



LEAPING THE DRAGON GATE THE SIR MICHAEL BUTLER COLLECTION OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CHINESE PORCELAIN

TERESA CANEPA AND KATHARINE BUTLER

This catalogue raisonné celebrates the most important collection of 17th-century Chinese porcelain in the world, assembled by the distinguished British diplomat Sir Michael Butler (1927–2013). His passion for porcelain is clearly reflected in the over eight hundred pieces he collected and lived with at his home and private museum in Dorset. The pots (as Sir Michael called them), many of extreme rarity or exquisite quality, give testimony to the incredible depth of knowledge he acquired over five decades and his outstanding contribution to research and education in this previously neglected field of study.

This famous collection covers most types of porcelain produced at Jingdezhen, in Jiangxi province, during the 17th century. The variety of the pieces carefully acquired by Sir Michael reflects the great innovative spirit of the highly skilled Jingdezhen potters and painters at a time when they were released from the controls of Imperial patronage, between the end of the reign of the Ming Emperor Wanli in 1620 and the re-establishment of the Imperial kilns by the Qing Emperor Kangxi in 1683. It is a study collection of porcelain unrivalled in its breadth and rarity that demonstrates the stylistic and qualitative evolution which occurred in Chinese porcelain production during the 17th century.

The introduction, written by Katharine Butler, tells the fascinating story of the circumstances that encouraged her father to acquire, collect and passionately study Chinese porcelain of the 17th century; how he found rare pieces with dates, interesting inscriptions, seal marks or narrative scenes; and how the collection and his scholarly publications came to be internationally renowned. The core of the book is composed of five sections presenting the main categories of porcelains in the collection: Late Ming, High Transitional, Shunzhi, Kangxi, Monochromes and Enamels, and, in conclusion is an essay on the puzzle pieces and the debates that arose around them.

Leaping the Dragon Gate refers to the symbolic metamorphosis from a humble carp to a mighty dragon – the most powerful of the Four Divine Creatures – that a student would undergo on succeeding to the highest level of the Imperial civil service examinations. Passing these examinations required years, sometimes decades, of enormous effort to acquire the requisite educational merit and success was very rare. It is a worthy metaphor for Sir Michael's scholarly achievement. This 576-page book with over 1,000 colour illustrations is a catalogue raisonné of almost his entire 17th-century porcelain collection, including many previously unpublished pieces. In the spirit of keeping the family legacy of acquisition and scholarship alive, the authors have included a few important, recently purchased pieces and also have revised and expanded the list of all known dated pieces of 17th-century Chinese porcelain in the world, from circa 185 that Sir Michael listed in 1990 to over 430.

Teresa Canepa is an independent researcher and lecturer in Chinese and Japanese export art, and currently co-editor of the Newsletter of the Oriental Ceramic Society, London. She completed a PhD in Art History at Leiden University, The Netherlands, and is the author of a number of books and articles and has lectured widely on these subjects.

Katharine Butler is the daughter of the collector, Sir Michael Butler. She has an MA in History of Art from Edinburgh University and worked closely with her father cataloguing and researching the collection. From 2004 onwards they collaborated on a digital database of the whole collection without which this catalogue raisonné would have been impossible.

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DETAILS

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PRESS ENQUIRIES

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REVIEWS

"Over the course of 50 years, the keen-eyed diplomat Michael Butler built up the largest collection of 17th-century Chinese porcelain in the world." —*Apollo*

"magisterial and scholarly...one must salute the range, breadth, and aspiration of the book, which will surely stand as a standard reference work for years to come, as well as a recognition of one man's contribution to the field." —*Orientations*

"The book brings a wealth of new research ... and (includes) a huge database of dated porcelains." —*Asian Art Newspaper*

"This handsome volume has been a monumental undertaking... and fulfils two distinct purposes. It is at once a tribute to Sir Michael Butler while also providing a very scholarly catalogue raisonné of his collection... Beautifully produced, lavishly illustrated... fully bilingual" —*Arts of Asia*

"this new bilingual book... adds another dimension to the existing literature. It provides both a systematic study of the collection and places it within a framework of existing seventeenth century pieces around the world... A wonderful reference work for ceramic enthusiasts" —*The Oriental Ceramic Society Newsletter*

"Books such as this provide a firm, scholarly basis for our future understanding of this specialist field of ceramic history, affirming the place of the Butler Collection in the global history of collecting Chinese ceramics." —*The Burlington Magazine*

"This is a landmark for the field and an extraordinary tribute to (Sir Michael's) work" Mike Hearn, Douglas Dillon Chairman, Dept. of Asian Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

"a fitting memorial ... remarkable ... this is the place to learn the meanings of the ... subjects and stories painted on the porcelain" —*Country Life*

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