THE EDWIN C. VOGEL COLLECTION OF CHINESE PORCELAIN

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The splendors of Chinese porcelain of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries quickly became known and treasured in the West. The famous collection of August the Strong, Elector of Saxony (1694-1733) was gathered together during the lifetime of the K'ang-hsi and Yung-cheng emperors; it became the core of the Johanneum at Dresden. Paris and Berlin, Amsterdam and London followed suit. This tradition was kept up in the New World, where the wares of this period reached, perhaps, the peak of their fashion in the first third of the twentieth century, and some collections, especially of monochromes, soon surpassed the old European ones. Whatever the fluctuations of fashion may be, the inherent qualities of the good examples of the K'ang-hsi and Yung-cheng periods will always stand out, marking a unique achievement, and will assure these pieces a lasting place in our appreciation.

Edwin C. Vogel began to buy Chinese porcelain about forty years ago. Soon he combined this new interest with his pursuit of fine English furniture. Collecting became a way of life with him, which was to lead him far afield and to give him considerable pleasure. He never bought anything which he did not personally like and want, with which he did not develop a personal relationship. This devotion he has been lucky to share with his wife, who also developed a keen and active interest in the growing collection. From his father-in-law he had learned that in collecting he should always try for quality, not for quantity. So he took his time in finding what he wanted; he sifted, exchanged, and eliminated right down to the day when he decided to place his Chinese porcelains as a long-term loan with the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The result is a small (80 pieces) but remarkable collection, outstanding in its over-all quality. There is not a single indifferent object; all are representative, many are rare, some unique. Nearly all date from the K'ang-hsi period (1662-1722) and is in the Vogel collection, now on loan in the Museum.
Hsi-wang-mu, Queen of the West, and the Immortal Ho Hsien-ku as young ladies of the court. Enamel on biscuit 1722), and most of them are decorated in one or another rich variety of enamel colors, long the most popular family of Chinese wares in the West.

The most conspicuous group are the porcelain figures decorated with enamel on biscuit, lovely decorative sculptures of great beauty and rarity.
They immediately transport us into the enchanted realm of Chinese legend. There is Hsi-wang-mu, the Queen of the West, who resides in the K'un-lun mountains and from time to time exchanges visits with favored imperial devotees. Every three thousand years, when the peaches of immortality ripen, she celebrates her birthday with the Immortals at a fabulous banquet. Figures of the goddess were, in more recent days, presented to ladies who reached fifty years of age. One of Mr. Vogel's figures represents her in ceremonial dress, seated on a lion; another with the dress and features of a young and charming court lady, carrying the famous peaches, and accompanied by the fairy Ho Hsien-ku, one of the Eight Immortals. Also attired as an elegant young lady, whose green robe contrasts beautifully with the black one of Hsi-wang-mu, Ho Hsien-ku holds a stylized lotus in her hands. She is supposed to have lived in the seventh century. After eating some magic substance she passed her time floating from one mountain peak to another, collecting precious magic fruits for her mother. She soon did not need any food herself any more and, having become more and more ethereal, eventually disappeared from mortal view altogether—unfortunately just when she had been invited to court by the empress. This remarkable pair of figurines is one of the loveliest in existence. Another, somewhat larger, pair in the Vogel collection shows the two ladies in flower-studded dark and light green robes.

A fellow immortal of Ho Hsien-ku's is the lame beggar Li T'ieh-kuai—"Li with the iron crutch" (p. 163). He received his crutch and hair band from Hsi-wang-mu or, according to another legend, from the great Lao-tzu. A master in the technique of immortality, he also holds a magic peach in his hand. On the pedestal we see the character shou ("long life") which indicates a birthday present. The rich black glaze of the robe makes this figure an unusual and rare piece.

The immortal beggar's weird and foreign features recall the "Indian" faces of the Lo-han, ascetic disciples of the Buddha, which we know from earlier Chinese art. Passing the unmarked border from the Taoist into the Buddhist pantheon, we find this type again in the yellow-robed Bodhidharma, reputed founder of the Ch'an (Zen) sect, crossing the Yang-tzu on a reed.
There are more figures from this world of religion and legend. Kuan-yin, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, into whom have merged perhaps two Chinese goddesses, a protectress of seafarers and a bringer of progeny, sits enthroned on a lotus, her acolyte Shan-ts’ai at her knee. The fat-bellied Pu-tai Ho-shang, “the Monk with the Hempen Sack,” sits, smiling, on the ground, clad in a loose priest’s robe, a rosary in his left hand. He leans on his bag, which contains the primordial ether or, in another version, the five lucky gifts. This monk, who is supposed to have lived about 900, is held to be an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Maitreya, the Buddha of the future.

Kuan Ti, the war god of popular religion, sits in belted robe and armor, a martial expression on his face. On earth he was a military hero in the late Han dynasty, famous for his loyalty. He was killed in 219, but it took him a considerable amount of time to advance in rank. Ennobled as duke and then as prince in the twelfth century, he finally was made a god in 1594.

The fragile and rare figurine of a man on horseback brings us back into the realm of ordinary mortals who remain anonymous and whose advancement is limited. He is a minor official in summer robes, shown as he perhaps used to ride out to supervise his district. Also the two seated men (p. 165) are officials, leisurely enjoying their talk as well as smoke and drink. Three children at play, romping about despite their formal robes, are a charming and unusual group.

Then there are animals—spotted horses reclining; a splendid pair of lions, the male with the magic brocade ball and the female with the cub, all looking like glorified Pekinese; finally two beautiful geese whose species even the Audubon Society would find difficult to identify. Well modeled and graceful, they are enameled in a color scheme different from the general palette and reminiscent of the T’ang tradition.

There are few enameled vases in the collection, but they are all outstanding. The remarkable pair of square yellow beakers in three-color enamel with embattled edges imitate a bronze form. The design is well balanced and the green and aubergine harmonize with the yellow background. The stylized shou characters, the cranes, mounts of the Immortals, the rocks between the waves, symbolizing the Isle of the Blest, all suggest that the vases were a birthday present. The famille noire (“black hawthorn”) baluster vase
is a splendid specimen, decorated with white flowering prunus, green rocks, and yellow, brown, and green birds. The prunus, flower of winter and messenger of spring, is a favorite of the Chinese painter and poet and a symbol of purity and chastity. The square vase with two green and two yellow panels is unique and a masterpiece of Chinese craftsmanship. One of the yellow panels shows a landscape with a scholar’s lodge, the other a dragon and a tiger—symbols of East and West, rain and wind, Yang and Yin—in a landscape setting. The two green panels have a flowering magnolia and chrysanthemums with birds and rocks and, the second, a vase with prunus and the po-ku (‘‘hundred antiques’’): bronze vessels, lute, jie-i scepter, etc. The neck of the vase shows two cranes among pines and rocks, a stag, and a doe with the magic ling-chih, the mushroom which grows where the Immortals live, and a tortoise, all symbolizing long life and good luck. The stylized chrysanthemums of the main panels mean, by a pun, “permanence”; we find them once more on the shoulders, together with shou characters; four medallions show the four miraculous animals, feng-huang, tiger, dragon, and ch’i-lin. This wealth of auspicious symbols probably means that this vase also was made for an anniversary present. In this and other pieces here described the sub-

ABOVE: Square vase with green and yellow panels. Enamel on biscuit. LEFT: Beaker. Enamel on biscuit.
duced splendor of the rich enamel colors on
the biscuit can only be appreciated in front of the
original. The palette is limited, generally to a
pattern of three or five colors, but there is no
limit to the variety of effects obtained from them.
A rare pair of covered hexagonal famille jaune
vases was shown at the Berlin Chinese exhibition
of 1928. Another quite different type is the fine
club-shaped vase with rouge-de-fer background;
the reserves of varying shape are decorated, in
superb brushwork, with bird and flower paint-
ings in enamel on the glaze. An unusual bowl is
enameled on the inside in yellow and on the
outside in black with the flowers of the four sea-
sons. Two perfect blue and white bottle vases in
stupa form, also shown in the Berlin exhibition,
remind us that Chinese blue and white has al-
ways been the despair of the European potters.

Whereas the enameled wares of the famille
verte and their variations had, to a large extent,
been made for export to the West where they
continued to be highly popular, the Chinese
collectors of the Ch'ing dynasty who were in-
terested in contemporary wares treasured their
monochromes much more highly. This "Chinese
taste" hardly affected the European market, but
it has played a great role in influencing collectors
—and prices—in this country in our century.
The rich turquoise and aubergine glazes had al-
ready been appreciated by the earlier European
collectors; the sang-de-boeuf followed suit; the
delicate peachblossoms and the sophisticated cel-
dons and clair de lunes are, outside of China,
most splendidly represented in this country.

Among the sang-de-boeuf porcelains in Mr.
Vogel's collection we would like to point out
a lovely small ruby-red bottle-form cabinet vase
and the splendid large baluster vase. The thick
and deep glaze of the latter shows an even and
controlled flow downward toward the foot,
where the color reaches an extraordinary depth;
bubbly and stippled, it thickened and darkened
during its descent to produce, increasingly, the
effect reminiscent of the floor of a slaughterhouse
which gave the ware its name in the West and
which, more delicately, is compared to crushed
strawberries. Among the ten peachblossoms the
finest are a "rouge box" (for seal paste) from the
Morgan collection and a deep pink amphora.
The Chinese names for this glaze are "apple-
red," "apple-green," or "bean-red"; it has also
been compared to the blush on a maiden’s
cheeks. As the different terms imply, this is not
a uniform color but a combination of varying
shades and mottlings. This soft and harmoni-
ous blend of colors, together with the absolute-
ly perfect potting of the small vessels, has pro-
duced jewels which cannot be adequately shown
by a photograph in black and white.

Of several apple-green pieces the most beau-
tiful is one of the small bottles, of a lumino-
ous and brilliant color. Two hive-shaped brush-
washers in pale celadon (tou-ch'ing, the green of
dried peas) glaze, with a molded cloud-pattern
decoration, recall the famous earlier wares. A
graceful pair of slender beakers consciously imi-
tates the archaizing, precious Ju or Kuan wares
of the Sung dynasty in their lustrous light bluish,
grayish green "moon-white" (yieh-pai) glaze as
well as in their shape, which copies a bronze ku.
The light bluish gray ware which in the West we
call clair de lune is even rarer than peachbloom
and of the same refinement in glaze and potting.
Two flat coupes and especially an apple-shaped
brush-washer are splendid specimens of this im-
perial ware, perfect examples of what the Chinese
potter of the period, guided by a refined and
scholarly taste, could produce.