



Sold: Chinese porcelain famille rose 'Ghost flag' Hong Bowl with the USA flag

The 'Ghost Flag' Hong Bowl

Qianlong period circa 1787-88

American Market

Diameter: 14 inches; 35.5cm

A Chinese export porcelain punchbowl painted to the exterior with scenes of the Hongs at Canton in famille rose enamels, showing the flags of Denmark, the Philippines, France, America, Sweden, Britain and The Netherlands - and one 'ghost' flag (overpainted) between the British and Dutch flags.

This hong bowl shows the waterfront buildings in Canton, where the Western offices and factories were located. It was a small area about the size of Buckingham Palace, where westerners were confined to their trade.

This rare and remarkable bowl appears to have a unique feature for such Hong Bowls in that it has a 'ghost' flag, the outline of which has been painted over, and the visible US flag is larger than usual. This suggests that the US flag was first intended for one position and was then switched to a new position during the decoration of this bowl. And it further suggests that this was commissioned by an American in Canton. It enables the dating of this bowl very precisely: it would appear to have been made at the exact moment when the US traders moved their principal office from one site to the next. It must have been ordered by an American in Canton at that time, who would have demanded the change - and indeed on this bowl the US flag in its brand new position is painted larger than the rest!

Other bowls are known with the US flag in either position - which was originally thought to be an error but Van Dyke and Mok 2016, have described the relocation of the US offices at this time.

The earliest bowl with these Hongs dates from 1765 and is in puce enamels having a panel on the other side of Copenhagen from a print of 1764. The changes in the architecture can be plotted from a careful study of these bowls and from paintings which were also popular at the time (see Paul A Van Dyke & Maria Kar-wing Mok 2016, *Images of the Canton Factories 1760-1822, Reading History in Art*).

The panelled versions date from about 1775 and later ones from about 1782 have a continuous scene all round the bowl. From the late 1780s the US flag is found on some bowls after the first US ship *The Empress of China* had been to Canton in 1783 and a US base was set up a few years later.

The two bowls with US flags illustrated in Cohen & Cohen 2017 (pp 130-137) are from the late 1780s when the US was trading in Canton and they have the US flag in the two different positions.

Also unusual on this bowl is the Philippine flag for *The Real Compañia de Filipinas* (Royal Philippine Company) that was founded in Madrid in March 1785 under the patronage of Charles III of Spain. This flag was first used in 1787.

References: Sargent 2012, No 241, an identical (apart from the ghost flag) bowl in the Peabody Essex Museum; another example is in Nostell Priory, Yorkshire (see Patricia Ferguson, *Canton Revisited: A Hong Bowl at Nostell Priory*, *Apollo Supplement Historic Houses and Collections*, (April 2009) 18-23); two bowls in the Winterthur Museum, No 1961.1427 is similar but has the US flag between the English and Dutch as on the grisaille bowls and No 2005.0037, similar to this example; a similar bowl is in the Reeves collection, Washington and Lee University, gift of HF Lenfest; Cohen & Cohen 2017, pp130-7.