



Peaches and Peonies Export Porcelain Vase Reproduction

This porcelain vase is based on a mid-nineteenth century Chinese bottle and lid currently in the Peabody Essex Museum collection in Salem, Massachusetts. The original bottle and lid were part of a lady's toilette, owned by a woman in one of the grand homes of Chestnut Street, Salem, Massachusetts. Though produced in China, this and many other porcelain products were developed for and sent to a European or American market.

The technique of making porcelain was so specialized that European manufacturers competed to find the secret recipe for true porcelain-- a hard, white, heat-resistant ceramic unlike anything produced in Europe. Not until the eighteenth century did Europeans develop a substitute, creating a high demand for "China" export porcelain over many centuries.

Though the original porcelain toilette set was probably made at Jingdezhen (jing-du-jen), the porcelain capital of the world from the fourteenth century to the present. From the Ming period onwards, official kilns in Jingdezhen were controlled by the emperor, making imperial porcelain in large quantity for the court and the emperor to give as gifts. The majority of the fine ceramics produced during the Qing dynasty came from the Jingdezhen kilns.

This vase would have been part of a lady's toilette set, used in her routine of grooming and dressing, and perhaps contained water. In the nineteenth century, elaborate toilette sets were created for bureaus, dressing tables and washstands, providing a wonderful niche for Chinese porcelain makers.

It is made from kaolin/gaoling, a clay containing feldspar, granite and pegmatite that remains white when fired; combined with petuntse/baidunzi, a clay of similar composition in which the feldspar is less decomposed. When fired, the petuntse vitrifies, holding the less fusible kaolin together and resulting in an extremely hard, translucent

ceramic. Kaolin is sometimes referred to as the bones of the porcelain, and petuntse as the flesh.

The name kaolin refers to the hills near Jingdezhen (CHING-duh- ZHUHN) where the clay was first discovered. The name porcelain derives from the Portuguese word “porcellana,” meaning cowrie shell, which 16th century traders thought the porcelain ceramics resembled in color and texture.

Some of the decoration was then painted on, specifically, the various underglaze motifs would be outlined in pale cobalt blue. The vessel was then covered with a clear glaze and fired at a high temperature (1250- 1450° C). The outlines were then filled in with translucent enamels of various colors. The enamels were composed of pigments suspended in lead-silica glass. They would be painted on after the first firing, and then the vessel would be fired again at a lower temperature. (The enamels cannot withstand the heat of the first firing.)

The underglaze outlines fit so perfectly with the overglaze enamels that the technique became known as “doucai,” (dew-sigh) or “joined colors,” a reference to the complex joinery used in wood furniture and architecture.

Peony Flowers: China’s unofficial national flower. Symbolically, the peony represents royalty, rank, wealth, honor, and female beauty.



Peach Fruit: Peaches symbolize longevity and immortality in China. The god of longevity is often depicted carrying a peach or coming out of one. The combination of peaches and peonies represent wealth and rank over the course of a long life.



Butterflies: Butterflies represent longevity as well as love, indicating conjugal fidelity.



Pomegranates: Representing fertility in Chinese culture, the numerous seeds in a pomegranate stand for the hundreds of sons a family might hope for. Pomegranates also hold strong meaning in the Judeo/Christian tradition, perhaps enhancing the appeal of

this exported vase to European and American markets. In the Jewish tradition, the pomegranate is said to contain six hundred and thirteen seeds, representing, among other things, the six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Torah. In the Christian tradition, the many seeds represent the individuals united by their faith, and the bursting forth of seeds represents the resurrection of Christ.



Power and Beauty Connections

Room 2

Peach Dish

The Kang-hsi period witnessed the maturation of two distinct formats that featured overglaze polychrome enamels against pure white porcelain ground. The earlier of the two techniques employed translucent enamels like those in this extraordinary dish (famille verte or green family), while the other featured opaque enamels (famille rose or pink family).

This exceptionally rare imperial porcelain features four peaches in vibrant green, yellow, and aubergine on leafy branches with black outline against a white ground. Most dishes of this type show pomegranate and persimmon as their main motif. This is the only dish of this style on record to display peaches.

The peaches are superimposed on a barely perceptible incised design of a central dragon in pursuit of a flaming pearl encircled by two other dragons. The underside is incised with two dragons and decorated with a peony and camellia branch. It also contains a six-character Kang-hsi reign mark in underglaze blue

Peach Dish, Kang-hsi mark and period (1662-1722), Famille verte ware Porcelain with peach design in overglaze enamels superimposed on incised dragon décor

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/48290/peach-dish-china>

Snuff Bottle, 31.113.2.a,b
Bottle, 50.46.138
Hexagonal Bowl, 78.1
Moon Flask, 84.116.2
Peach Dish, 2001.134

Bottle Vase 96.97.24
Vase, 98.72.3
Dish, 99.121.2
Pair of Famille Rose Bowls with Stand,
2000.215.1.1,2,3
Charger, 2014.136.2.1

Room 5

Large Storage Jar with Cover, 17-18th centuries, porcelain with underglaze with blue glaze, 2011.42.1a,b

Jardinier, 18-19th centuries glazed porcelain, 96.97.29.1

Garden Seat, Qianlong period, blue and white porcelain 2003.105.1

Collection Connection

Doris and Leo Hodroff Gallery of Export Porcelain G209