73.
A Rare *Feng-* Character Form *Kosometsuke* Inkstone
青花(古染付) [風] 字形 瓷硯

Length: 18.0 cm. (7 1/8 in.)
Width: 13.7 cm. (5 3/8 in.)
Height: 4.0 cm. (1 1/2 in.)

Zitan cover 紫檀蓋

Late Ming dynasty 明晚期
Early 17th century A.D.

The porcelain inkstone is in the shape of the Chinese character *feng*,"wind," and also reminiscent of a gold or silver ingot. Raised on two thick circular pad feet with beveled edges, the top is carved with a slightly recessed and grinding surface deepening to a trough to hold water at one end. The bottom of the stone is carved with a depression vaguely mirroring the inkstone surface. Opposite the water receptacle the image of a tiger is painted climbing a rock beneath three tall stalks of bamboo, the bamboo growing along the curved border on the left side of the inkstone, several clumps of leaves draping over the upper border of the implement. Facing the tiger that lords over the land, a dragon, denizen of the sea, is portrayed with arched neck, head held high, horns flowing back, its snout open, one clawed foot raised. The dragon emerges from cresting waves that continue up the right side of the inkstone and along the outside edge on the trough side opposite the bamboo. The greyish-blue cobalt painting is roughly but effectively applied capturing the brusque presence and power of the iconic creatures. The clear colorless glaze partially covers the base leaving the feet unglazed and exhibits heavy flaking from the edges of the piece. Considerable ink stains are apparent on the grinding surface where a crack running across the surface is also visible. A *zitan* wood cover fits over the grinding surface outlined with a raised thin-line border.

While men of letters were the backbone of the tea ceremony aesthetic that was the springboard for the creation of *kosometsuke*, only a small number *kososmetsuke* accouterment or utensils have come to light that would have supported their literary activities. These include the rare brushholder and waterdropper. Inkstones are more prevalent, yet hardly commonplace. The various activities associated with the world of tea that would require writing implements would include the writing of inscriptions on the wooden boxes carefully crafted to hold the various wares, documents to accompany the piece—its history or special characteristics, recording names in tea-ceremony guest books, composing journalistic records of tea ceremony gatherings, producing small sketches of the ceremonies themselves which ranged from drawings of the tearooms, to sketches of the implements used and written descriptions of the events. Whereas many of these activates would be behind the scenes, an underglaze-blue decorated inkstone from China would be appropriate as a member of a gathering, along with a prized flower vase and cherished incense burner.

In China, the shape of the present inkstone might suggest that of a gold or silver ingot, a well-known form in China and a symbol of wealth when used in a decorative manner. In Japan, the shape is understood as a representation of the character, *feng,* "wind," and when it comes to *kosometsuke,* the Japanese are the arbiters. Two similar inkstones have been published in Japan also with tiger and dragon painting (figs. 1-2). Like the present inkstone, the images of dragon, tiger, bamboo and waves contribute to the lively compositions, which required great deter-mination and control to effectively fit the motifs into the highly-restricted space. Early examples of *feng*-shaped

inkstones date to the Tang dynasty and include ceramic inkstones such as those produced from a fine white clay and stone ones as
well (figs. 3-4). However, it was during the Song to Ming period that the form seems to have come into favor.

In "Brewing Tea" by the Ming dynasty artist Wang Wen a *feng*-shaped inkstone is shown in use, a gentleman leaning his brush toward the stone where the liquid ink is ready for use (figs. 5-6). A Buddhist monk is using another *feng*-shaped inkstone in the presence of two other gentlemen (figs. 7-8). These inkstones were undoubtedly made of actual stone. Underglaze-blue painted porcelain inkstones, usually round, rectangular or square, were also used by Chinese scholars during the late Ming and Qing period. However, those are usually rather crude and unsophisticated but not intentionally so, and this sets them worlds apart from the very self-conscious *kosometsuke*.

Fig. 1: *Kosometsuke feng*-character inkstone, late Ming dynasty, early 17th century, after after Kawahara Masahiko, *Kosometsuke*, vol. I, color plates, Kyoto, 1977, pl. 105, p. 135.

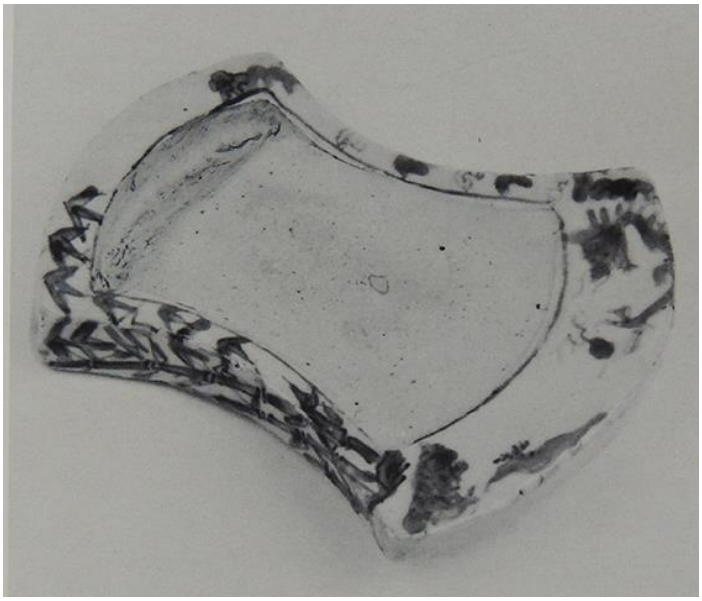

Fig. 2: *Kosometsuke feng*-character inkstone, late Ming dynasty, early 17th century, after Kawahara Masahiko, *Kosometsuke*, vol. II, monochrome plates, Kyoto, 1977, pl. 424, p. 111.

Fig. 3: Ceramic *feng*-character inkstone, Tang dynasty, after *Enlightening Pursuits: Scholar's Objects from the Mengdiexuan Collection*, University of Hong Kong exhibition, Hong Kong, 2006, no. 8, p. 61.

Fig. 4: *She* stone *feng*-character inkstone, Tang dynasty, after *Enlightening Pursuits: Scholar's Objects from the Mengdiexuan Collection*, University of Hong Kong exhibition, Hong Kong, 2006, no. 7, p. 58.

Fig. 5: Wang Wen (A.D.1479-1576), "Brewing Tea," dated A.D.1558, after *Enlightening Pursuits: Scholar's Objects from the Mengdiexuan Collection*, University of Hong Kong exhibition, Hong Kong, 2006, fig. 5, p. 17.

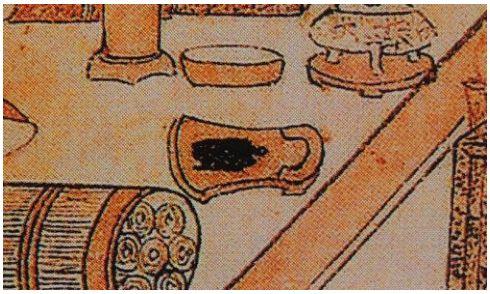

Fig. 6: Detail of fig. 5.

Fig. 7: Anonymous, "Buddhist Monk Writing in Company of Scholars," Song dynasty, after *Enlightening Pursuits: Scholar's Objects from the Mengdiexuan Collection*, University of Hong Kong exhibition, Hong Kong, 2006, fig. 8, p. 29.
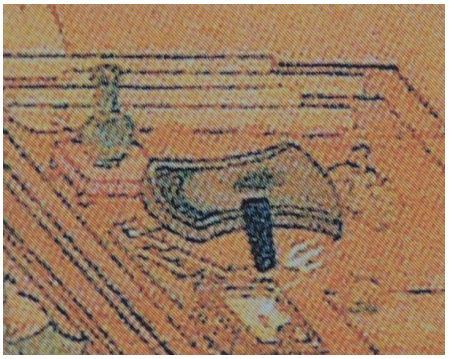
Fig. 8: Detail of fig. 7.