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A DREAM REALISED: KANGXI'S ULTIMATE *FALANGCAI* BOWL

A MASTERWORK OF *FALANGCAI* ART



AN EXTRAORDINARY RUBY RED-GROUND *FALANGCAI* 'DOUBLE LOTUS' BOWL
KANGXI BLUE-ENAMELLED YUZHUI MARK, CIRCA 1722
Estimate on request

A DREAM REALISED

This exquisite imperial bowl represents the pinnacle of *falangcai* art during the Kangxi period. The Kangxi Emperor's dream of perfecting local production of painted enamels was extraordinarily realised on this exceptional and unique 'double lotus' bowl.

WHAT IS *FALANGCAI*?

- Literal meaning is 'coloured enamels'
- Refers to porcelains painted with pictorial decoration in enamels
- First developed during the Qing Dynasty **Kangxi reign (1662-1722)**
- Composition differs from traditional Chinese overglaze decorations on porcelains
- *Falangcai* enamels can be easily mixed and layered to create a richer palette and thicker texture, reminiscent of the **qualities of an oil painting**
- **Pastel colours** were made possible on a porcelain surface for the first time, allowing greater shading and variety of colours
- The Kangxi Emperor (r. 1662-1722) first encountered European-made painted enamel metal wares through Jesuit missionaries in the late 17th century
- He was immediately enthralled and endeavoured to nurture local production of painted enamel wares
- He requested Jesuit missionaries to send enamellers to China to train local artisans, and even set up **enamel workshops in the palace** to manufacture painted enamel wares
- During the last years of the Kangxi reign, production of *falangcai* porcelains reached perfection, as can be seen on the current bowl

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- **THE IMPORTANCE OF KANGXI FALANGCAI PORCELAINS**

- The combination of enamelling and porcelain was an important technological breakthrough
- For the first time, pictorial decoration on porcelain was rendered with a 'painterly' quality
- A novel system of *falangcai* porcelain production was implemented
 - ❖ Plain white porcelains were first fired in the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen
 - ❖ They were then sent to the palace to be decorated by court enamellers
- *Falangcai* porcelains were owned exclusively by the Qing emperors, and were secreted deep inside the palace
- Since then *falangcai* porcelains had been coveted by generations of discerning connoisseurs

CHRISTIE'S PRESENTS: KANGXI'S ULTIMATE FALANGCAI 'DOUBLE LOTUS' BOWL

- *Falangcai* production did not reach maturity until the very last years of the Kangxi reign in the early 18th century
- From its shape, enamelling and decoration, we can ascertain the current bowl was made towards the end of the Kangxi reign, possibly in his last year in 1722
 - ❖ The period when *falangcai* production reached perfection



ULTIMATE PERFECTION

- The form of this bowl differs from the larger bowls typically seen amongst earlier Kangxi *falangcai* wares
 - ❖ Its delicate and thin potting is closer to characteristics of bowls from the reign of Yongzheng (r. 1723-1735), successor to the Kangxi Emperor
- The ruby-red, white and yellow enamels seen on this bowl were three enamel colours newly invented towards the end of the Kangxi reign
- These vibrant enamels were painted on a glazed porcelain surface, as opposed to earlier experimental examples painted on rougher, unglazed surfaces
 - ❖ This gives rise to a smoother texture and glossier surface, characteristic of the best and most desired *falangcai* porcelains made during the late Kangxi reign

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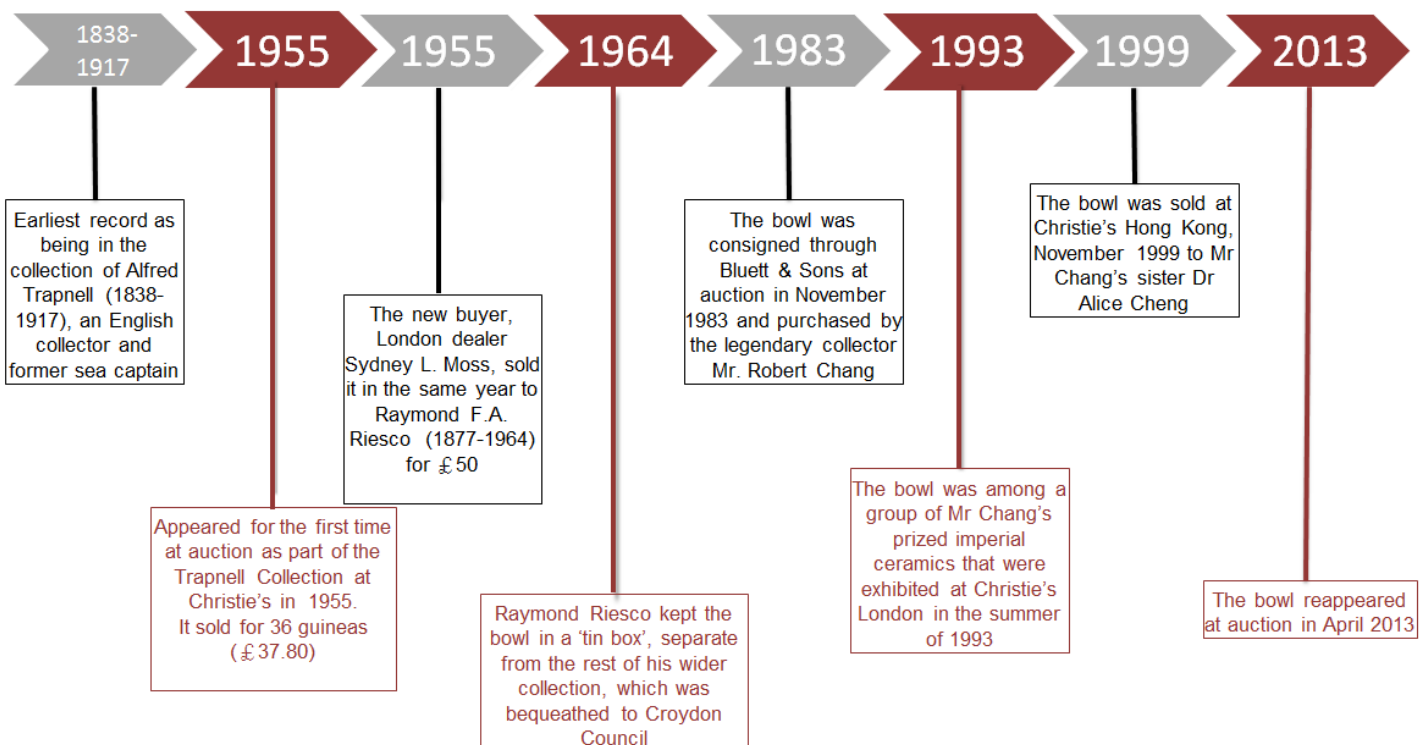
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DOUBLE

LOTUS

- The multi-petalled lotuses depicted on the bowl are a unique species known as qianyelian 'thousand-petal lotus', two of which are double-headed bingdilian 'double lotus'
- The Kangxi Emperor appears to have had a particular liking for these special lotuses originating from the Aohan Banner in Mongolia, and composed several poems in praise of them
- In the last year of his reign (Kangxi 61st year, corresponding to 1722), he even ordered the court artist Jiang Tingxi (蒋廷锡 1669-1732) to paint a scroll titled *Lotus of a Thousand Petals*
- The lotuses on this painting and the current bowl have a lot of resemblance. It is likely the painting served as an inspiration for the enamellist who painted the bowl
- Since Jiang's painting was executed in 1722, and the bowl bears characteristics of a late Kangxi *falangcai* porcelain, we can date the bowl to 1722, the 61st and very last year of the Kangxi reign



THE JOURNEY OF THE KANGXI FALANGCAI BOWL



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Notes to Editors

Date of Sale: 27th November 2019

Venue : Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, 1 Expo Drive, Wanchai, Hong Kong

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