



**Pair of Chinese export porcelain figure groups of seated maidens with spaniels**

Qianlong period circa 1740

English Market

Height: 8½ inches; 21.5cm

Provenance: James E Sowell Collection

A pair of seated Chinese ladies, each holding a spaniel and wearing a green coat with dragon roundels, a pink belt, and red pantaloons, their hair in blue turbans, a rock with a phoenix beside them; on a flat base enamelled in yellow-brown.

This is a very rare pair of figures that would have appealed to the European taste for chinoiserie. Similar groups of Chinese figures modelled in European factories such as those at Meissen and Chantilly have been recorded. Those may have been inspired by this group, but it is likely that the inspiration passed both ways depending on the taste and demand of the market at the time, though they were expensive to make and never became plentiful.

Variations of this group are known with parrots or small children instead of dogs, and other groups of standing figures with deer and vases are recorded. The image of a lady with a spaniel was a European sentimental scene.

The phoenix, *fenghuang*, is a Chinese mythological bird. This one is erroneously described as a peacock in other sources. Its head has an orange comb and wattle (like a chicken) and a back-pointing crest; these and the three tail feathers (like a pheasant) and the orange feathers on its back (like a Mandarin duck) are all features of the phoenix. The fenghuang was the Empress of Birds in Chinese mythology, honoured by the other birds. It signifies beauty, grace, virtue, and the unity of yin and yang. It adds an authentic feminine intimacy to this Chinese scene.

References: Others of this type can be found in Sargent 1991, p124, a pair, with detailed discussion; Howard 1994, p254, a single; Cohen & Cohen 1999, p39, a single; Sharpe 2002, p209, a pair including the Cohen & Cohen example; Sotheby's London, 22 June 1970, lot 154, a pair; Sotheby's Monaco, 27 June 1984, a pair holding parrots and without phoenix or rocks beside them; 18 June 1988, lot 1692, a pair holding boys, without rocks; Christie's New York, 24 Jan 2005, lot 97, standing lady holding a scone with a similar phoenix beside her; Bonham's London, 6 June 2003, lot 263, a mirror pair of the standing lady with scone and phoenix; Cohen & Motley 2008, p100, No 5.2 this pair; Cohen & Cohen 2015, p46, No 33, a pair of standing maidens with deer.