

# China Rediscovered

*The Benaki Museum Collection of Chinese Ceramics*





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The Benaki Museum Collection of Chinese Ceramics

George Manginis

BENAKI MUSEUM  
ATHENS

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## Foreword

When the Benaki Museum was inaugurated in 1931, a special room on the first floor of the nineteenth century mansion was devoted to Chinese art. The history, traditions, and aesthetics of a far-away land were encapsulated in a group of ceramics selected and donated to the Greek nation by the Londoner George Eumorfopoulos. The ceramics were housed alongside the collections formed by the founder of the Museum, Antonis Benakis.

These visionaries fulfilled long-standing dreams by presenting to the Greek public their personal collections. They were both expatriates, born and raised abroad. One belonged to the refined society of London and the other to the cosmopolitan world of Alexandria. They were also keen art collectors and devoted their lives to the pursuit of masterpieces. In 1925 the first volume of the eleven-part catalogue *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection* was published in London while the same year in Egypt, at the 'Exposition d'art musulman', Benakis exhibited for the first time his Islamic art collection. Most importantly, the two men shared a dream: to contribute towards enriching the cultural life of the struggling Greek state.

Eumorfopoulos was introduced to Benakis in 1927 through a mutual friend in Cairo, John Home, director of the National Bank of Egypt. A friendship blossomed based on shared interests and aspirations. Benakis was at the time in the process of settling in Athens. He took upon himself the task of helping Eumorfopoulos donate part of his collection to the land of his forefathers that he had never visited. Their correspondence, covering the years 1927 to 1939, is preserved in the Benaki Museum archives. It eloquently discloses their resolve

to enrich Greece's national collections and to expose its public to past cultures. Benaki wrote to Eumorfopoulos on 26 April 1927:

Let me express to you, as a Greek, my gratitude and congratulations for your noble initiative and for the sentiments which prompted a donation of such importance. Let us hope that your example will be followed by other expatriates and that, by their additions to your donation, a great national collection will be formed.

For the first two years Benakis's attempts to find suitable premises for the promised collection paint an interesting picture of Athens. Possible venues included Iliou Melathron, the neoclassical residence of Heinrich Schliemann designed by Ernst Ziller, as well as the Parliament building. Finally, in June 1929 Eumorfopoulos enthusiastically welcomed Benakis's proposal to house the Chinese collection in the museum he would create. Athens was destined to have a museum celebrating multiple cultures as well as a study centre for arts and crafts. Both collectors took an interest in establishing and enriching the museum's library with the latest publications, to enable further study.

Although Eumorfopoulos was physically distant from Greece, he embraced the country's effort to define its national identity alongside rather than opposite other cultures. He saw it as his patriotic duty to promote a progressive, cosmopolitan and educated society by supporting a cultural institution. The vision he shared with his Alexandrian friend retains its special resonance to this day and adds one further dimension to the Benaki Museum collection of Chinese ceramics.

Mina Moraitou, Benaki Museum



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With thanks to the Paddy & Joan Leigh Fermor Arts Fund.

Edinburgh, April 2016

## Chronology

Neolithic period *circa* 6500–1700 BCE

[Xia dynasty *circa* 2070–1600 BCE]

Shang dynasty *circa* 1600–1046 BCE

Zhou dynasty 1046–256 BCE

Western Zhou dynasty 1046–771 BCE

Eastern Zhou dynasty 770–256 BCE

Spring and Autumn period 770–476 BCE

Warring States period 475–221 BCE

Qin dynasty 221–207 BCE

Han dynasty 206 BCE – 220

Western Han dynasty 206 BCE – 25

Xin dynasty 9–23

Eastern Han dynasty 25–220

Six Dynasties period 220–589

Three Kingdoms period 220–280

Jin dynasty 265–420

Southern and Northern Dynasties period 420–589

Southern Dynasties period 420–589

Northern Dynasties period 386–581

Sui dynasty 581–618

Tang dynasty 618–906

Liao dynasty 907–1125

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period 907–960

Song dynasty 960–1279

Northern Song dynasty 960–1126

Southern Song dynasty 1127–1279

Western Xia dynasty 1038–1227

Jin dynasty 1115–1234

Yuan dynasty 1279–1368

Ming dynasty 1368–1644

Hongwu reign 1368–1398

Jianwen reign 1399–1402

Yongle reign 1403–1425

Xuande reign 1426–1435

Zhengtong reign 1436–1449

Jingtai reign 1450–1457

Tianshun reign 1457–1464

Chenghua reign 1465–1487

Hongzhi reign 1488–1505

Zhengde reign 1506–1521

Jiajing reign 1522–1566

Longqing reign 1567–1572

Wanli reign 1573–1620

Tianqi reign 1621–1627

Chongzhen reign 1628–1644

Qing dynasty 1644–1911

Shunzhi reign 1644–1661

Kangxi reign 1662–1722

Yongzheng reign 1723–1735

Qianlong reign 1736–1795

Jiaqing reign 1796–1820

Daoguang reign 1821–1850

Xianfeng reign 1851–1861

Tongzhi reign 1862–1874

Guangxu reign 1875–1908

Xuantong reign 1909–1911

Republic of China 1911–1949

## Abbreviations

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## Introduction

Museum objects are heterotopic transplants, organs re-positioned within the living organisms of public collections. Such an admission informs the reading of any museum arrangement, thematic, chronological, or other. In this book, eighty-eight Chinese ceramics now housed at the Benaki Museum will illuminate a ‘rediscovery’ of Chinese culture which happened largely in London during the early years of the twentieth century. The narrative hinges on George Eumorfopoulos (1863–1939, figure 1), a British businessman and art collector of Greek origin who donated the majority of these ceramics. The first part of the book (entries 1–39) will examine encounters between China and other countries from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries as they were mediated through ceramics; emphasis will be placed on European receptors within a global perspective. The second part (entries 40–88) will discuss ceramic categories that were either collected for the first time or re-appraised by early-twentieth-century European collectors, among whom Eumorfopoulos was pivotal. Multiple heterotopias for the objects in focus will be woven together: the export trade in ceramics between the Yuan and the Qing dynasties, the fascination with blue-and-white porcelains in Victorian England, the osmosis of connoisseurship and archaeological scholarship between Republican China and Europe, and the ultimate creation of a new way of understanding the ‘choreographed archive that is China’s cultural heritage’ before World War II.<sup>1</sup> This understanding is hardly unexplored in the scholarly record; Stacey Pierson’s *Collectors, Collections and Museums*, published in 2007, is its seminal study. Nevertheless, no attempt has been made to visualise it using a museum collection. To this end, the Eumorfopoulos collection at the Benaki Museum is eminently suitable, as it was formed by the arbiter of early twentieth-century taste in Far Eastern art and remains a ‘time capsule’ of the period’s preoccupations with regard to China.

George Eumorfopoulos was born in Liverpool in the twenty-fourth year of the Victorian era. Both his parents, Aristides (1825–1897) and Mariora (1840–1908), originated from the Greek island of Chios but were born on another Aegean island, Syros, and got married in



Figure 1  
George  
Eumorfopoulos  
(1863–1939)  
Benaki Museum

Athens in 1861; their families had fled the 1822 massacre of Chios’s population by the Ottoman army during the Greek Revolution.<sup>2</sup> George grew up in London and was schooled at the Greek College, where his father was President of the Managing Committee. He was an exact contemporary of the most famous member of the Greek diaspora, the Alexandria-born poet Constantine P. Cavafy (1863–1933), who also spent two years in London with his family during the mid-1870s; it would be tempting to imagine that the two boys met within the confines of the tight-knit expatriate community. The Eumorfopoulos family business was the trade of cereals with Russia; George, the eldest son, joined his father while his younger brother, Nicholas (1872–1942), was allowed to go to university and became a Professor of Chemistry at University College London. In 1902 George started working for the merchant trading firm of Ralli Brothers; he would remain in their employment until his retirement in 1935. He and his wife Julia (1864–1944, married in 1890), also of

Greek origin, lived in Clendon, Surrey, until 1922, when they moved to an expansive townhouse at 7 Chelsea Embankment, on the banks of the River Thames.

Eumorfopoulos showed a penchant for collecting art from a young age and his earliest purchases, after his marriage, were European porcelains. By the end of the century he had shifted his interests to Japanese art. However, it was his encounter in 1906 with Chinese burial figures that ignited a special spark. By 1910 he was a major lender to the ‘Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain’ exhibition of the Burlington Fine Arts Club (74).<sup>3</sup> Three years later he loaned objects of similarly early date to the ‘Exhibition of Chinese Applied Art’ at the Manchester City Art Gallery (among which 35, 39, 40, 49, 53, and 58). Beginning in 1912 he created a long-term loan collection for the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge which would eventually number 104 items (among which some can be identified with certainty in the Benaki Museum: 15, 16, 23, 24, 27, 28, 47, 69, and 71); he also contributed to further exhibitions of Asian, Byzantine and Italian art.<sup>4</sup>



*Figure 2*  
The Eumorfopoulos Collection, Churchman's cigarette card 1936–1937. The two Tang dynasty figures illustrated are today in the British Museum (1936,1012.229 and 1936,1012.220) and were reportedly discovered at the tomb of Liu Tingxun (died 728) in Luoyang, Henan province. Private collection, London.  
Image courtesy of the author.

Between 1925 and 1932 his Chinese, Korean and Islamic objects were published in an eleven-volume catalogue, which established him as owner of the most comprehensive Asian art collection in the western world. In Arthur Lonsdale Hetherington's (1881–1960) words, ‘there is no one in this country who has done more for the study of Chinese art. His collection is unrivalled in its completeness and is only matched by the generosity with which he makes it available to the public [...]’.<sup>5</sup>

In 1927 Eumorfopoulos decided to make a substantial donation to Greece, a country he had not previously visited. He withdrew the 104 items from Cambridge and added another 237. The ceramics arrived in Piraeus in 1929 aboard the *Assyrian* but their crates were only opened in October 1930 as their exhibition venue had not been decided. Intercessor for this gesture was Antonis Benakis (1873–1954), another Alexandrian Greek who had moved to Athens in the early 1920s. When his father Emmanuel (1843–1929) passed away, Antonis and his sisters decided to present the family house and collections to the Greek nation, forming the nucleus of the Benaki Museum. Eumorfopoulos's donation coincided with this bequest and was included in the new institution, which opened in April 1931. This was the first and last time Eumorfopoulos visited his parents' homeland; he was accompanied by the collector and connoisseur Sir Percival David (1892–1964, to be discussed later) and the collector Oscar Charles Raphael (1874–1941). In December 1934 he informed Benakis of his intention to sell most of his collection to the British state (it was split between the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum) and to augment his donation to the Greek museum by offering another 250, later 350, and eventually 452 items, which reached Athens aboard the *Sorrento* in 1936.<sup>6</sup> The first catalogue of the Benaki Museum collection of Chinese ceramics, by Sir Arthur Leigh Ashton (1897–1983), was published in 1935. A new edition, supplemented with entries by Robert Lockhart Hobson (1873–1941), appeared in 1939.<sup>7</sup> Eumorfopoulos died in December of that year and the remainder of his private collection was auctioned in 1940 and in 1944, after the death of his wife.

Few recollections survive of Eumorfopoulos, the private individual. He was universally liked and seen as erudite and ‘unobtrusive’.<sup>8</sup> Arthur Upham Pope (1881–1969) extolled ‘the extraordinary combination of qualities that has distinguished the work of Mr. Eumorfopoulos in the field of Chinese art: wide and accurate knowledge, bold and



## 09

Bowl. Porcelain with brown glaze. Diameter 16.9 cm.

Six character inscription, *da qing yongzheng nian zhi* ('made during the Yongzheng reign of the great Qing dynasty'), within a double circle in underglaze cobalt blue on the base.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Yongzheng reign.

Benaki Museum 2736. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1929/30.

Published: Ashton 1935, 94 (288.120/27); Ashton & Hobson 1939, 152 (621.120/121).

## 10

Dish. Porcelain with green glaze over incised decoration of Eight Buddhist Symbols within a scroll. Diameter 20.9 cm.

Six character inscription, *da qing yongzheng nian zhi* ('made during the Yongzheng reign of the great Qing dynasty'), within a double circle in underglaze cobalt blue on the base.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Yongzheng reign.

Benaki Museum 2776. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1929/30.

Published: Ashton 1935, 98 (310.120/49); Ashton & Hobson 1939, 160 (661.120/120).





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Yongzheng reign monochromes exemplify the vibrant colours and technical excellence of ceramic production in Jingdezhen kilns during the early eighteenth century. The *café au lait* brown glaze on bowl 09 was made using an iron oxide pigment. Dish 10 features an incised scroll with the Eight Buddhist symbols and a vibrant green glaze.

Dish 11 is adorned with an incised flower scroll and yellow glaze; yellow is a colour often associated with imperial use since the Ming dynasty and was produced by the careful manipulation of iron oxides added to the glaze. Cup 12 is covered only on the outside with primrose yellow enamel which is opaque and pastel in tone as the transparent lead-antimony pigment was mixed with zinc, a technology developed in the late Kangxi reign.



## 13

Bowl. Porcelain with pale blue glaze over incised and moulded relief decoration of stylised flower scroll and upright leaves. Diameter 11.6 cm.

Six character inscription, *da qing yongzheng nian zhi* ('made during the Yongzheng reign of the great Qing dynasty'), within a double circle in underglaze cobalt blue on the base.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Yongzheng reign.

Benaki Museum 2744. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1936.

Published: Hobson 1927b, 43 (E314), plate XLI (E314); Ashton & Hobson 1939, 154 (629.120/102).

Bowl 13 features stylised floral motifs moulded in low flat relief and creating a bichrome effect where the glaze (poetically termed '*clair de lune*' – 'moonlight') has pooled. The shape of vase 14 copies Shang dynasty bronze

## 14

Bronze-shaped vase. Porcelain with white glaze over moulded relief decoration. Height 18.2 cm.

Six character inscription, *da qing kangxi nian zhi* ('made during the Kangxi reign of the great Qing dynasty'), in underglaze cobalt blue on the base.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Kangxi reign.

Benaki Museum 2647. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1936.

Published: Hobson 1927b, 31 (E215), plate XL (E215); Ashton & Hobson 1939, 130 (532.120/7).

*gu* vases. On the curved profile of similar vases various glazes and enamels were applied. The six character seal mark and the quality of both objects support an association with the imperial household.



## 15

Bowl. Porcelain with enamel decoration of lychee, pomegranate, and peach branches. Diameter 15 cm.

Six character seal mark, *da qing jiaqing nian zhi* ('made during the Jiaqing reign of the great Qing dynasty'), in underglaze cobalt blue on the base.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Jiaqing reign.

Benaki Museum 2916. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1929/30.

Exhibited: Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, until 1928.

Published: Ashton 1935, 106 (340.120/79), the seal mark identified as of the Daoguang reign. This bowl is not included in Ashton & Hobson 1939.

## 16

Bowl. Porcelain with enamel decoration of lychee, pomegranate, and peach branches. Diameter 15 cm.

Six character seal mark, *da qing qianlong nian zhi* ('made during the Qianlong reign of the great Qing dynasty'), in underglaze cobalt blue on the base.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Qianlong reign.

Benaki Museum 2917. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1929/30.

Exhibited: Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, until 1928.

Published: Ashton 1935, 106 (339.120/78), the seal mark identified as of the Daoguang reign. This bowl is not included in Ashton & Hobson 1939.



These two bowls, painted in *famille rose* enamels, combine peaches (*tao*, 'long life'), pomegranates (*shiliu*, 'abundance of sons'), and lychees (a homophone to *lizhi*, 'attaching a new branch to the family tree'), thus expressing wishes for a successful marriage union. Upon first inspection, they appear identical, indeed a pair.

However, they bear on their bases seal marks dating bowl 16 to the Qianlong reign and bowl 15 to the ensuing Jiaqing reign. Although very similar in shape, decorative motifs, and surface arrangement, these bowls are different in potting and in the colour of their enamels. It is probable that George Eumoropoulos sent them to the Fitzwilliam Museum first and to the Benaki Museum later as complementary study pieces.



## 17

Brushpot. Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue outlines and overglaze enamel decoration of scholar's objects. Diameter 18 cm.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Kangxi reign.

Benaki Museum 2855. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1929/30.

Published: Ashton 1935, 101 (319.120/58); Ashton & Hobson 1939, 177 (740.2037), dated to the Yongzheng reign in both works.

The *doucai* palette which is used for the decoration of brushpot 17 is a fifteenth-century development. Its heyday was the reign of the Chenghua emperor. The technique was laborious and costly. On the unfired and unglazed porcelain body of the vessel the outline of the decoration was drawn in cobalt oxide. The vessel was then glazed and fired. After firing, the surfaces within the

## 18

Dish. Porcelain with green, yellow, white, and aubergine enamels over incised decoration of dragons chasing a flaming pearl, flowers, clouds, and flowering branches; four further dragons chase four further flaming pearls on the exterior. Diameter 35.4 cm.

Six character inscription, *da qing kangxi nian zhi* ('made during the Kangxi reign of the great Qing dynasty'), within a double circle in underglaze cobalt blue on the base.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Kangxi reign.

Benaki Museum 2677. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1936.

Published: Hobson 1927b, 29 (E199), plate XXXVIII (E199); Ashton & Hobson 1939, 137 (562.120/37).

underglaze cobalt blue outlines were filled with transparent enamels applied over the glaze and the vessel was fired a second time at a lower temperature to fix these enamels. Dish 18 was meticulously incised and then painted against a yellow-enamelled background, a faster and more economical method than *doucai* enamelling.







The *famille verte* and *blanc de Chine* (Dehua) ceramics in the following pages originate from or are similar to examples housed in European royal and aristocratic collections from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Chinese and Japanese porcelains (routinely indistinguishable in European inventories of the time) decorated in blue-and-white and enamels would be used in elaborate interior arrangements inside, on and around fireplaces, doorways, window frames *etc.*, often climbing up the walls onto brackets executed in wood, plaster, or *papier mâché*. The main exponent of this style was the French decorator Daniel Marot (1661–1752), working in the Late Baroque style popular in the court of King Louis XIV of France (1638–1715, ruled 1643–1715); Marot disseminated his ideas through much-copied decorative schemes and popular prints, giving rise to a fashion for *Porzellankabinetten*, rooms filled with porcelain, encountered throughout Europe. The enormous Oriental porcelain collection of the Elector of Saxony Augustus II ‘the Strong’ (1670–1733, ruled 1694–1733) included items similar to 19, 20 and 22 as well as the actual bowl 21. His Chinese items inspired copies made in hard paste porcelain after the secret of its manufacture was discovered in Meissen, near Augustus’s capital Dresden. The hen-and-chicken ewer 19 and the dragon-infested ewer 22 were both copied there. Similar animal-shaped vessels or figures were collected by European royalty and aristocracy struck with a veritable *maladie de porcelaine* (‘porcelain illness’) during the mid-eighteenth-century ‘Rococo’ era, when the use of imported porcelain percolated down the social ladder and was popularised by the vogue for tea and coffee drinking within the home and in dedicated public houses. Chinese imports were admired for their skilful modelling, porcelain bodies, bright enamels, and exotic subject matter, although their original connotations and uses remained obscure. After the third quarter of the eighteenth century Neoclassicism would render such Chinese-themed porcelains unfashionable, since they compared unfavourably to ‘[...] those inimitable models from the Greek and Roman vases brought into modern use by the ingenious Mr Wedgwood’ (Sir John Barrow, 1st Baronet, British, 1764–1848, quoted in Rose Kerr, ‘The Chinese Porcelain at Spring Grove Dairy; Sir Joseph Banks’s Manuscript’, *Apollo* 129.323, January 1989, 31).

## 19

Hen and two chicks-shaped ewer. Porcelain with yellow, green, white, and brown enamels over moulded decoration. Metal lid with chain attachment. Width 15.1 cm. Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Kangxi reign, circa 1700–1720. Benaki Museum 2670. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1936. Published: Hobson 1927b, 27 (E183), plate XXXIV (E183); Ashton & Hobson 1939, 135 (555.120/30).

Hens and chicks had positive symbolic connotations in traditional Chinese culture since they were thought to avert evil; their multiple offspring also connoted fertility. Similar ewers often appear in pairs and have been copied in European factories, for example by Johann Joachim Kändler (1706–1775) in Meissen, near Dresden, Saxony, in 1734. The metal lid with its chain is replacing an original porcelain lid in the shape of a chick.





**ΠΑΡΑΛΕΙΠΟΝΤΑΙ ΕΝΔΙΑΜΕΣΕΣ ΣΕΛΙΔΕΣ**  
**IN-BETWEEN PAGES ARE OMITTED**

## 32

Dish. Porcelain painted in underglaze cobalt blue with flowers and leaves. Diameter 16 cm.

Six character inscription, *da qing kangxi nian zhi* ('made during the Kangxi reign of the great Qing dynasty'), within double circle in underglaze cobalt blue on the base.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Kangxi reign.

Benaki Museum 2614. Donated by George Eumorfopoulos in 1936.

Published: Ashton & Hobson 1939, 124 (499.269/13).

Aster flowers, as the ones around the wall of dish 32, were equally popular with European clients and Middle Eastern clients and such dishes were copied in stonepaste wares produced at Safavid-ruled Iran during the late seventeenth century. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Chinese exports to Mughal India copied the shapes of and decorations on Indian hardstones

## 33

Water pipe bottle. Porcelain painted in underglaze cobalt blue with flowers, leaves, and garden scene with men and attendants. Height 19.5 cm.

Artemisia leaf mark in underglaze cobalt blue on the base.

Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen. Kangxi reign.

Benaki Museum 44828. Donated by George Manginis. Unpublished.

and metalwork. Bottle 33, containing water through which pipe smoke filtered, resembles brass and glass versions manufactured in the subcontinent. The shape is Indian; however, the material, technique of decoration, and motifs are Chinese. There are extremely few examples of water pipe bottles with garden scene decoration; most are adorned with Mughal-style flowers.

