

The British
Museum

The Daily Life
In

The Forbidden City

Falangcai Bowl With Peonies

珐琅彩牡丹纹碗



Room 3

Admission Free

The Palace Museum



故宫博物院



Preface

Kangxi Emperor (reigned 1662—1722) was the emperor ruled for the longest reign in the history of China. Under his rule, Kangxi always kept his awareness and alertness to oversee the state and took every cautious measure against anything that might endanger his power to maintain a strong empire.

With a span of over three thousand years in the history of Chinese ceramics, the two Song dynasties and the three eras of Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong era of the Qing dynasty were acclaimed as the golden periods of ceramic production. The ceramics of Song dynasty were credited for their wide variety and stylistic essence while the ceramics of Qing dynasty were acclaimed for their refined quality in terms of clay, glaze and the unprecedented forms and decorations.

In the Kangxi period, ceramic production had reached a new flourishing state in which varieties of forms and production techniques reached a cradle in Chinese ceramic history. Kangxi Emperor was an enlightened monarch, and unceasingly interested in expanding his knowledge in a variety of fields. He was greatly attracted by expertise in the arts, especially that from abroad. So the technique of enamel painting entered the imperial court, where enameled porcelains began to be produced.

The color enameled ware of the late Kangxi period not only show that potters introduced foreign pink enamel with gold as colorant, but also changed the mode of applying colors by using imported oil mixture instead of the traditional water and glue to paint the designs in color enamels on the ware, making a distinction like western oil painting and Chinese ink painting, and these enameled wares of the Kangxi ear were only designed for imperial use.

The most esteemed color glaze was the yellow glaze which was a kind of low-fired glaze with its color derived from iron oxide. Imperial regulations laid down that use of wares completely glazed in yellow was restricted to the Emperor, Empress and Great Empress Dowager while the imperial concubine of the first rank might use wares glazed in yellow on the exterior and white in the interior, the imperial concubine of the 2nd rank might use wares decorated with green dragons on a yellow ground and imperial concubine of the 3rd rank might use wares decorated with yellow dragons on a blue ground. According to the records, the yellow glazed wares should have been commissioned at the time.

How was the daily life in the mysterious Forbidden City? How to balance the strict regulations and the cultural amusement? Let's explore it from this beautiful peonies bowl.

Falangcai bowl with peonies

清康熙 黄地珐琅彩缠枝牡丹纹碗

Porcelain made in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province;

Decoration added in Beijing.

Qing dynasty, Kangxi yuzhi mark and period, about AD 1716—22

Height: 56mm, Diameter: 115mm

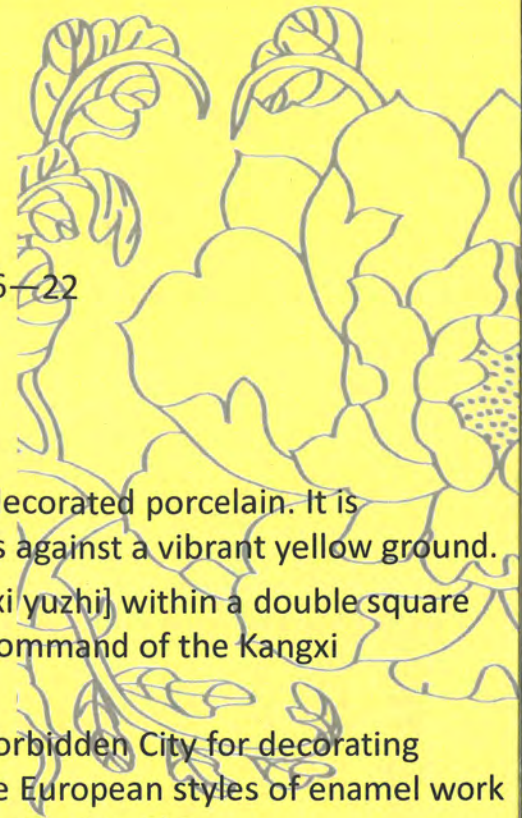
Museum number: PDF A806

Falangcai (Color Enamels) were created in Kangxi period.

This bowl is one of the earliest typical examples of palace-decorated porcelain. It is delicately painted on the exterior with intertwining peonies against a vibrant yellow ground.

The bowl bears the four-character mark “康熙御制” [Kangxi yuzhi] within a double square in overglaze blue enamel, which means made by imperial command of the Kangxi emperor(1654-1722).

The Kangxi emperor set up enamel workshops within the Forbidden City for decorating porcelain. He was inspired to do so by a desire to reproduce European styles of enamel work that he had seen through his contact with foreign Jesuits resident in China.



The colored backgrounds usually seen were red, yellow, blue, purple, green and carmine. The main designs were scroll peonies, big floral sprays, round flowers whit “寿” (means long life) in the center.

The inside of porcelains with color enamel decoration was smooth white glaze without other colors.



Collection in BM, Museum number 1936,0413.34



Kangxi Emperor (1654-1722)

Kangxi is considered one of China's greatest emperors. Kangxi's reign brought about long-term stability and relative wealth. Kangxi Emperor was an enlightened monarch, and unceasingly interested in expanding his knowledge in a variety of fields. He was greatly attracted by expertise in the arts, especially that from abroad. So the technique of enamel painting entered the imperial court, where enameled porcelains began to be produced.

Because Falangcai were successfully created in the late Kangxi, few of them were handed down. They are rare and very precious.

