indicating that some of these towers may have represented pleasure pavilions. But the presence of three figures with crossbows suggests that such structures could have also been defensive watchtowers.

These lead-glazed models provide information on Han architectural styles and construction methods. For example, the balcony and roof are

supported by dougong 斗拱 brackets, a structural feature used in traditional Chinese buildings until the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

B.3

Warriors

China, Western Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 9)

Earthenware

1996-01493, 1996-01498, 1996-01502

These figures were once part of a miniature army buried with the deceased to serve and protect him in the afterlife. The curved legs of the cavalryman indicate he was originally placed on a horse, which was probably carved from wood and had disintegrated over time.

Tomb sculptures from the early Western Han period were more martial but as the dynasty progressed and the political climate stabilised, more scenes of leisure (such as banquets, music

and dance performances) were represented by the burial figures.

Early ceramics

Pottery is one of the earliest human technologies, and an early form of art. As people began to farm on a large scale, they made pottery vessels for the preparation, storage, and serving of food and water.

Some of these vessels were given decorative shapes and patterns to enhance their beauty. Potters stamped, incised, or painted patterns on their wares, and burnished them to a shine. Archaeological excavations have shown that some of these vessels were used as burial goods and might have served as ritual objects too.

B.4

Cocoon-shaped flask

China, Western Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 9)

Earthenware

Gift of Mrs Annie Wee

1992-01280

With their distinctive oval form, flasks like this have been likened to silkworm cocoons as well as duck’s eggs. Cocoon-shaped earthenware vessels were popular during the Qin (221–206 BC) and Western Han dynasties, where ceramics were an alternative to more expensive bronze and lacquer burial wares.

B.5

Jar

China, Gansu or Qinghai province,
Majiayao 马家窑 culture (Machang 马厂 phase, around 2200–2000 BC)
Earthenware
C-1221

The Majiayao culture flourished around 3100 to 2000 BC in the upper Yellow River region (mainly in Gansu and parts of Qinghai province). Ovoid jars like this were made from long coils of clay that were stacked, then beaten and smoothed into shape with a paddle and anvil.

Machang period vessels typically featured bold motifs – geometric, curvilinear, and sometimes figural patterns. They highlight how ceramics developed beyond being utilitarian objects into expressions of beauty and craftsmanship as early as the Neolithic Age.

B.6

Stemcup

China, Shandong province, Longshan 龙山 culture (around 2400–2000 BC)
Earthenware
1993-01536

The Longshan culture succeeded the Dawenkou culture in the lower Yellow River valley. Sleek, eggshell-thin black vessels represent one of the achievements of Longshan pottery. These vessels were formed on fast-turning wheels, then fired in a reduction (oxygen-starved) atmosphere which blackened their surfaces. They were then burnished to achieve a glossy finish. The extreme thinness of these vessels (some had walls less than 1mm thick) suggests they were used in rituals rather than everyday life.

B.7

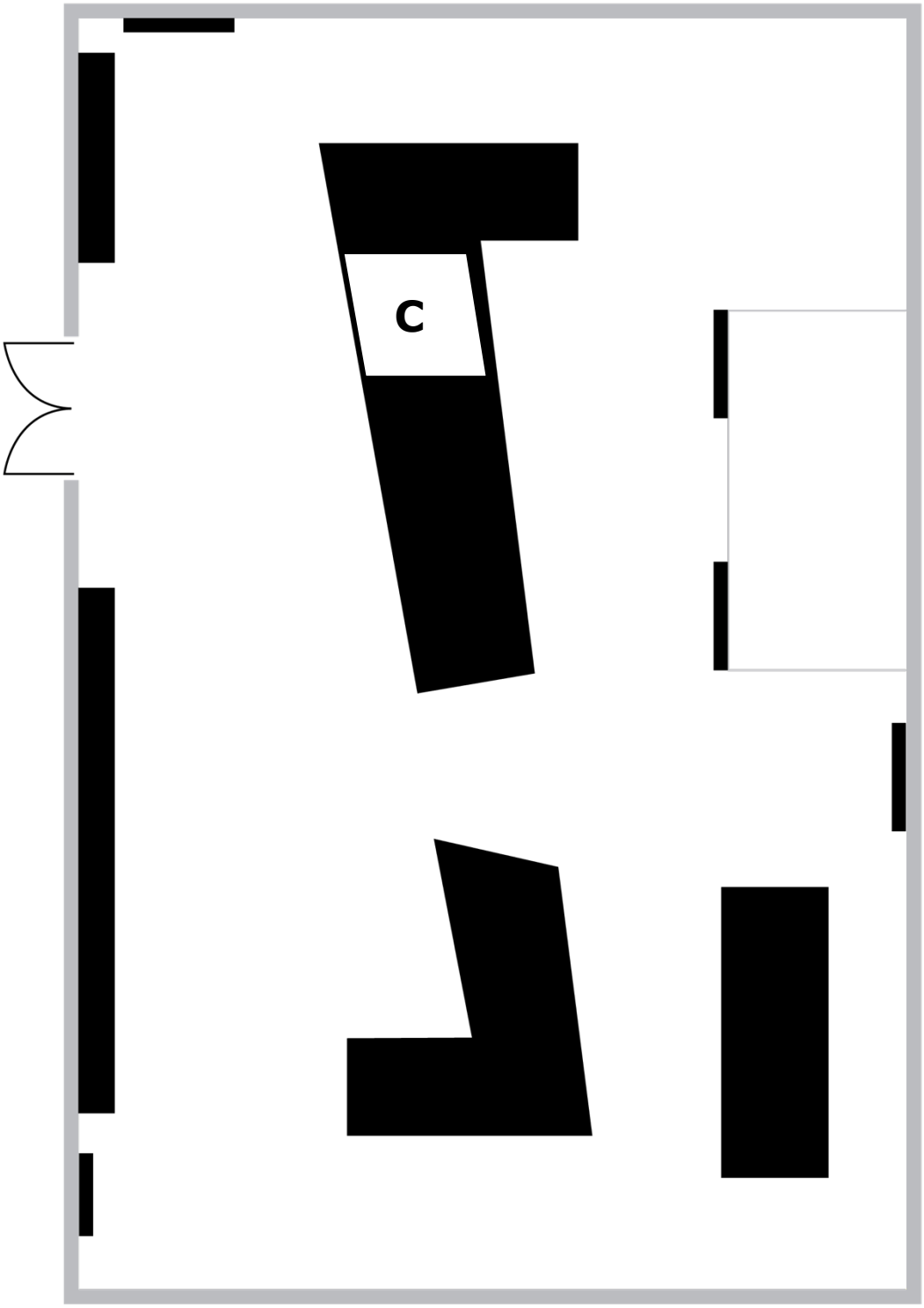
Tripod ewer (gui 鬶)

China, Shandong province, late Dawenkou 大汶口 culture (around 2800–2400 BC)

Earthenware

1995-02067

White pottery vessels were one of the key wares produced in the late phase of the Dawenkou culture. The most representative white wares are vessels with three udder-shaped legs, which are thought to have served ritual purposes. The Dawenkou culture refers to a group of Neolithic communities living primarily in present-day Shandong province.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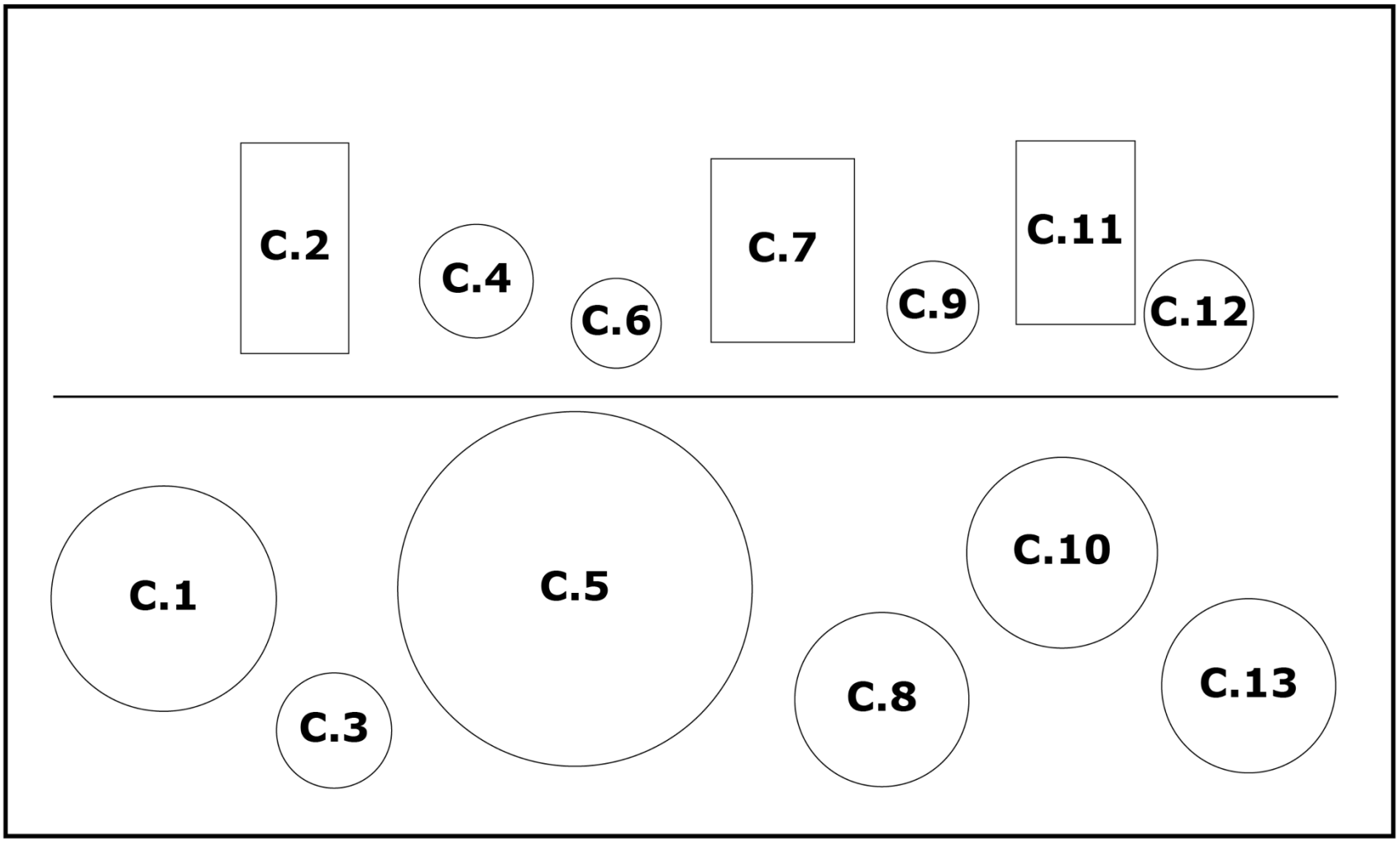
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C

Celadon wares

High-fired, green-glazed ceramics are known as qingci 青瓷 (greenwares) – "celadon" in English. The colour comes from the higher levels of iron oxide in the glazes and clay bodies, and reduction firing (oxygen excluded from the kiln). Other factors – varying levels of iron oxide, presence of other minerals, the firing conditions – result in colours ranging from greyish-green and bluish-green to olive.

The lure of green

With their sensuous glazes that evoked the beauty of jade, celadon wares were prized in China and in foreign markets. The earliest famed greenwares were products of the Yue 越 kilns in Zhejiang province, highly acclaimed during the Tang dynasty as courtly, ritual, and tea vessels (see examples in the Tang Shipwreck gallery, Level 1). The appeal of greenwares is reflected in

the numerous kilns that produced them in later dynasties, especially during the Song period (960–1279).

The Longquan 龙泉 kilns, Zhejiang province, produced wares characterised by thick, viscous glazes. They operated into the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

Guan 官 ("official") ware was produced in Hangzhou, after the Song court moved its capital there. The finest examples have thin bodies with lustrous, thickly applied glazes showing a crackle.

Yaozhou 耀州 ware, produced in Shaanxi province, is the representative northern celadon. The dramatic relief carvings on Yaozhou vessels allowed glaze to pool, bringing out the complexity of the design.

Jun 钧 wares, from Henan province, are a northern product admired for their thick, cloudy glazes (in shades of green and blue), with purplish-copper splashes at times. Blue Jun glazes are unusual because the colour is due largely to optical effects. Tiny glass droplets suspended in the glaze reflect blue light, thus the glaze appears blue.

C.1

Dish with two fishes

China, Longquan kilns, 12th or 13th century

Stoneware

Gift of Mr Chen Chia Hung

1996-00878

Longquan wares were exported in huge quantities from the Song to the Ming dynasty, reaching Japan, Southeast Asia, and as far afield as Egypt. Many Longquan dishes feature a pair of fishes, symbolising fertility and abundance. This

dish was reportedly found in a shipwreck near the Riau Islands.

C.2

Vase shaped as a gu 觚 (ancient wine vessel)

China, Longquan kilns, 12th or 13th century

Stoneware

On loan from the Edmond Chin Collection

EC 381

C.3

Box with peony

China, Longquan kilns, 12th or 13th century

Stoneware

Gift of Dr Francis Li

1997-00084

C.4

Conical bowl

China, Longquan kilns, 12th or 13th century

Stoneware

On loan from the Edmond Chin Collection

EC 382

C.5

Dish with dragon

China, Longquan kilns, 13th or 14th century

Stoneware

Gift from Jurong Town Corporation

1995-03461

C.6

Bowl carved with chrysanthemum blossoms

China, Yaozhou kilns, Northern Song dynasty (960–1127)

Stoneware

Purchased with funds from The Shaw Foundation

C-1402

C.7

Jar with petal rim

China, Yaozhou kilns, Northern Song dynasty (960–1127)

Stoneware

This object has been adopted by Lam Soon Cannery Private Limited

2014-00432

The pooled glaze in the recesses of the carving emphasises the floral pattern. The form of this jar was inspired by metalwork objects (see gilded-silver cup nearby). Yaozhou green wares were influenced by the highly prized celadons from the Yue kilns.

C.8

Dish

China, Jun kilns, 12th century

Stoneware

On loan from the Edmond Chin Collection

EC 379

C.9

Flower-shaped cup

China, Liao dynasty (907–1125)

Gilded silver

Purchased with funds from the ACM Gala 2011

2012-00580

C.10

Bowl with handle

China, Jun kilns, 12th to 14th century

Stoneware

On loan from the Edmond Chin Collection

EC 377

Shallow bowls with a barbed flange and loop handle like this were used as wine vessels from the Southern Song to Yuan dynasty. They were likely modelled after metal wares from Central or West Asia. Contemporaneous examples in gold and gilded silver are associated with the Golden Horde, a Mongol-Turkic khanate that ruled over parts of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Russia during the 13th and 14th centuries.

One of those metal cups is displayed in the museum's Islamic Art gallery on Level 2.

C.11

Lobed vase

China, Guan kilns, 12th or 13th century

Stoneware

On loan from the Edmond Chin Collection

EC 380

C.12

Flower-shaped bowl

China, Guan kilns, 12th or 13th century

Stoneware

On loan from the Edmond Chin Collection

EC 351

C.13

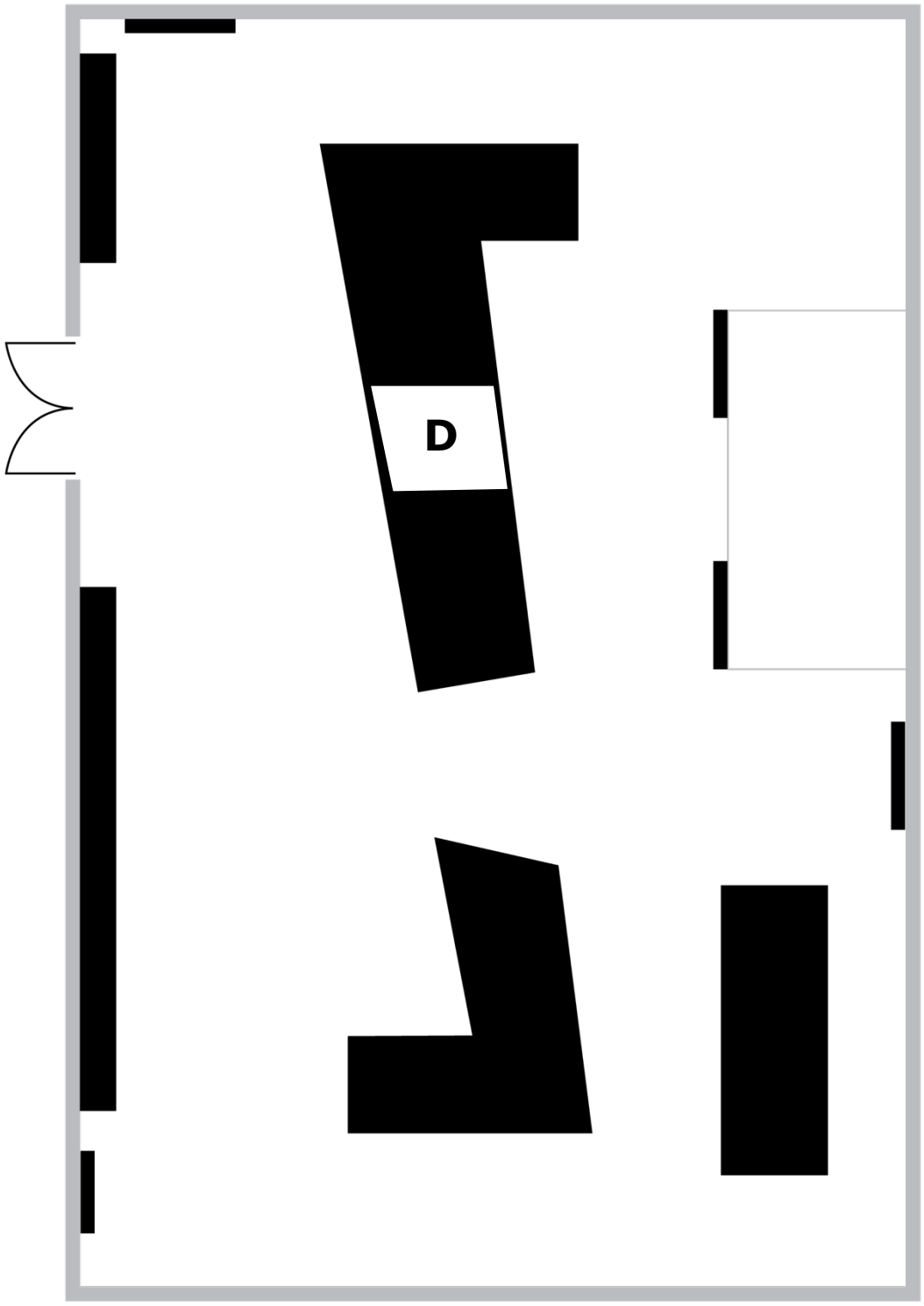
Bowl with crackled glaze

China, 12th to 14th century

Stoneware

On loan from the Edmond Chin Collection

EC 378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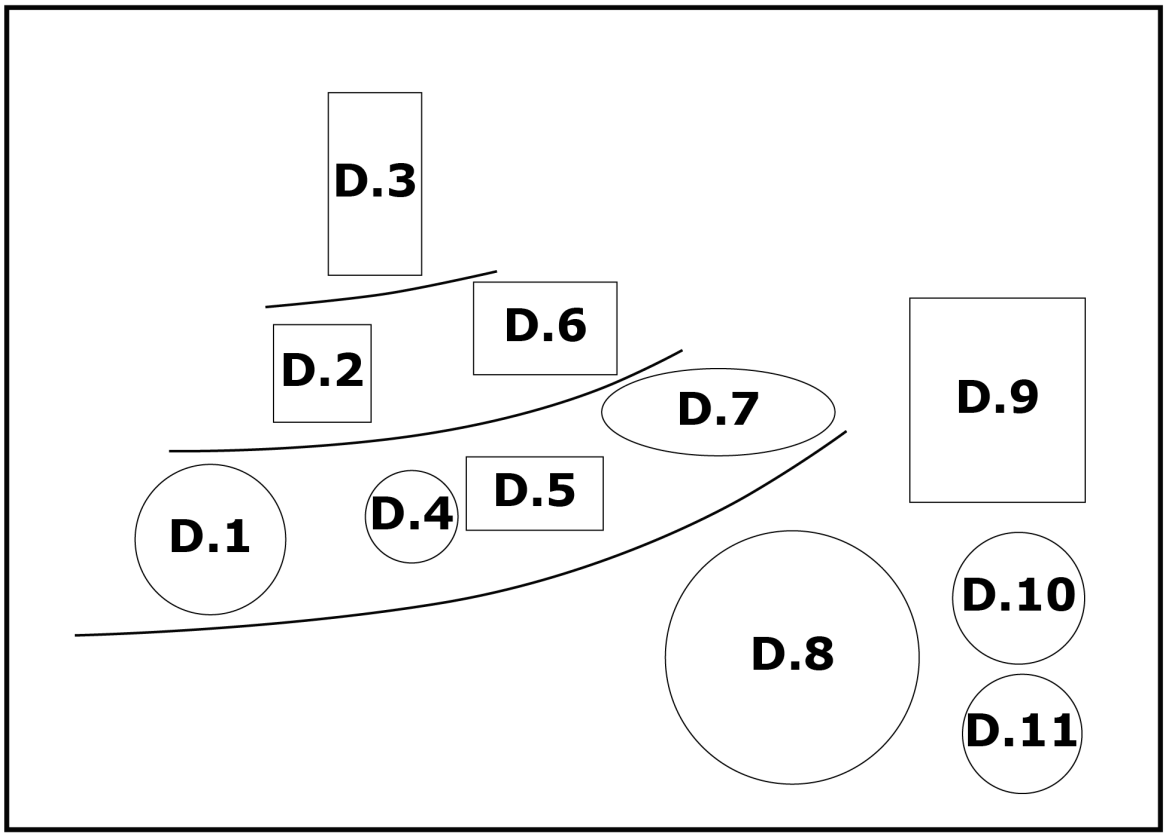
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D

White Wares

Although white pottery vessels (taoqi 陶器) were made in China earlier, it was only in the second half of the 6th century that high-fired white wares with harder and denser bodies (ciqi 瓷器) were made.

Porcelain or stoneware?

The Chinese do not distinguish between stoneware and porcelain; both types are regarded as ciqi. By the Sui dynasty (581–618), porcelain, as defined in the West – white, hard, translucent bodies – was produced in northern China.

Xing and Ding kilns

While several northern kilns made white wares, the finest Tang-period examples came from the Xing 邢 kilns in Hebei province. Xing porcelains were likened to snow and silver, but they were

cheaper and more practical (easier to clean, for instance). During the Song dynasty (960–1279), white wares from the Ding 定 kilns, also in Hebei province, were viewed as the premier porcelain product of northern China. Ding is regarded as one of the "five great kilns" of the Song (a concept that first appeared in the Ming), and Ding wares of superior quality were sent as tribute to the court.

Qingbai wares

In the 10th century, potters in Jingdezhen also began producing porcelain. These wares have a glossy, icy-blue glaze now typically referred to as qingbai 青白 (bluish white) or yingqing 影青 (shadow blue). In line with the prevailing taste for elegance and simplicity, qingbai potters of the Northern Song period (960–1127) favoured form and subtlety in their decoration.

Mass-production

As China's export trade expanded during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), new mass production techniques were introduced. Moulds were used to create more elaborate patterns, as seen in the bowls displayed here. Evocative of jade, qingbai wares were imitated at other kilns in Jiangxi and neighbouring provinces.

D.1

Bowl incised with an infant

China, Jingdezhen, 13th or 14th century

Stoneware

C-1371

D.2

Two figures with a storage jar

China, possibly Jingdezhen, 13th or 14th century

Porcelain

2010-00388

D.3

Vase with petal-shaped base

China, Jingdezhen, 12th century

Porcelain

This object has been adopted by Lam Soon Cannery Private Limited

2011-01615

The best qingbai porcelains have a glossy, light-blue glaze. The beauty of the glaze is best observed in areas where it has pooled, such as in the indented folds of the base of this vase.

D.4

Pumpkin-shaped cosmetic box

China, Jingdezhen, 12th or 13th century

Porcelain

1995-02031

D.5

Two jarlets

China, possibly Jingdezhen, 14th century

Porcelain

2010-00382, 2012-00383

Jarlets like these were mainly exported to Southeast Asia, where they were probably used as containers for medicines, ointments, or other precious substances.

Though small, these vessels allowed the potters to flex their creative muscles. The beading and shaping of the handles into chi dragons (a type of hornless dragon) were among the new decorative elements introduced.

D.6

Pair of double-gourd pitchers

China, possibly Jingdezhen, 14th century

Porcelain

2010-000379, 2010-00380

Foreign trade during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) brought new materials and artistic influences into China, which spurred developments in ceramic production. Potters introduced iron, cobalt, and copper pigments onto qingbai wares. Although the decoration was not very refined, these underglaze-painted qingbai wares were well-received by Southeast Asian consumers.

D.7

Pair of bowls with moulded flowers

China, Jingdezhen, 13th or 14th century

Stoneware

2014-00583

D.8

Dish with moulded flowers

China, Ding kilns, 12th or 13th century

Porcelain

Gift from Jurong Town Corporation

1995-02384

Because Ding wares were fired upside down to prevent warping, the glaze around the rims was wiped off to prevent the pieces from sticking together. That is why copper rims were added to many Ding dishes to conceal the unglazed rims.

D.9

Pilgrim flask

China, Xing kilns, around 10th century

Porcelain

2011-01579

This flask takes the form of a leather bag. The U-shaped flanges applied on each side suggest seams. The shape is inspired by objects used in the nomadic, horse-riding culture of the Khitans, who ruled northern China during the Liao dynasty (907–1125).

D.10

Dish with incised flower and butterfly

China, Ding kilns, 11th or 12th century

Porcelain

Gift from Jurong Town Corporation

1995-02408

D.11

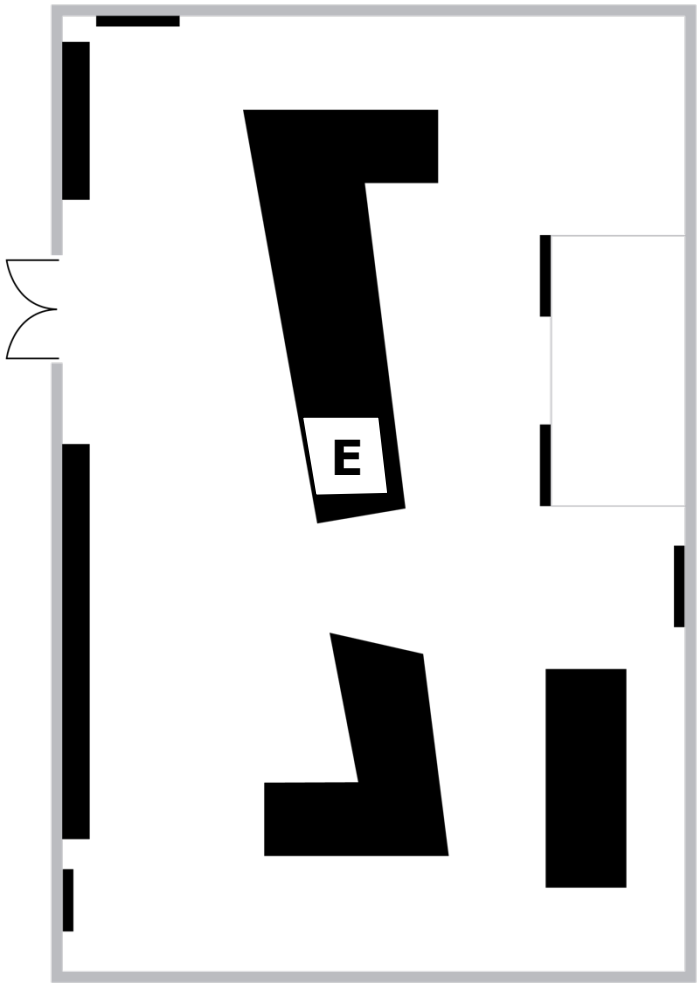
Dish with incised dragons

China, Ding kilns, 12th century

Porcelain

On loan from the Edmond Chin Collection

EC 372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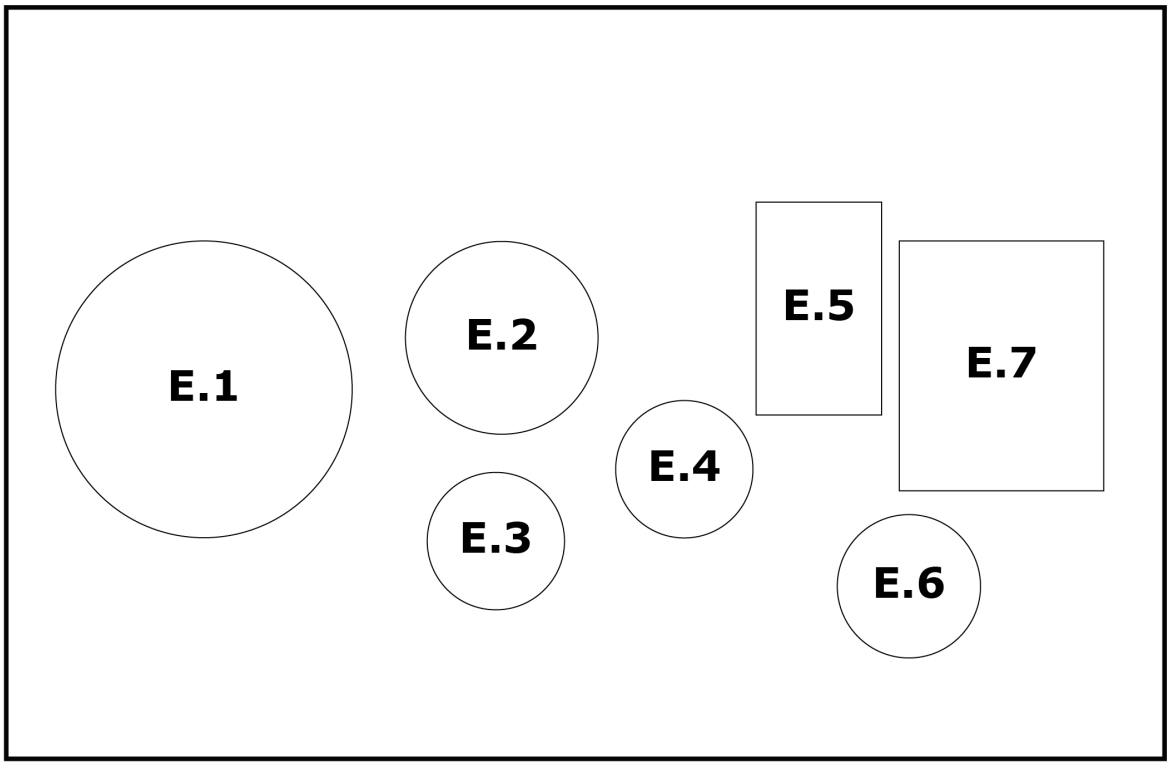
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E

Dark-glazed wares

Like celadons, brown- and black-glazed wares rely on iron oxide as the main colouring agent. These dark glazes have a larger concentration of iron oxide (5% or more, compared to 1–3% in celadons). Made since the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), these high-fired ceramics were inspired by objects decorated in lacquer.

Tea drinking

The popularity of these dark wares peaked during the 10th to 13th century, with the fashion of drinking powdered tea. Hot water was added and then whisked into a frothy mixture. Contests, in which the tea as well as its foam were judged, were enjoyed by the elites. Ceramic bowls with intensely dark glazes were best for accentuating the white froth of the whisked tea.

The magic of iron-rich glaze

Potters used leaves, wax, or paper cut-outs to create resist designs on bowls. Others relied on the unpredictability of iron-saturated glazes. Excess iron rises to the surface when fired, then crystallises as it cools to form diverse patterns. These designs were described in various ways – “partridge feather mottles” (zhegu ban 鹧鸪斑), “oil spots” (youdi 油滴), et al. Dark-glazed tea bowls were taken to Japan by visiting Zen Buddhist monks, where they were treasured in temples, as well as by courtiers and the military elite.

E.1

Bowl with russet splashes

Northern China, 12th century

Stoneware

2014-00229

E.2

Mallow-shaped dish

China, Song dynasty (960–1279)

Lacquer

2014-00589

E.3

Bowl with “tortoiseshell” glaze

China, Jiangxi province, Jizhou 吉州 kilns,

12th or 13th century

Stoneware

1995-02033

The amber mottling on these bowls, which resembles hawksbill turtle shells, was likely created with an ash-rich glaze. When fired, the places covered by the glaze turned amber.

E.4

Bowl with resist floral design

China, Jiangxi province, Jizhou 吉州 kilns,

12th or 13th century

Stoneware

1995-02033

E.5

Ewer

China, Yaozhou kilns, probably 11th century

Stoneware

2014-00585

The colour of the glaze here is believed to have been influenced by reddish-brown lacquerware in vogue during the Song dynasty (960–1279).

E.6

Bowl with “oil-spot” glaze

Northern China, Jin dynasty (1115–1234)

Stoneware

1998-01073

Tea bowls with iridescent, “oil-spot” glazes were first made at the Jian kilns in Fujian province during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). These famed vessels were imitated at various northern Chinese kilns, a trend which likely began after China was divided in 1127 (with the Jin dynasty ruled by the Jurchens in the north and the Southern Song dynasty in the south). The political division affected commerce, and the potters in the north increased production of these tea bowls when the Jian kilns could not meet demand.

E.7

Ewer

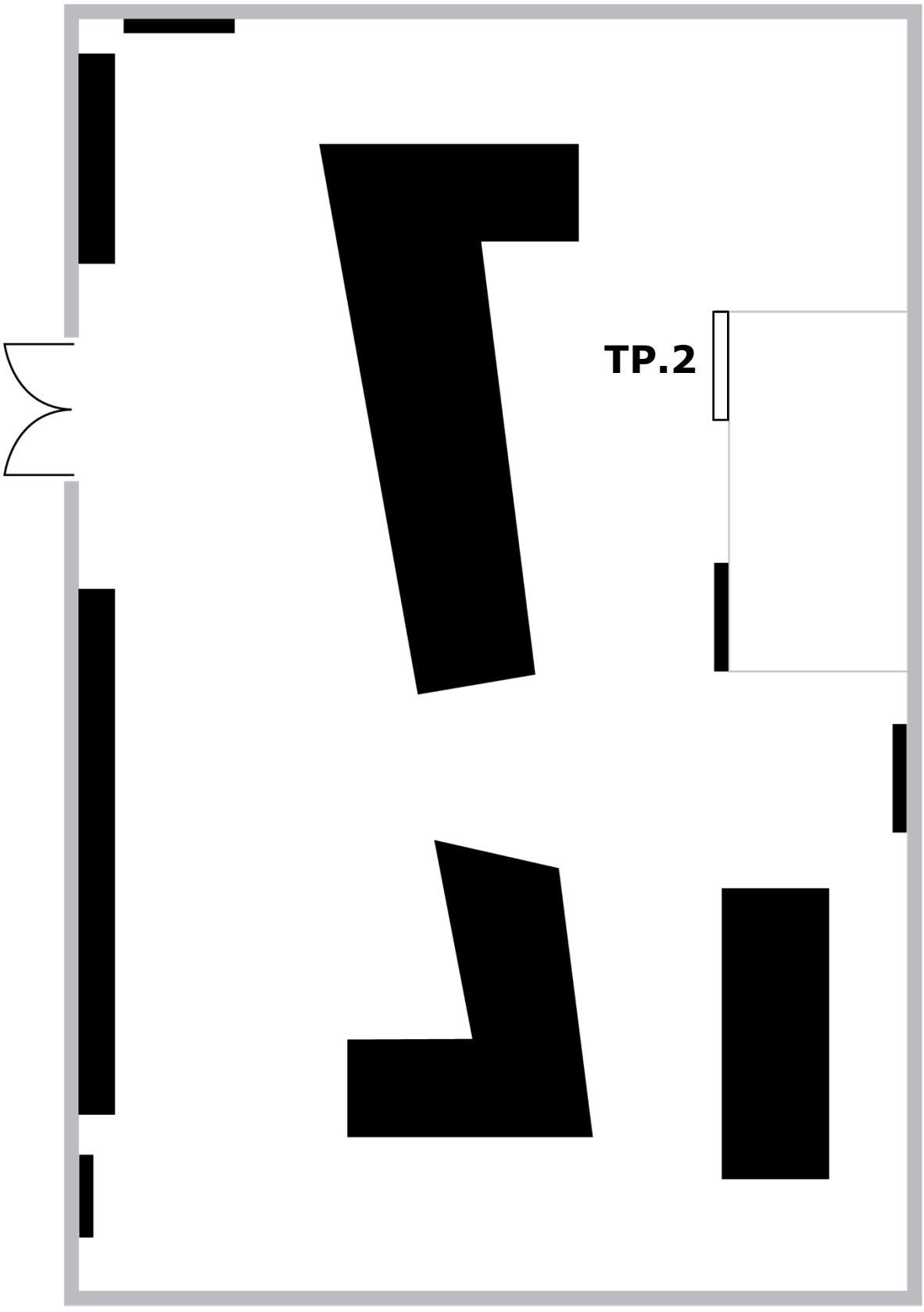
China, Henan province, Duandian 段店 kilns,

8th or 9th century

Stoneware

1993-00210

The milky-blue splashes on this ewer were made by brushing an ash-rich glaze onto the dark glaze before firing.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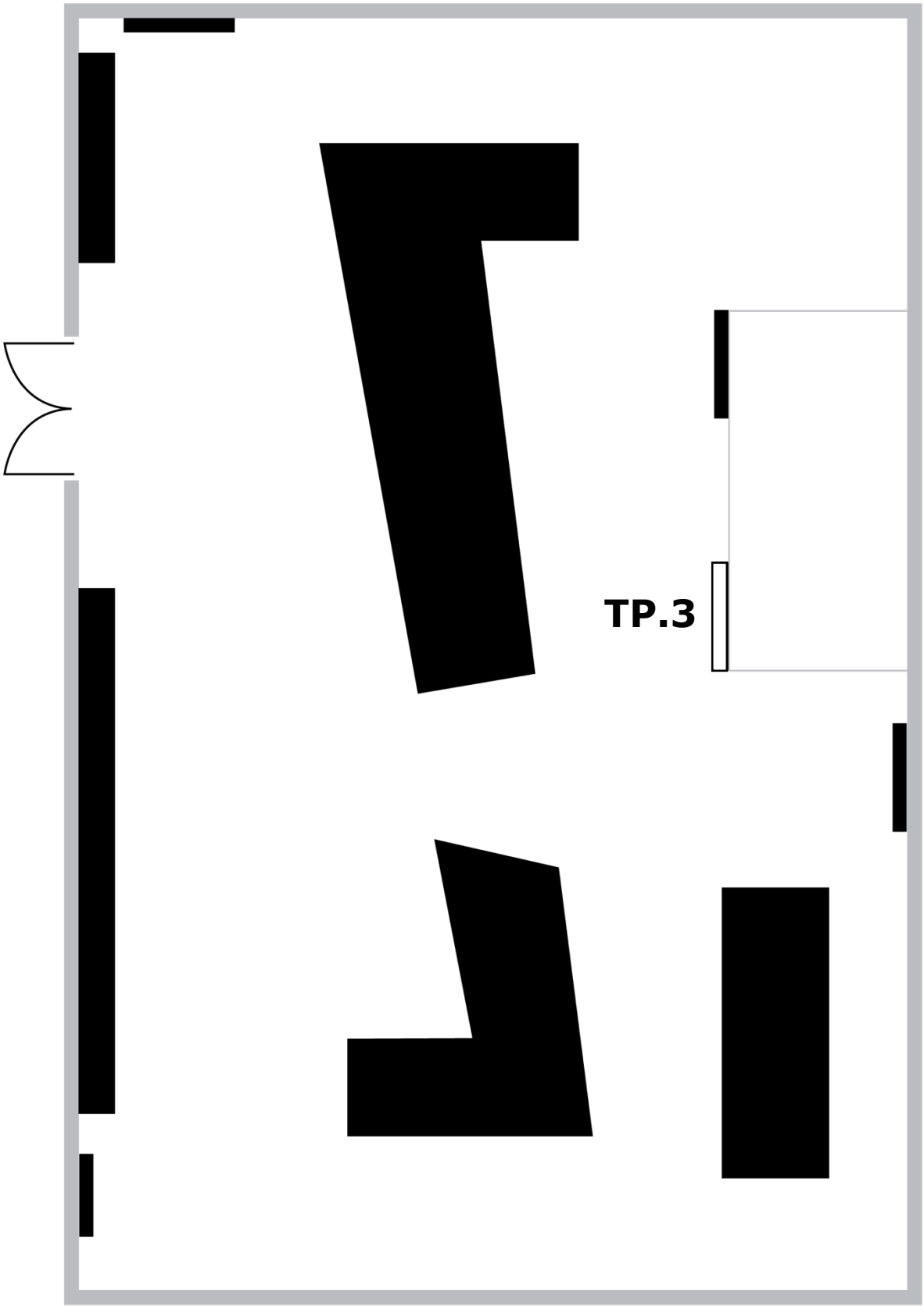
TP.2

China’s geology

The abundance of suitable raw materials (clays and mineral pigments) in many parts of China contributed to the wide range and high-quality of Chinese ceramics. Different geological conditions in various regions produced materials with different properties, which shaped their products.

A north-south divide

Geologically (as well as geographically and culturally), China is separated by the Qin Mountains (Qinling 秦岭) and Huai River (Huaihe 淮河). In general, high-fired ceramics from the north tend to have clay-rich bodies with higher alumina content. In the south, ceramics are composed more from “china stone” (cishi 瓷石, also called “porcelain stone”) rich in quartz and mica. The high silica content of the southern bodies gives it a more glassy and granular, sugary white appearance.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TP.3

The magic of fire

Advances in kiln design and technology enabled Chinese potters to fire ceramics at high temperatures. Turning clay to ceramics in a kiln is a crucial step in the production process. Firing is irreversible and entails a certain degree of uncertainty. It can transform wares in pleasantly surprising ways – but also ruin them.

The earliest ceramics were produced by heating them directly in an open fire, but in the Neolithic period (around 10,000–2,000 BC), the first kilns emerged. They became progressively more efficient.

Key kiln types

By the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BC), two major types of high-temperature kilns had developed, mirroring the north-south division in clay bodies. Dragon kilns, in the south, enabled far larger quantities of ceramics to be produced in a single

firing. Mantou kilns, in the north, provided more consistent firing conditions.

A. Mantou kilns

Mantou kilns (mantou yao 馒头窑), are named for their resemblance to steamed bread rolls (mantou).

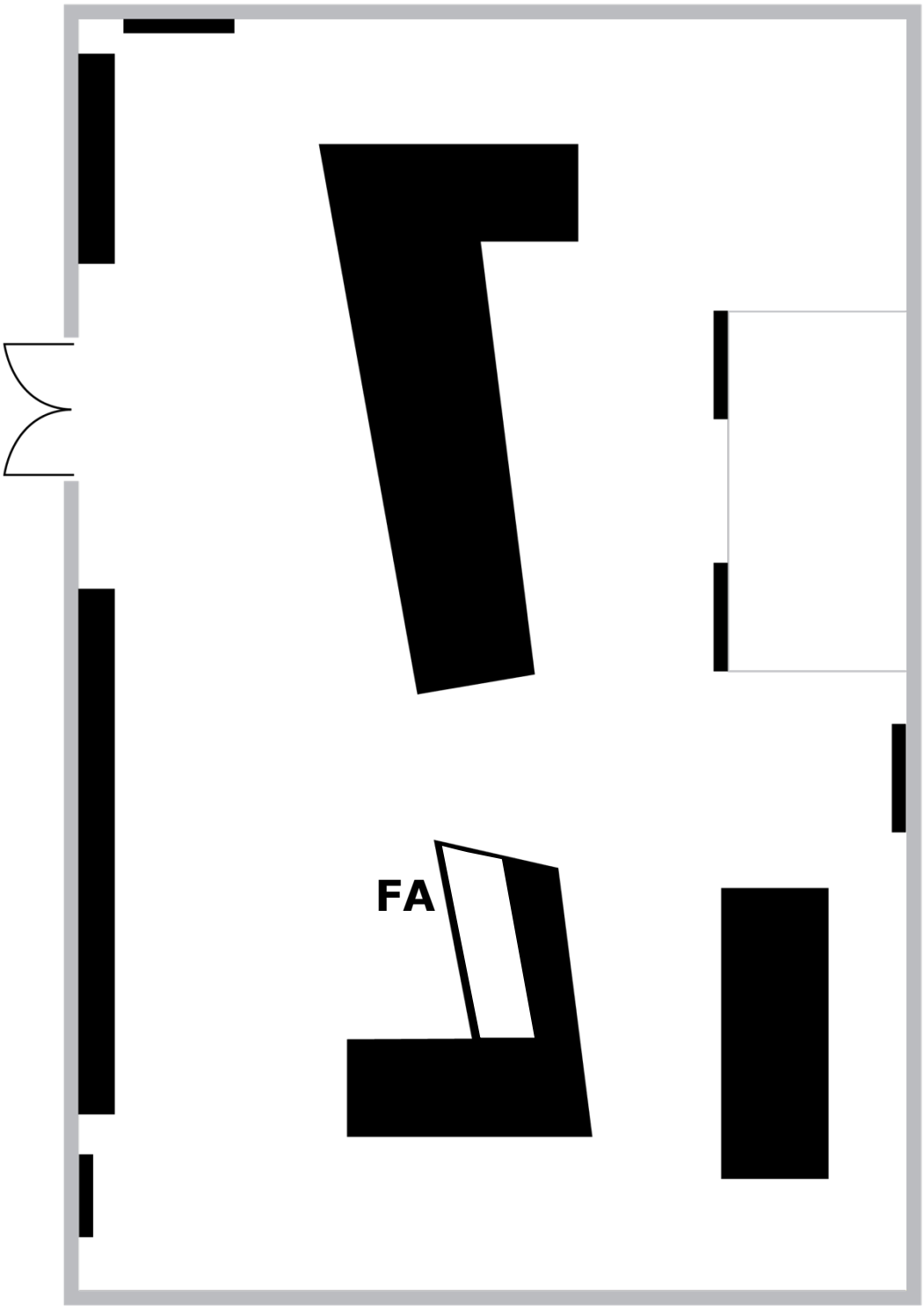
B. Dragon kilns

Dragon kilns (long yao 龙窑) are long, narrow, and stretch along hillslopes. From the early 20th century, southern Chinese immigrants brought their pottery know-how to Singapore and built dragon kilns here. Today, only one dragon kiln remains operational.

C. Egg-shaped kilns

In the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644), this new kiln design appeared in the porcelain capital of Jingdezhen. It was so successful that it remained in use into the 20th century. More efficient than

the dragon kiln, it enabled different firing conditions (temperatures and oxygen levels) within the same chamber. Thus, a variety of ceramics, from high-fired blue- and-white porcelains to vessels with low-temperature monochrome glazes, could be produced at the same time.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FA

Blue-and-white porcelain

Blue-and-white porcelain is high-fired ceramic painted with cobalt-blue pigments under a layer of clear glaze. Cobalt-blue was used on Chinese ceramics from the Tang and Song dynasties, but its use was sporadic. In the 1300s, the Jingdezhen kilns began producing blue-and-white porcelains on a large scale and exported many pieces.

Heavenly blue

The rise of blue-and-white late in the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) was mostly because of the Mongol rulers. Blue was traditionally an important colour to the Mongols, who associated it with heaven. They ruled over a vast empire that stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Persian Gulf. Coupled with their encouragement of trade, this facilitated the movement of merchants and the import of cobalt from Iran.

Since the Yuan, porcelain has been a staple of Chinese porcelain production and continues to enjoy enduring, international fame.

FA.1

Jar with Daoist immortals

China, Jingdezhen, Ming dynasty, Jiajing period (1522–66)

Porcelain

2014-00953

The Daoist immortals gather to pay their respects to Shoulao 寿老, the Chinese god of Longevity, identifiable by his prominent cranium. The many icons of longevity, including the lingzhi 灵芝 fungus (encircling the neck of the jar), pine trees, and cranes, can be attributed to the Jiajing emperor's obsession with immortality. It is widely speculated that he died from consuming supposed elixirs of immortality that contained toxic substances such as mercury.

During the Jiajing period, the cobalt used for decorating porcelain came from local and foreign sources. It was mixed in various proportions before application, which resulted in the different shades and intensities of blue seen on Jiajing porcelains. The key cobalt pigment, called huiqing 回青, was known for its bright, purple-tinged blue. Where huiqing pigments came from is still debated, but Xinjiang has been suggested as a probable source.

FA.2

Stem cup

China, Jingdezhen, Yuan dynasty (1279–1368)

Porcelain

1997-04802

This stemcup features a popular motif on Yuan blue-and-white porcelain – a three-clawed dragon in pursuit of a flaming pearl (a symbol of wisdom and enlightenment).

FA.3

Brush washer

China, Jingdezhen, Ming dynasty, Xuande period (1426–35)

Porcelain

Marked: 大明宣德年製 (Made in the Xuande reign of the Great Ming)

1999-02657

The five-clawed dragon, a symbol of the emperor, is one of the most frequently seen motifs on imperial Chinese porcelain. It is a fitting imperial emblem as the dragon reigns supreme above all animals. It is also a divine mythical creature that connects heaven and earth, and embodies yang (masculine) energy.

The darker parts of the decoration show the "heaped and piled" effect caused by the high iron content of the cobalt ores used on Xuande imperial wares. The cobalt, which the Chinese called sumali

qing 苏麻离青, was probably imported from Iran. Although this cobalt was lauded for its rich blue shade, the iron in the pigment diffuses through the glaze to create blackish spots during firing.

FA.4

Bowl with dragons and phoenix

China, Jingdezhen, Ming dynasty, Jiajing period (1522–66)

Porcelain

Marked: 大明嘉靖年製 (Made in the Jiajing reign of the Great Ming)

From the Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection in memory of Dr Tan Tsze Chor

2002-00099

FA.5

Dish with dragons and ruyi scrolls

China, Jingdezhen, Ming dynasty, Jiajing period (1522–66)

Porcelain

Marked: 大明嘉靖年製 (Made in the Jiajing reign of the Great Ming)

Gift from Jurong Town Corporation

1995-02387

FA.6

Dish with narrative scene

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662–1722)

Porcelain

Marked: 大明成化年製 (made in the Chenghua reign of the Great Ming)

1993-00184

Narrative scenes from popular Chinese plays and literary works have featured on porcelain since

the Yuan dynasty. The scene on this dish may have been based on woodblock prints of the Romance of the Western Chamber (Xi Xiang Ji 西厢记), a tale that originated in the Tang dynasty (618–907) and evolved into a play in the Yuan dynasty. It is one of the most popular stories from the "scholar-beauty" romance genre, where two young individuals meet, fall in love, surmount various obstacles, and live happily after.

FA.7

Vase with panelled decoration

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662–1722)

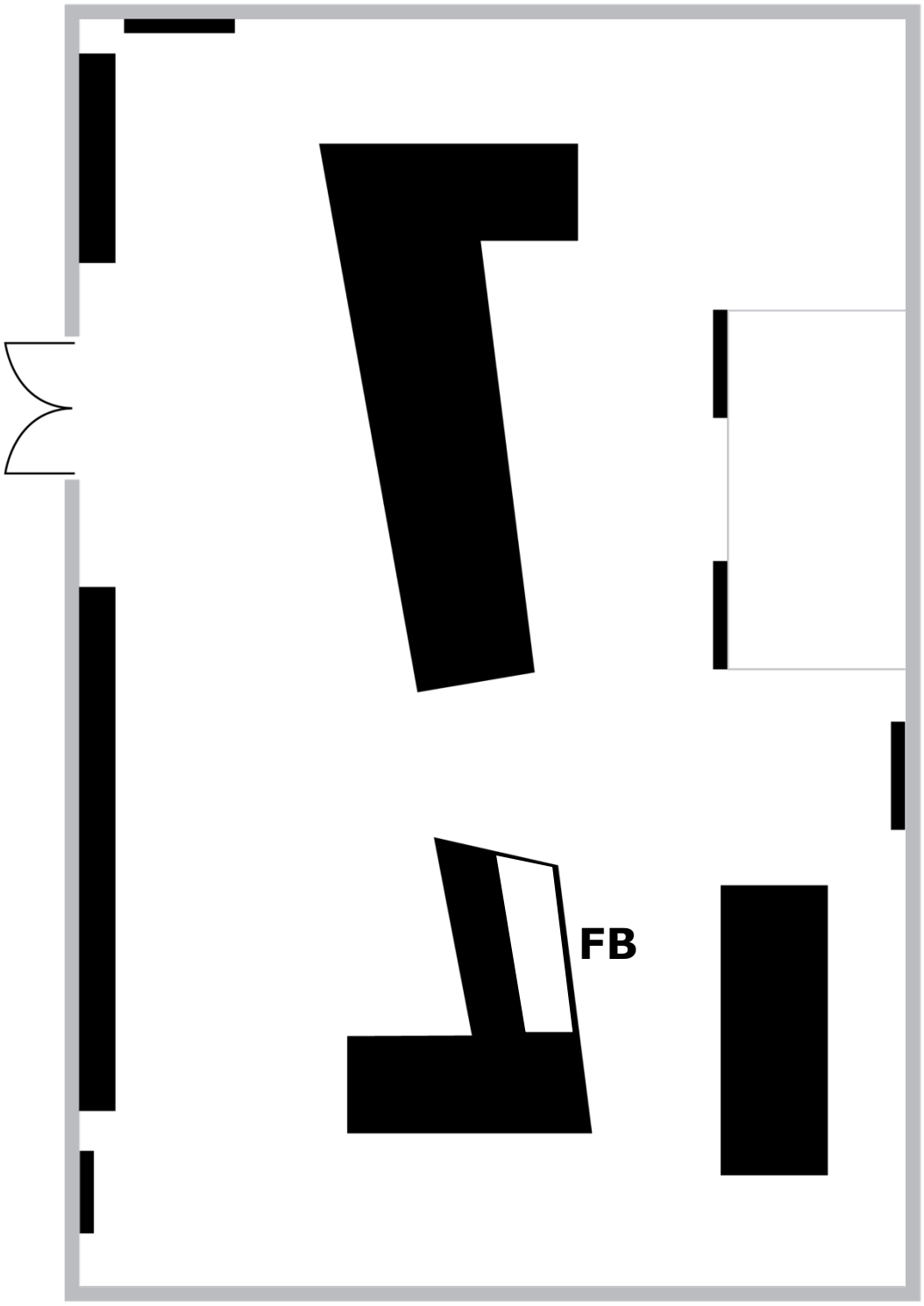
Porcelain

From the Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection in memory of Dr Tan Tsze Chor

2002-00095

The warriors and officials alternating with idyllic images of flowers, rocks, and landscapes are depicted in different shades of blue, a characteristic of Kangxi-period blue-and-white porcelain. These gradations in colour bring to mind the ink washes of Chinese brush painting.

Cobalt used on Kangxi porcelains came from Zhejiang and Yunnan. The refined quality of cobalt, the clarity and vibrancy of colours, as well as dynamic decoration seen on Kangxi blue-and-white porcelain made it one of the high points in the history of Chinese blue-and-white wares.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Monochrome porcelains and glorious glazes

A glaze is a glass-like coating fused to the ceramic body to waterproof and decorate it. Glazes take on many colours, due to the different minerals present, firing temperature, and amount of oxygen in the kiln.

Firing and flux

There are high-firing or low-firing glazes. They are also classified according to the type of flux used (a flux lowers the melting point of the glaze). Lead-fluxed glazes, fired at temperatures below 1000°C, were widely used on Han-period and Tang-period burial wares. They were also used on Liao-dynasty (907–1125) wares, as seen on the ewer here.

During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, ceramics glazed with a single colour remained popular even as potters

developed new types of multicoloured decoration for their porcelains (see opposite showcase). For instance, monochrome blue and yellow porcelain was used as ceremonial vessels at the imperial altars dedicated to Heaven and Earth.

FB.1

Stem bowl

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period (1723–35)
Porcelain
Marked: 大清雍正年製 (made in the Yongzheng reign of the Great Qing)
Gift from Jurong Town Corporation
1995-02413

The red was achieved by firing the copper glaze in a reducing (oxygen starved) atmosphere. Copper oxide was used to produce monochrome copper-red wares from as early as the 14th

century. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, monochrome porcelain was used in state sacrifices and red monochromes were used to contain offerings to the Sun.

FB.2

Green-glazed ewer

Northern China, around 11th century

Stoneware

2011-01613

FB.3

Dish

China, Jingdezhen, Ming dynasty, Zhengde period (1506–21)

Porcelain

Marked: 大明正德年製 (made in the Zhengde reign of the Great Ming)

1998-00726

The dish is covered with an overglaze iron-yellow enamel. Yellow had been used during the Zhou period (1027–256 BC) to symbolise the Earth. Following this tradition, the Ming emperors used monochrome yellow porcelain at the Altar of the Earth (Diqitan 地祈坛).

FB.4

Monk's cap ewer

China, Jingdezhen, Ming dynasty, Yongle period (1403–24)

Porcelain

Inscribed: 永樂年製 (made in the Yongle reign)

1998-00725

These ewers get their name from their rim's resemblance to the shape of hats worn by Tibetan monks. The Yongle emperor maintained diplomatic relations with Tibet and employed Tibetan priests to conduct rituals for his deceased parents, both to demonstrate his filial

piety and to assert his legitimacy to the throne (Yongle was dogged by accusations that he had usurped the throne from his nephew). This ewer may have been used in such religious ceremonies or bestowed as an imperial gift to the Tibetans. White, associated with mourning, filial piety, and purity, was favoured by the Yongle emperor. This vessel appears plain at first glance, but a closer look reveals lotus scrolls, lingzhi scrolls, and the Eight Buddhist Emblems (endless knot, conch shell, lotus, double fish, standard of victory, vase, canopy, wheel) incised on the porcelain body. Subtly incised patterns that seem to vanish beneath the glaze are called anhua 暗花 (“hidden decoration”).

Encircling the neck are four characters rendered in seal script, Yong le nian zhi 永樂年製 (“Made in the Yongle reign”). Reign marks were first used on porcelain during the rule of the Yongle emperor.

FB.5

Vase with “robin’s egg” glaze

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Porcelain

Marked: 大清乾隆年製 (made in the Qianlong reign of the Great Qing)

1998-01074

Blue glazes with darker-blue (and sometimes red) streaks and mottling are popularly referred to as “robin’s egg” or “robin’s egg blue” because they resemble the bird’s speckled blue eggs. The glaze is coloured with cobalt and copper, and made opaque with lead arsenate. The vessel is then fired to a low temperature of about 700–800°C to achieve the effect.

This type of glaze first appeared during the Yongzheng period, inspired by Jun wares from the Song dynasty. Thus the Chinese refer to it as

lu Jun 炉钧 (furnace Jun), as these wares were fired for a second time in a lower-temperature furnace (after the first high-temperature porcelain firing).

FB.6

Jar with Eight Buddhist Emblems and literati pursuits

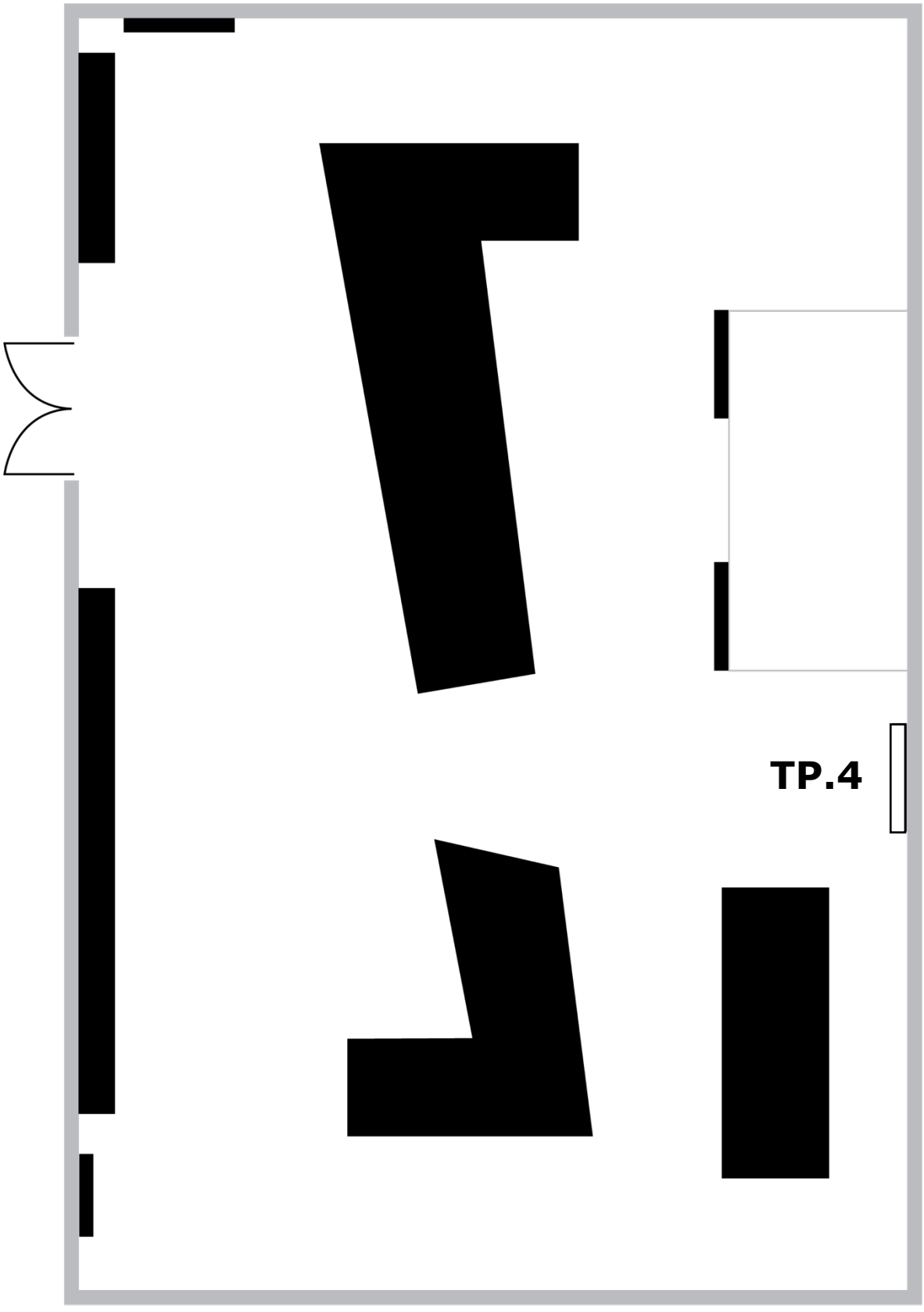
China, 16th century

Porcelain

Gift from Jurong Town Corporation

1995-02385

Polychrome ceramics like this, with raised or incised outlines to create cells that are then filled with glazes, are known as fahua 珐花 ware. Potassium oxide was used as the main flux in fahua glazes.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Jingdezhen – Porcelain capital of the world

Since the Tang dynasty (618–907), the kilns in and around the modern city of Jingdezhen 景德镇, Jiangxi province, have been producing porcelain for various consumers, including the imperial court. These kilns rose to prominence during the Song period (960–1279), when porcelain tinged with a qingbai (bluish-white) glaze was the key product. The town enjoyed an abundant supply of raw materials (porcelain stone and kaolin clay) and wood to fuel the kilns, as well as connections to major water transport networks.

Court patronage

In 1278, Jingdezhen's position was strengthened when the Yuan government established the Fuliang Porcelain Bureau (Fuliang Ciju 浮梁瓷局) to oversee production of imperial porcelain. These kilns made technological advances and developed new types of wares.

Blue-and-white porcelain had the greatest impact in the ensuing centuries.

The dominance of Jingdezhen continued in the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, when an imperial porcelain factory (known as Yuqichang 御器厂, then later Yuyaochang 御窑厂) catered specifically to the demands of the emperor and his court.

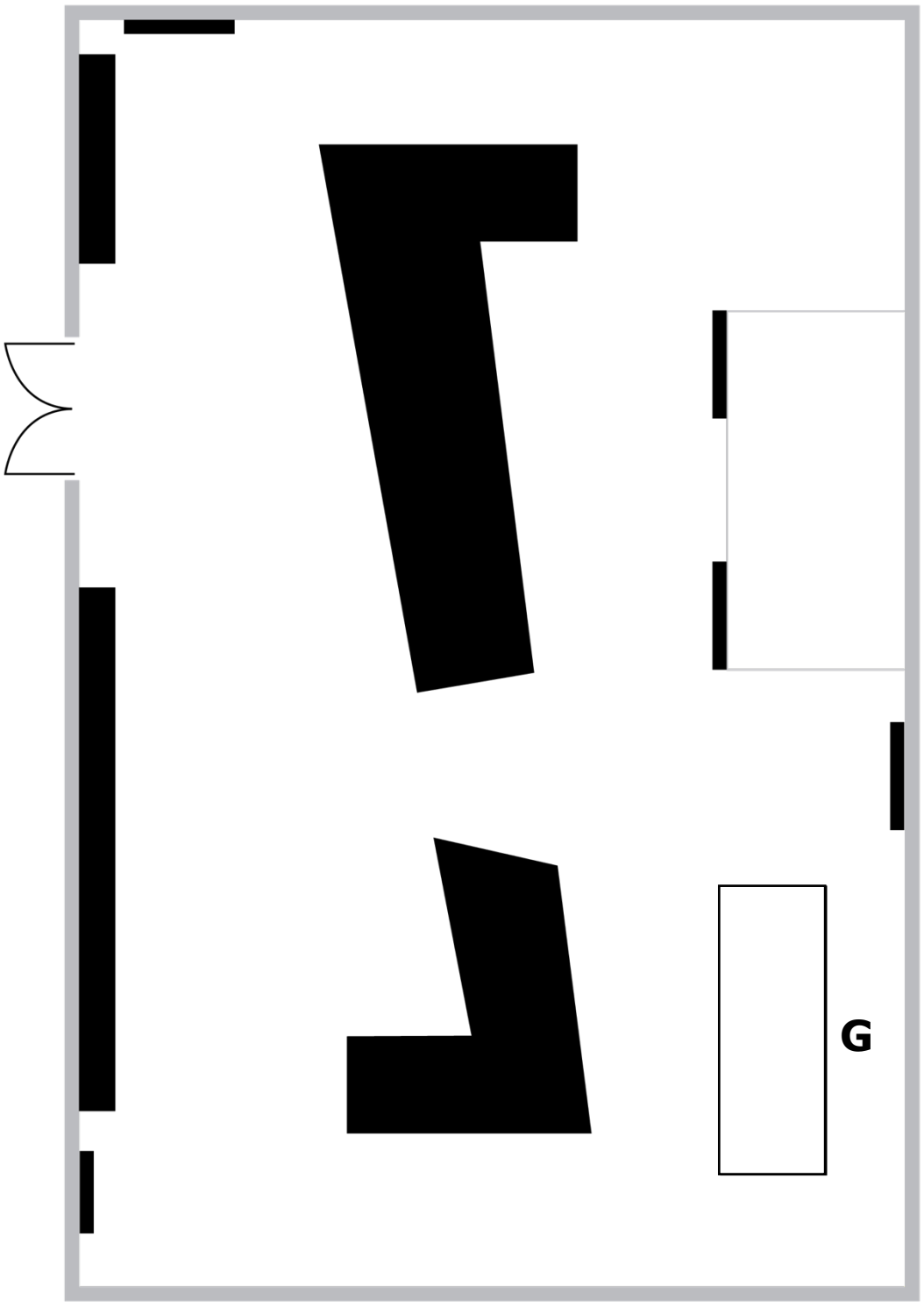
Other kilns

Private workshops also flourished from the mid-16th century by fulfilling orders that were too large for the government-run official kilns to handle, and by producing a variety of wares for domestic and export markets.

Emperors spur innovation

Many of the Ming and Qing emperors took a keen interest in porcelain, spurring technical developments and influencing aesthetic qualities.

For instance, the use of overglaze enamels received great stimulus from the Kangxi emperor. He was captivated by painted enamel objects presented by Western embassies and sought to replicate the art in the Qing imperial workshops.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G.1

Dish with interlocking flowers

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662–1722)

Porcelain

Marked: 大明成化年製 (made in the Chenghua reign of the Great Ming)

Gift from Jurong Town Corporation

1995-02375

This dish is painted in the doucai 斗彩 ("fitted colours" or "contrasting colours") style, which combines underglaze blue with overglaze enamels. Motifs are first outlined or partially painted on a vessel using cobalt-blue pigment, then glazed and fired. Next, the design is completed using coloured enamels and fixed with a second, low-temperature firing. This decorative technique was developed in the early 15th century and reached new heights in artistry and quality during the Chenghua era (1465–87).

Many Qing imperial porcelains, like this dish, are painted with reign marks of an earlier period. This reflects the desire to emulate the fine quality of porcelain from the earlier reign.

G.2

Dish with floral medallion

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662–1722)

Porcelain

Marked: 大清康熙年製 (made in the Kangxi reign of the Great Qing)

From the Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection in memory of Dr Tan Tsze Chor

2002-00104

This dish combines decoration painted in underglaze blue with coloured overglaze enamels. A brownish-black enamel is used for outlining the main floral pattern while the

underglaze cobalt blue is used for rendering leaves that complement the overall composition. Compare this with how the designs are created on the nearby dish with interlocking flowers.

G.3

Bowl with the Three Star Gods

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period (1723–35)
Porcelain
Marked: 大清雍正年製 (made in the Yongzheng reign of the Great Qing)
1998-01401

Auspicious motifs were frequently used to decorate Chinese porcelain. The exterior of this bowl features the Three Star Gods, the God of Fortune (Fuxing 福星), the God of Rank and Affluence (Luxing 禄星), and the God of Longevity (Shouxing 寿星), who represent prosperity, rank, and longevity. The interior of the bowl depicts a

deer, a crane, and some lingzhi 灵芝 fungus, all of which are popular symbols of longevity in Chinese art. In Chinese mythology, the deer is known for its ability to find lingzhi, a sacred herb that could provide immortality.

G.4

Medallion bowl

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Daoguang period

Porcelain

Marked: 大清道光年製 (made in the Daoguang reign of the Great Qing)

1998-00053

The exterior features four circular panels, each containing lanterns and precious objects. The lanterns (deng 灯) are paired with stalks of grain (gu 谷) signifying wugu fengdeng 五谷丰登, a Chinese idiom denoting an abundant harvest.

The interior is painted with four lanterns surrounding a geometric pattern (perhaps a lantern seen from above). The lantern motif suggests that these bowls were made for use during Yuanxiao 元宵, the Lantern Festival, celebrated on the 15th day of the first lunar month.

G.5

Vase with bats amid clouds

China, Jingdezhen, 18th or 19th century
Porcelain
Marked: 乾隆年製 (made in the Qianlong reign)
From the Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection in memory of Dr Tan Tsze Chor
2002-00085

Bats are well-loved in Chinese culture and frequently represented in Chinese art. The character for bat, fu 蝠, sounds like the character for happiness or good fortune fu 福. The imagery

of bats flying amid clouds, many in a downward direction, suggests the bestowal of blessings from the heavens.

G.6

Dish with auspicious creatures

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662–1722)
Porcelain
2014-00543

A qilin 麒麟 and phoenix, dominating the central medallion, have long been regarded as auspicious creatures in Chinese culture and were thought to appear only in times of peace and prosperity.

This dish is painted in a predominantly green palette that some refer to as famille verte (green family). The Chinese simply described multicoloured, overglaze enamelled

decoration (sometimes paired with underglaze blue decoration) as wucai 五彩 (five colour). The number five referred to the use of many colours, not only five. Wucai porcelain was first produced in the Ming Xuande reign (1426–35) and peaked during the Kangxi reign.

G.7

Chrysanthemum dish

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period (1723–35)
Porcelain
Marked: 大清雍正年製 (made in the Yongzheng reign of the Great Qing)
Gift of Mr Saiman Ernawan
1999-00448

Butterflies flit among chrysanthemums on this large dish. Chrysanthemums symbolise autumn and are one of the Four Gentlemen

(si junzi 四君子), plants said to embody the noble qualities of a scholar-gentleman. The chrysanthemum is a hardy plant which blooms in chilly autumn, and thus represents strength and longevity.
The painter used soft, delicate brushstrokes that may have been inspired by the naturalistic style of Yun Shouping 恽寿平 (1633–1690), a specialist in painting flowers and birds. The dish is decorated in fencai 粉彩 (powdery or soft colours), which was the defining porcelain style of the Yongzheng emperor.

By the Yongzheng period, the variety of materials used for making coloured enamels had expanded, with Jingdezhen potters making their own ingredients through experimentation, as well as by learning from European glass and metal enamelling techniques. These colours allowed artists to create a greater variety of designs on fine white porcelain.

G.8

Dish with the Three Friends of Winter

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Guangxu reign (1875–1908)
Porcelain
Marked: 大清光緒年製 (made in the Guangxu reign of the Great Qing)
1998-00052

Porcelain with a black enamel ground was first produced during the Kangxi period (1662–1722). This was achieved by applying a copper-green, lead-based enamel over an unfired coating of Chinese cobalt. The two layers fused together during firing to create a lustrous shade of black.

This dish is decorated with birds and the popular motif of the Three Friends of Winter (Suihan Sanyou 岁寒三友). The trio refers to three plants that continue to thrive in winter – pine, prunus, and bamboo. Their resilience and steadfastness

were thought to be qualities a scholar-gentleman should possess.

G.9

Dish

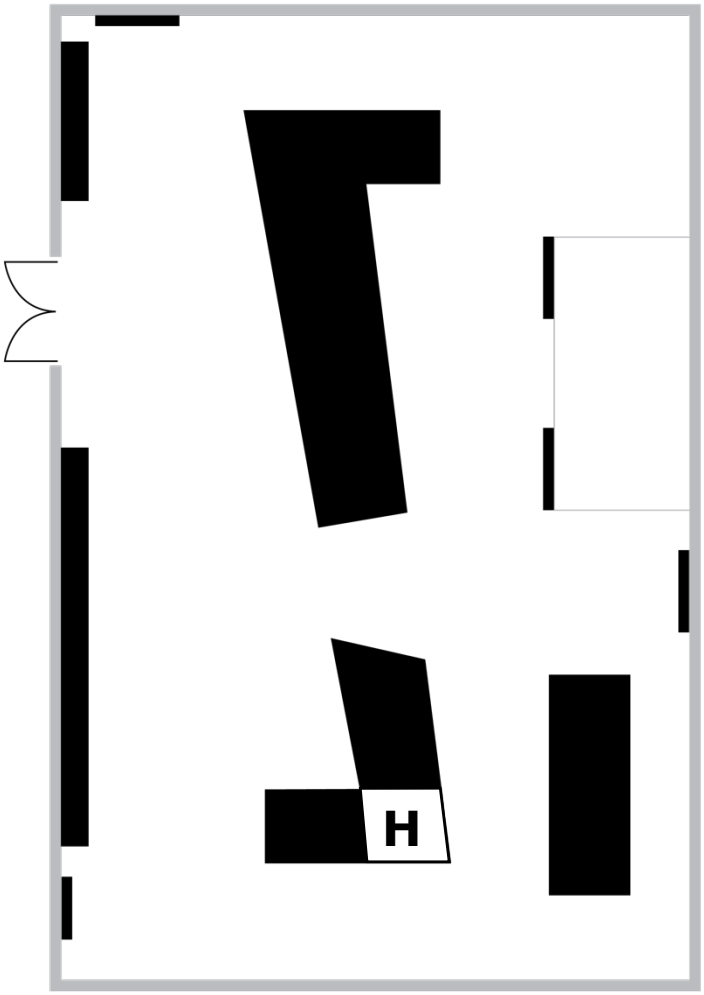
China, Qing dynasty, 18th or 19th century

Porcelain

Gift from Jurong Town Corporation

1995-02376

The central panel portrays a woman fixing her hair while her attendant looks on. This dish would originally have been more resplendent, but the silver is now worn off in areas and has darkened over time. The gilded designs on the red panels are also mostly lost.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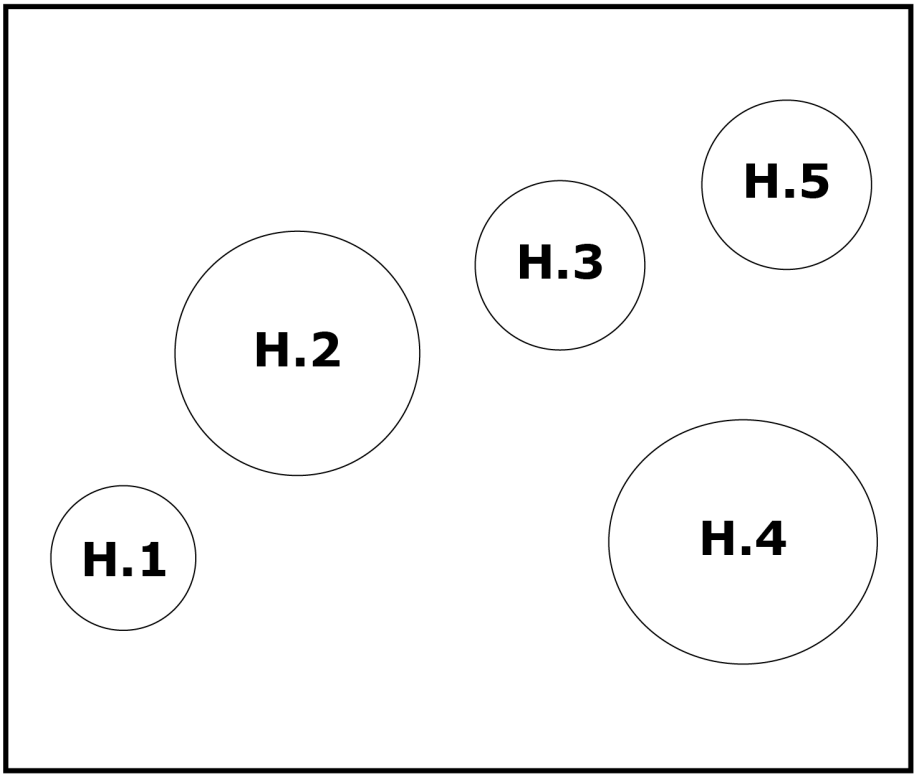
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H.3
H.2
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H.4

H

Polychrome porcelains

We hope visitors can better appreciate the delicacy and decorative details on Chinese porcelain in this specially designed showcase.

H.1

Cup with butterflies and plants

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662–1722)
Porcelain
Marked: 大明成化年製 (made in the Chenghua reign of the Great Ming)
1994-05390

The Kangxi period is regarded as one of the "golden eras" of Chinese porcelain production. While there were new innovations, the potters also paid homage to the past. During the Kangxi reign, elegantly decorated porcelain in the doucai style (a combination of underglaze blue and

enamels atop the glaze) continued to be made. Many of these wares have Chenghua reign marks, as doucai porcelain from this earlier period (1465–87) is still regarded to be the best-ever made.

H.2

Pair of dishes with bats

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Tongzhi period (1862–74)

Porcelain

Marked: 同治年製 (made in the Tongzhi reign)

1993-00182, 1993-00183

H.3

Bowl with bats

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period (1723–35)

Porcelain

Marked: 大清雍正年製 (made in the Yongzheng reign of the Great Qing)

1998-01402

The bat is an auspicious Chinese symbol. The character for bat, fu 蝠, sounds the same as the one for good fortune, fu 福. The five bats (four on the exterior, one inside) represent the Five Blessings: longevity, wealth, health, love of virtue, and a peaceful death.

H.4

Pair of bowls with floral sprays

China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Jiaqing period (1796–1820)

Porcelain

Marked: 嘉慶年制 (made in the Jiaqing reign)

Gift of Mr and Mrs C. P. Lin

1998-00100

The quality of porcelain is thought to have declined after the Qianlong period (1736–95). But this pair of bowls with flowers delicately rendered in the fencai 粉彩 style seems to suggest otherwise. Fencai (powdery colours) is created using an opaque arsenic-white enamel called boli bai 玻璃白 as its base, to which other colours are applied. This white compound gives the patterns a softer look.

H.5

Su sancai 素三彩 bowl

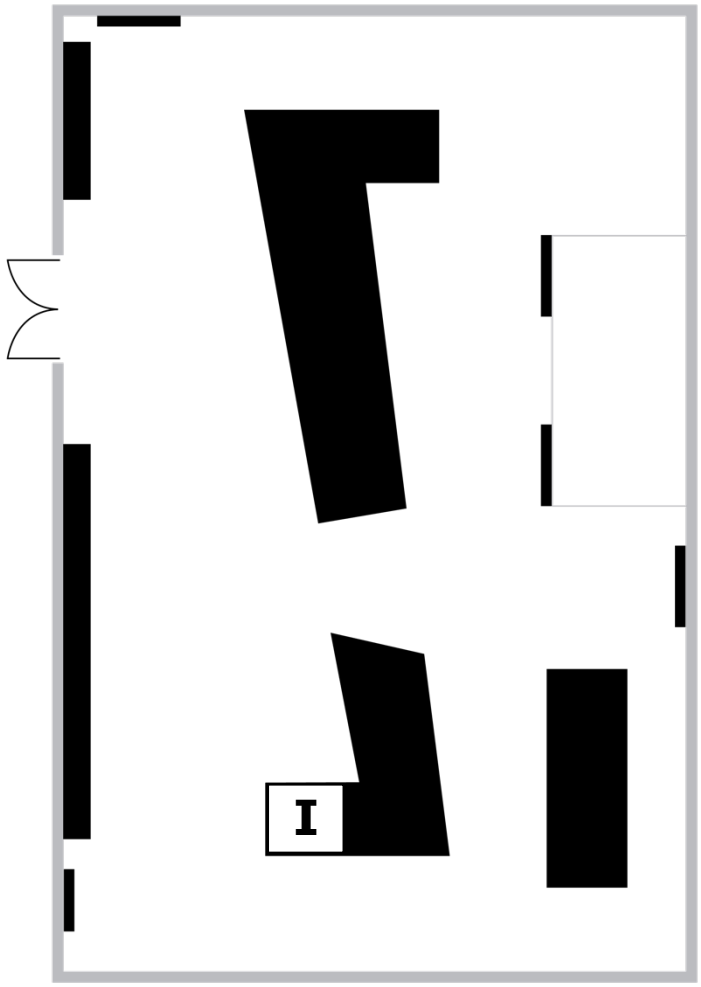
China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662–1722)

Porcelain

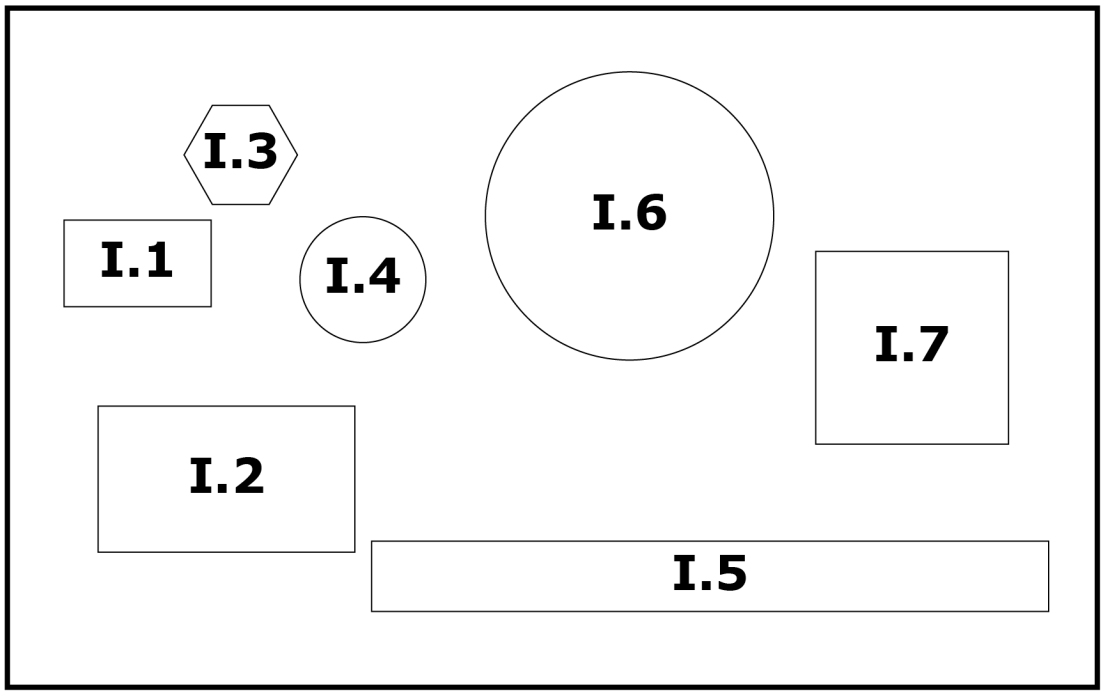
Marked: 大清康熙年製 (made in the Kangxi reign of the Great Qing)

1997-04799

Su sancai 素三彩 "plain three colours" – refers to the painting of enamels (typically in yellow, green, and purple) onto biscuit (fired but unglazed) or thinly glazed porcelain. Look for the incised dragon motifs beneath the enamelled flowers.



TOP VIEW



I

Hickley Collection

Most of the blanc de Chine porcelain in this gallery was donated to the museum in 2000 by Pamela Hickley, in memory of her husband Frank. After the Hickleys' first encounter with blanc de Chine during a trip to Macau in 1969, they became keen collectors of this white ware. Over three decades, they built one of the most comprehensive private collections of blanc de Chine porcelain in the world. Their gift to ACM comprises more than 170 items spanning the 13th to 20th century.

Born in Malacca, Pamela Hickley (1918–2017) lived in Singapore for much of her life, but also spent time in the United Kingdom and China. She worked as the personal assistant to the last two colonial governors of Singapore, Sir Robert Black and Sir William Goode. Pamela and Frank Hickley were both founding members of the Southeast

Asian Ceramic Society, established in Singapore in 1969. Pamela Hickley also served as the Society's president from 1996 to 1998.

I.1

Ingot-shaped box

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

I.2

Group of coins

China, Dehua, 19th century

Porcelain

2000-03496 to 2000–03500

These coins were initially made as tokens for use in gambling houses in Thailand. But they were also used, along with metal coins, as a form of currency in the 19th century. Some have the character qian 钱 (money) on the reverse.

I.3

Hexagonal box

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

I.4

Circular box

China, Dehua, 17th or 18th century

Porcelain

Gifts of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03419, 2000-03420, 2000-03436

Blanc de Chine porcelain boxes were widely exported to Southeast Asia and Europe, and were used to hold many things. In Southeast Asia, some might have held the ingredients for betel chewing. Boxes like this are listed as salt cellars in the inventory of Augustus the Strong's porcelain collection in Dresden, Germany.

I.5

Flute

China, Dehua, 17th or 18th century

Porcelain

Marked: 鳳鳴 (call of the phoenix)

2015-00498

Since receiving the Hickley's collection, ACM has sought to collect pieces to complement and add to their generous gift. This flute – a rare and luxurious version of an instrument usually carved from bamboo – is one such example.

The scholar-collector Zhou Lianggong 周亮公 (1612–1672) wrote of Dehua porcelain flutes that "only one or two in a hundred are in tune. But of those that are, the sound is sad and clear, carrying far better than the bamboo."

I.6

Dish

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03405

Pamela Hickley recounts how when she saw this dish it was “shining at us like a full moon”. She and her husband spotted it in the shop window of a Macau antique dealer in 1969. Seeing it made the Hickleys “decide then and there to concentrate on this ware and [we] have done so ever since”.

I.7

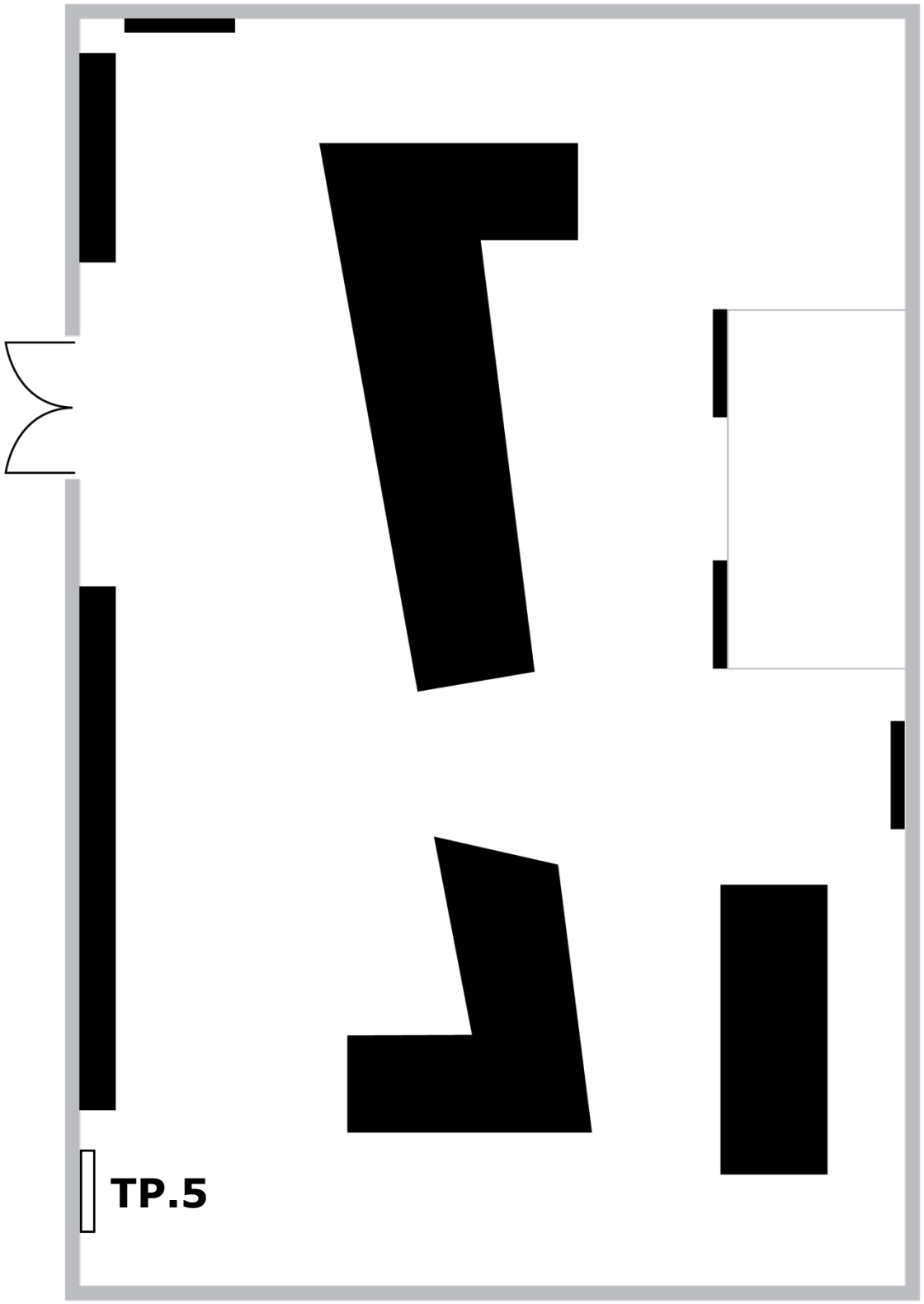
Leaf-shaped dish

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03380


TP.5

TP.5

Blanc de Chine – White porcelain from Dehua

The pottery kilns in Dehua county, Fujian province, are best known for producing porcelain popularly known in Europe as “blanc de Chine” (white from China). They achieved this fame by perfecting blanc de Chine in the 16th century. These wares have a white, translucent body with a smooth, glossy glaze that has been likened to ivory, pork fat, and white jade.

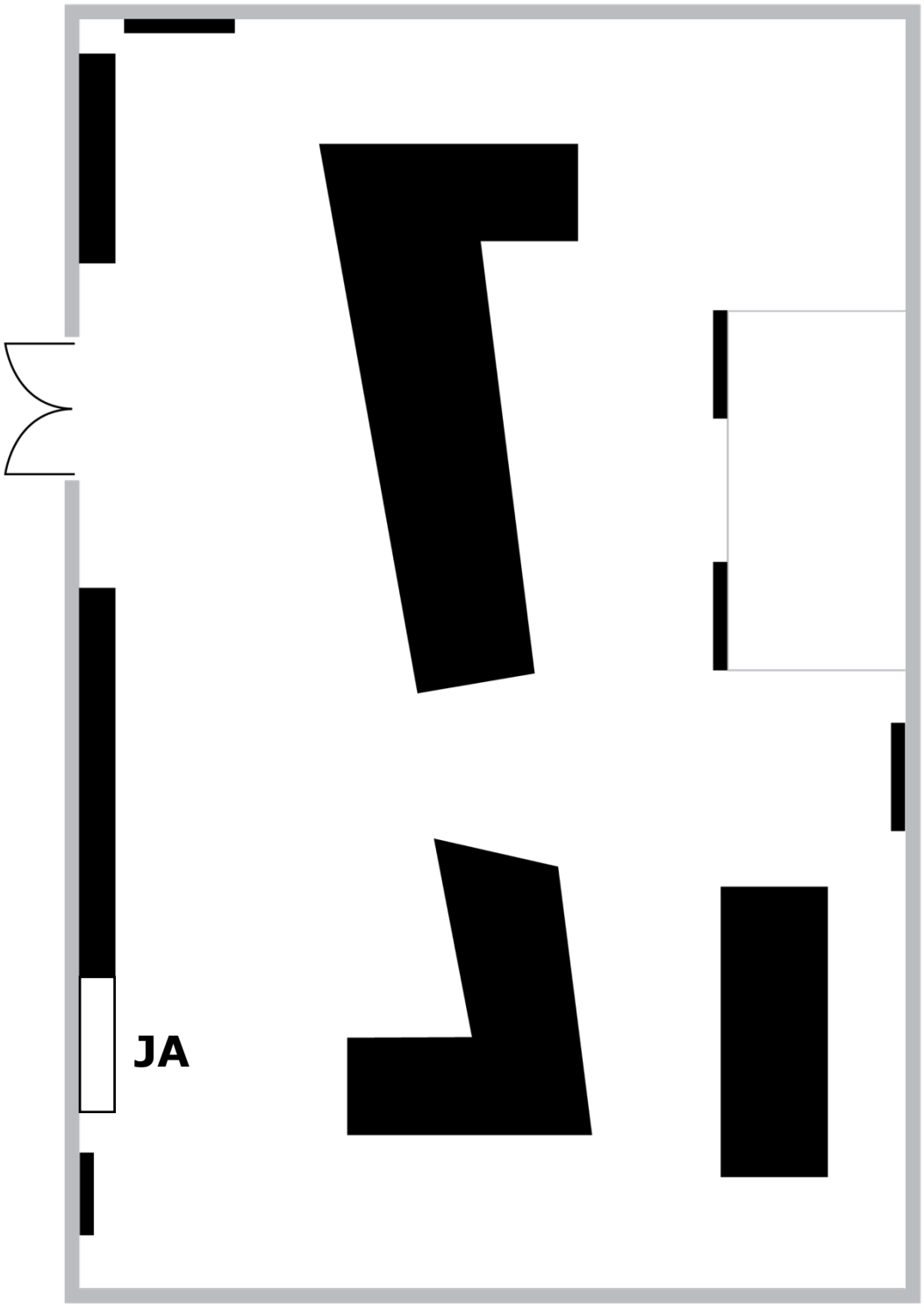
Raw material is key

The whiteness is attributed to the unusually pure porcelain stone from the region. Dehua porcelain was fired in an oxygen-rich environment, which gave the glaze a warm, ivory tone. The mineral composition made it resistant to distortions in high-temperature firings, which allowed potters to make complex figures with fine details. The

relative stiffness of the material also made it suitable for moulding.

Avidly collected

Dehua porcelain was initially produced for use in homes and temples in China, but it quickly became popular among foreign consumers in Southeast Asia and Europe. It was collected by European aristocrats and royalty. The most avid among them was probably Augustus the Strong (1670–1733), Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. He amassed over 1,200 pieces of Dehua porcelain. His collection provided models for the earliest European porcelains produced in Meissen, Germany, in the early 18th century.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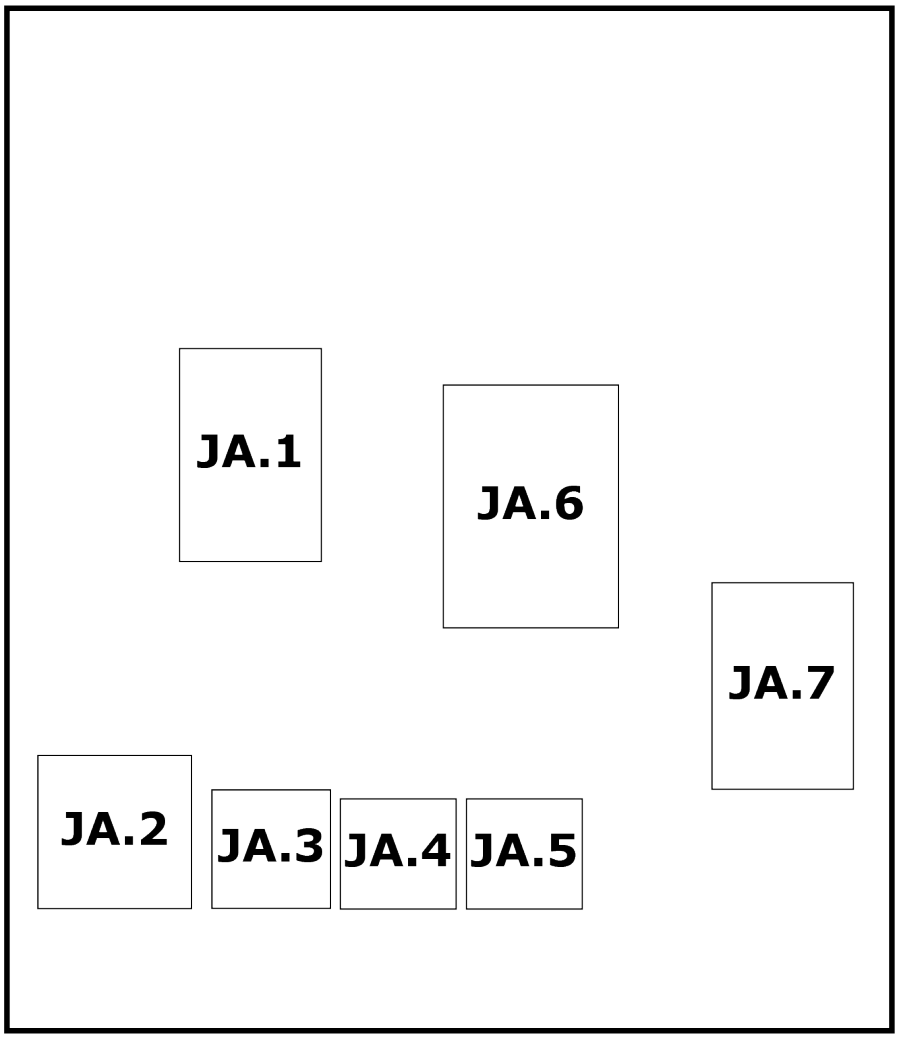
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JA.5

JA.1

Seated deity

China, Dehua, early 17th century

Porcelain

2009-01523

This figure may represent the Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝 Yuhuang Dadi), who reigns supreme among the deities in Chinese popular religion. He commands a bureaucracy of gods who assists him in maintaining peace in heaven and on earth. The Jade Emperor is often portrayed holding a tablet and wearing a crown with hanging beads (they probably once hung from the holes in the hat here).

JA.2

Family in Western dress

China, Dehua, late 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03472

This sculpture of a European family is popularly called the “Governor Duff” group. Governor Duff was probably the name given by the Chinese to Diederik Durven, Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company (in office 1729–31).

JA.3

Couple seated at a table

China, Dehua, 18th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03374

JA.4

A man and a dog

China, Dehua, late 17th or 18th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03469

JA.5

Two musicians on an elephant

China, Dehua, late 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03495

JA.6

Wenchang 文昌 (Daoist god of literature)

China, Dehua, around 1600

Porcelain

Marked: 何朝宗 (He Chaozong)

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03335

Wenchang is thought to control the fate of scholars. They prayed to him for academic success. Here he is portrayed as a civil official of the highest rank, as indicated by the badge with crane insignia. The finely rendered details and beautifully fluid drapery show the skills attained by Dehua potters in the 17th century.

Dehua and Yixing were the only kilns in China where potters “signed” their work. The most famous Dehua potter is He Chaozong (active late 1500s–early 1600s) – his square mark is on the back of this sculpture.

JA.7

Ascetic in meditation

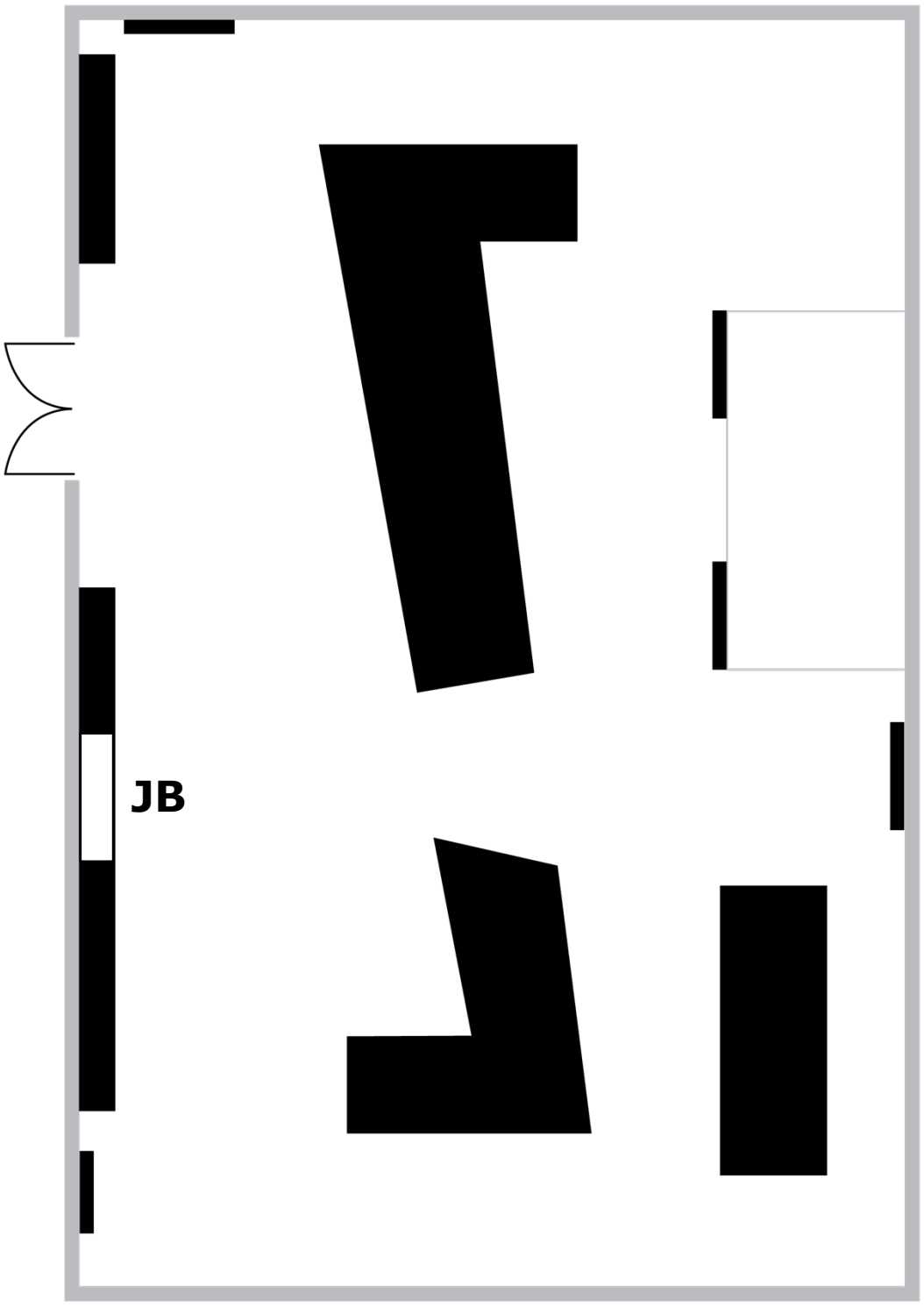
China, Dehua, early 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03336

The gaunt face, tight hair curls, and protruding ribs of this figure underscore the great skill of Dehua potters. It is probably a figure of Shakyamuni, as it bears some distinguishing marks of the Buddha. These include the ushnisha, a bump on the top of his head, and the urna, a round tuft of hair between his eyebrows.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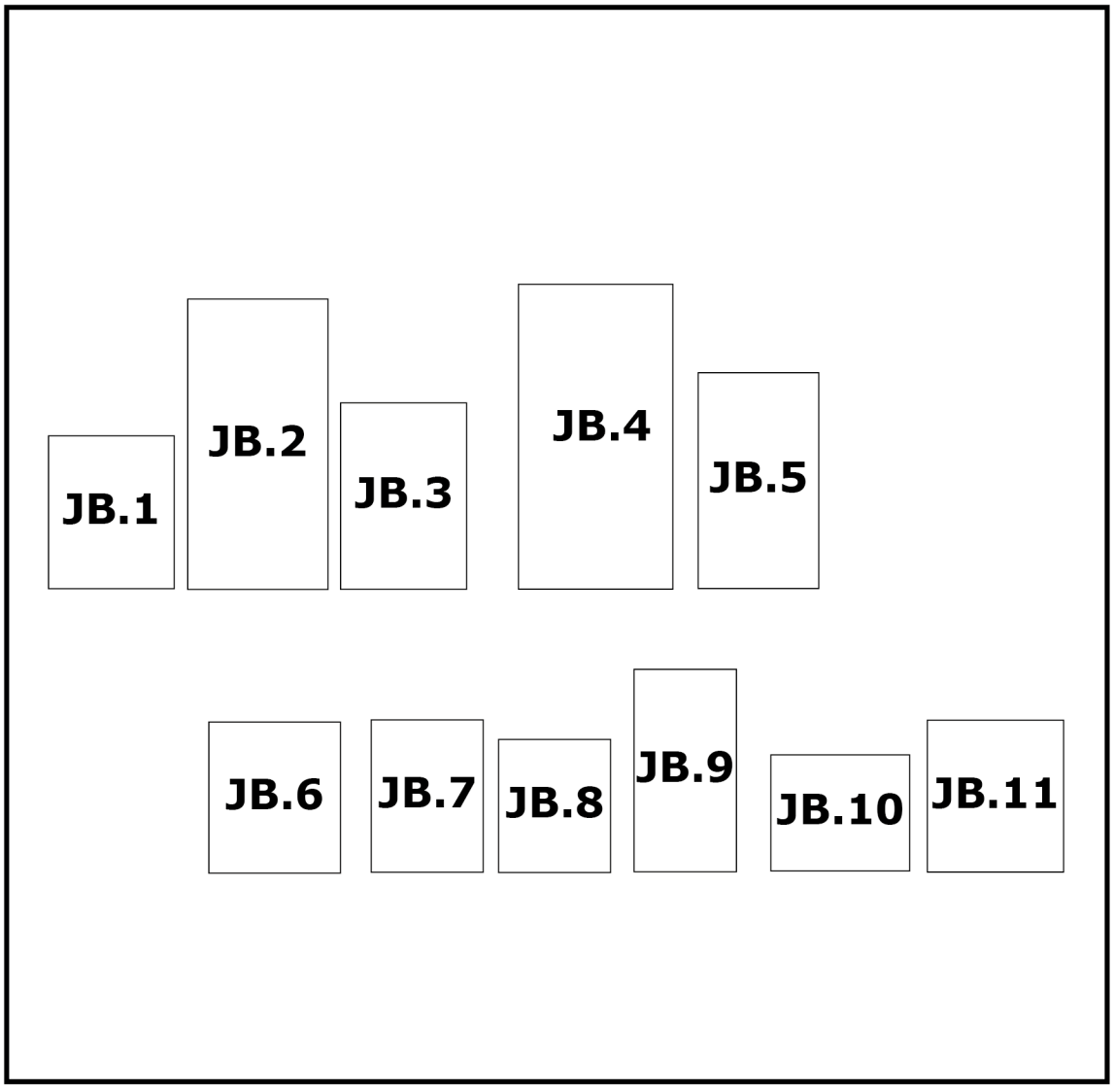
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JB.1

Bodhidharma

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03477

Bodhidharma (Damo 达摩 in Chinese) was an Indian monk who brought Chan (Zen) Buddhism to China in the 6th century. He is often shown with prominent facial features and a piercing gaze (he had reportedly cut off his eyelids to stay awake during meditation). This figure's intense expression reveals the skills of Dehua potters.

JB.2

Bodhidharma crossing the Yangzi River

China, Dehua, 20th century

Porcelain

Marked: 陶雅堂 (Hall of Elegant Pottery)

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03411

Standing on a reed above foaming waves is a popular way to depict Bodhidharma in Chinese art. It refers to the story of him riding a single stalk of reed across the Yangzi River on his journey to the kingdom of Northern Wei (386–534). This is often interpreted as a metaphor for the attainment of enlightenment by overcoming obstacles and “crossing to the other shore”.

JB.3

Bodhidharma carrying his shoe

China, Dehua, 19th or 20th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03386

This more light-hearted portrayal of Bodhidharma appears to have melded two famous episodes in the monk's life – crossing the Yangzi River and his journey back to India (after his death), walking barefoot with a single shoe in his hand.

JB.4

Guanyin with a child and vase

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03494

Guanyin 观音 (also Avalokiteshvara and the Bodhisattva of Compassion) is one of the most common religious figures made by Dehua potters. This sculpture shows the deity as Songzi Guanyin 送子观音, the “giver of children”. Guanyin is worshipped for her powers to bestow sons and protect women during pregnancy and childbirth.

JB.5

Female deity on a lobster

China, Dehua, 17th century or later

Porcelain

Marked: 张寿山 (Zhang Shoushan)

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03368

This figure might represent Guohai Guanyin 过海观音 or Ma Zu 妈祖 (the Goddess of the Sea), who were both worshipped by sailors and fishermen in China's southern coastal areas. Originating in Fujian, the worship of Ma Zu spread to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia along trade and migration routes.

JB.6

Bearded sage

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

2000-03422

JB.7

Seated Guanyin with sutra box

China, Dehua, 17th century or later

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03454

JB.8

Guanyin with a child and lion

China, Dehua, 17th or 18th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03369

JB.9

Guanyin with a vase

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03438

Guanyin sits in the pose of royal ease (rajalilasana) on a rocky pedestal, with an air of regal confidence and serenity. The meiping 梅瓶 vase next to her contains the sweet dew (amrita) believed to cure illnesses and prolong life.

JB.10

Hehe Ersheng 和合二圣

China, Dehua, early 17th century

Porcelain

Marked twice: 何朝宗 (He Chaozong)

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03385

Hehe Ersheng (also Hehe Erxian 和合二仙) refers to Han Shan 寒山 and Shi De 拾得, two Tang-dynasty monks who wrote poetry. They are typically shown as child-like figures holding their attributes, a covered box and a lotus flower.

The Chinese characters for box 盒 and lotus 荷 sound like he 和 (harmony) and he 合 (union). Because of this, these figures might have been presented as wedding gifts.

JB.11

Liu Hai 刘海

China, Dehua, 17th century or later

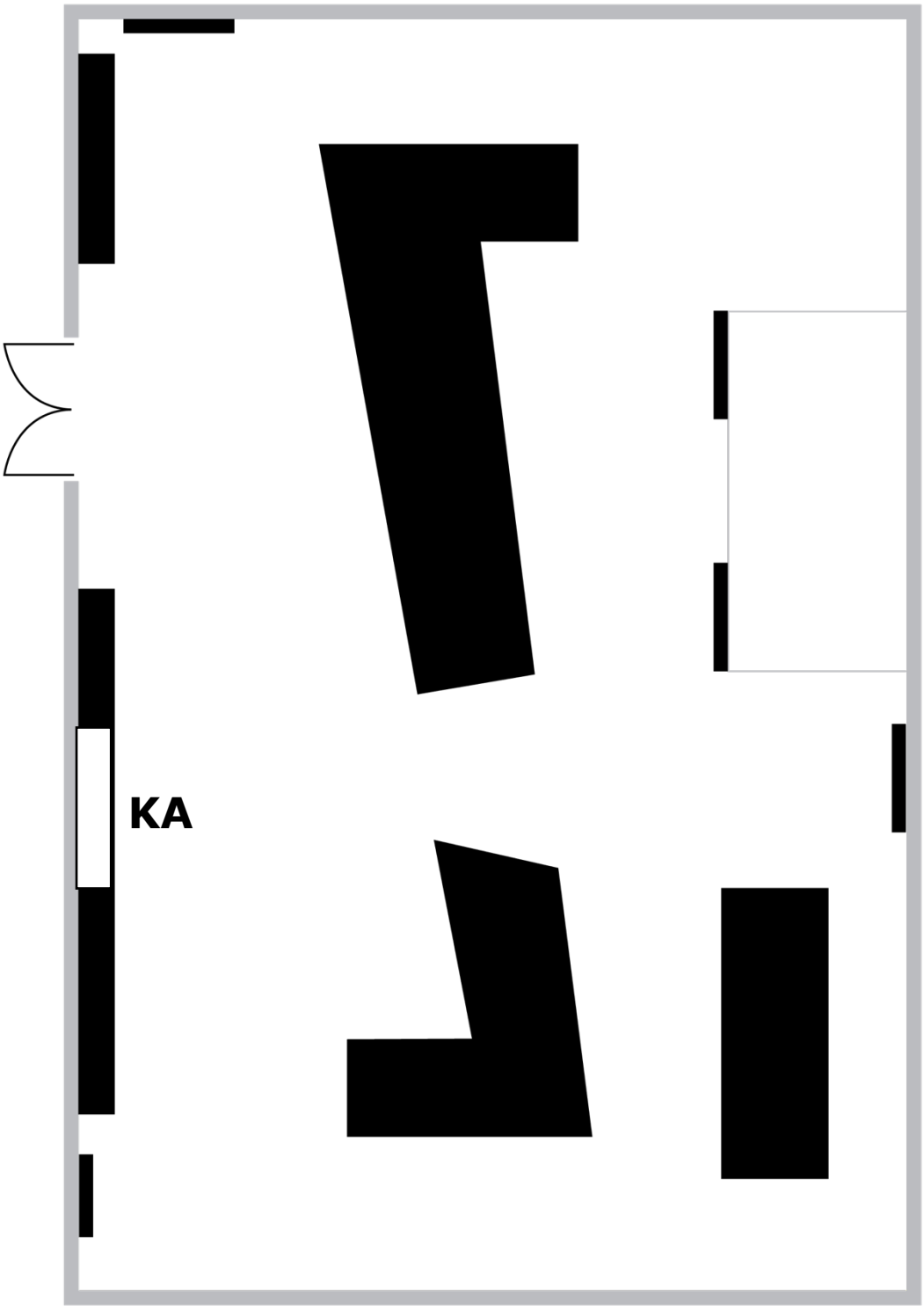
Porcelain

Marked: 何朝宗 (He Chaozong)

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03384

The Daoist immortal Liu Hai and his three-legged toad, which could spew gold coins, are a popular symbol of wealth in Chinese art.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KA.15

KA.1

Grotto with Guanyin

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

Acquired with funds from The Shaw Foundation, through ACM 2007

2007-52980

Guanyin 观音, the Goddess of Mercy, is a bodhisattva dedicated to relieving all beings of suffering. The mountainous form with swirling waves represents Guanyin's home, Mount Potalaka. From the Tang dynasty onwards, the Chinese identified it with Mount Putuo (普陀山), an island off the coast of Zhejiang province.

In this sculpture, Guanyin is flanked by the boy pilgrim Sudhana, also known as Shancai Tongzi 善财童子, and the Dragon Princess (Longnü 龙女). This trio is seen in Chinese art from the 12th century onwards.

KA.2

Plum blossom tree with figures

China, Dehua, 19th century

Porcelain

Gift of Dorothy Chan in honour of Pamela Hickley

2019-00535

Plum blossom trees (Prunus mume) were popular pieces created by Dehua potters during the 18th and 19th century. This example is one of the largest and most complex, with gnarly roots, a craggy rock, and two women enjoying themselves.

KA.3

Theatre scenes

China, Dehua, 18th century

Porcelain

2014-00447

This pair of miniature stages features (on both sides) lively figures performing scenes drawn from historical epics or popular theatrical pieces. The scene with a man threatening another with a halberd, bears a plaque inscribed with the characters 凤仪亭 (Phoenix Pavilion), referencing an episode from Romance of the Three Kingdoms 三国演义. Here, the warlord Dong Zhuo fights with his adopted son Lü Bu for consorting with his lover Diao Chan.

The other cube might depict a scene from the Romance of the Western Chamber (Xi Xiang Ji 西厢记), one of the most popular Chinese dramatic works written.

KA.4

Dish with incised peony

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03329

KA.5

Seal-paste box

China, Dehua, late 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03404

Seal paste is used by painters and calligraphers to stamp their seals on their works. Typically red, seal paste was traditionally made from a mixture of powdered cinnabar, castor oil, and the fibres of the mugwort plant. Because porcelain is impervious to oil and pigment, it is an ideal material for seal-paste containers.

KA.6

Pair of seals

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03339

One seal is carved with the characters “Zhu shi” 朱氏, the other “Zhuo yin” 焯印.

KA.7

Lotus leaf-shaped brush washer

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03399

KA.8

Water dropper with crab

China, Dehua, late 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03492-002

Water droppers are used for the preparation of ink for writing or painting. Water is dripped onto an inkstone, then an inkstick is ground into it. A crab sits inside and hides one end of the spout, from which water was poured out.

KA.9

Lotus leaf with crab

China, Dehua, 18th century

Porcelain

2014-01176

This may have been used as a dish for the scholar's table, to hold water for an inkstone.

The pairing of a lotus (荷 he) with a crab (蟹 xie) forms a rebus (picture puzzle) signifying harmony (和谐 hexie).

KA.10

Oil lamp with sea creatures

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03478

The tube at the centre is for the wick, which draws oil from the bowl. When the wick is lit, the flickering light over the pool of oil would have made the sea creatures and plants appear to come alive.

KA.11

Brush holder

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03403

KA.12

Pomander

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03484

KA.13

Censer shaped as a gui 簋 bronze vessel

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03337

KA.14

Censer shaped as a fangding 方鼎 bronze vessel

China, Dehua, mid-17th century (with later wood cover)

Porcelain, wood, coral

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03432

Ancient bronzes from the Shang (around 1600–1046 BC) and Zhou (1046–256 BC) dynasties were collected by Ming and Qing scholar-connoisseurs. This archaism (taste for things of the past) was translated into porcelain design. The forms and motifs of ancient bronzes were copied or adapted by Dehua potters for porcelain vessels like this.

KA.15

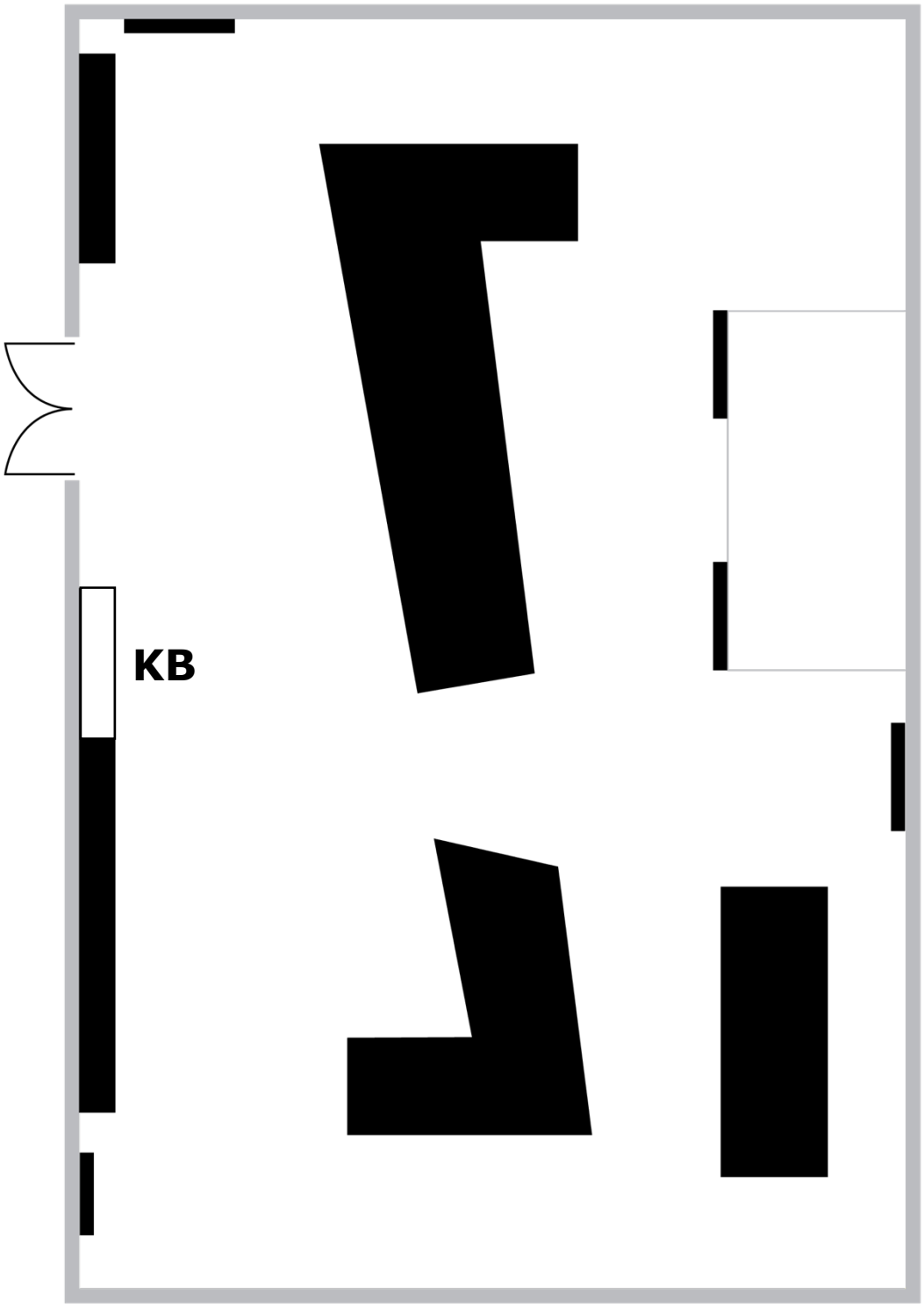
Censer with cloud-shaped feet

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03343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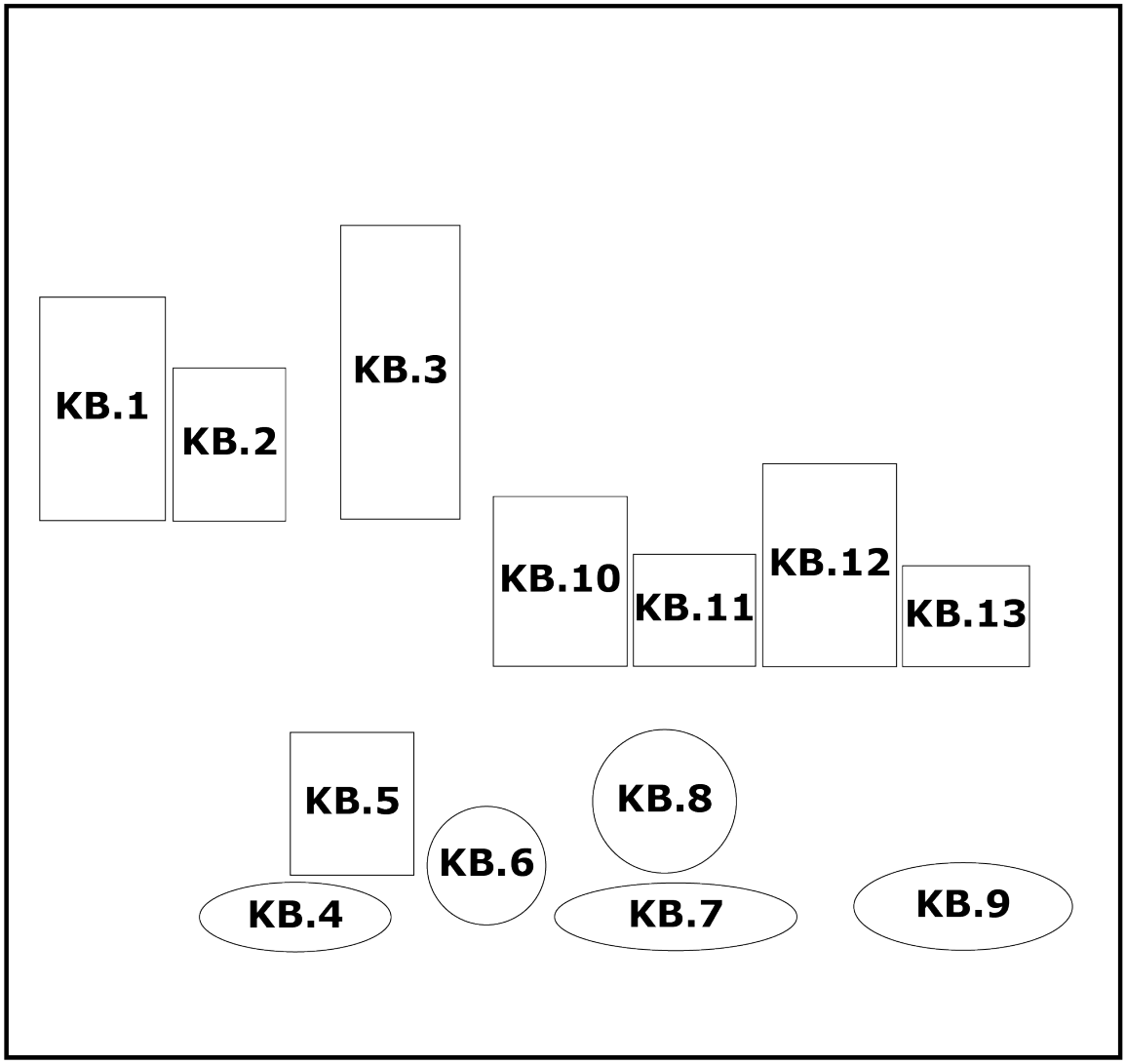
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KB.1

Vase shaped as a gu 觚 bronze vessel

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03328

KB.2

Tripod censer

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

2009-01522-001

KB.3

Sleeve vase with lion masks

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03392

KB.4

Pair of trick cups

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03445, 2000-03480

These trick cups – called “fairness cups” or “justice cups” (公道杯 gongdaobei) – have a figure with a tube inside. A hole at the base of the figure connects to a hole under the cup. The cup empties out when it is filled above three-quarters full, creating a nasty surprise for the greedy drinker.

KB.5

“Rhinoceros horn” cup with chess players

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03352

This vessel imitates the form of cups carved from rhinoceros horn. The horn was valued for its alleged medicinal properties, and cups made from the material were believed to react with poison, protecting the user from harm.

KB.6

Enamelled cup with plum and magnolia blossoms

China, Dehua, mid-17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03481

The overglaze enamel colours were probably painted on this cup after it reached its export destination in Europe.

KB.7

Cups with metal fittings

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain, silver and ormulu mounts

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03348, 2000-03349-001

The addition of metal fittings to porcelain was a popular practice in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The attached handles suited European ways of drinking tea, and could transform the cups for other uses (such as a sugar bowl). The metal around the rim and base prevents chipping.

KB.8

Teapot

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain, silver fittings

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03350

KB.9

Lobed and faceted cups

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

2000-03400, 2000-03401, 2000-03413

KB.10

Teapot with square handle

China, Dehua, 18th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03332

KB.11

Bamboo-shaped teapot

China, Dehua, late 17th or early 18th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03379

KB.12

Double-gourd ewer

China, Dehua, probably early 17th century

Porcelain

2015-00397

KB.13

Tankard with chi dragon handle

China, Dehua, 17th century

Porcelain

Gift of Frank and Pamela Hickley

2000-03409