

Ming bowl

金魚滿塘

jin yu man tang

a pond full of gold fish

金玉滿堂

jin yu man tang

a hall filled with
gold and jade

鯉

li

carp

The bowl (fig. a) is decorated with an aquatic scene of gold carp, lotus and water plants. The decoration shows the use of pun in the Chinese language. It illustrates the phrase 'jin 金 (gold) yu 魚 (fish) man 滿 (full) tang 塘 (pond)', meaning a pond full of gold fish. With yu 魚 (fish) having the same sound as yu 玉 (jade), and tang 塘 (pond) the same sound as tang 堂 (audience hall), can also mean an audience hall full of gold and jade.

Therefore, the scene of a pond full of gold fish, which sounds like 'Jin yu man tang 金魚滿塘', also sounds like the auspicious saying, 'a hall filled with gold and jade' 金玉滿堂 in Chinese. The decorations suggest the good wishes of 'may your hall (audience hall or home) be full of (or filled with) gold and jade (wealth)'.

As for carp, pronounced li 鯉, this has the same sound as li 利, meaning profit or monetary gain. The carp has additional significance for aspiring scholars, since the carp was believed to swim up river to the Dragon Gate, leap it and become a dragon. This represents the aspiring scholar, who passes the imperial examinations and becomes an official.¹

The interior of the bowl is decorated with several dots and two aquatic plants (fig. b). On the base of the bowl is a six-character reign mark in underglaze blue without a frame: *Daming Jiajing nien zhi* 大明嘉靖年製, meaning 'made in the reign of Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522–66) of the Great Ming 大明 (1368–1644)' (fig. c).

This porcelain bowl, a translucent white ware, was first decorated in cobalt blue under a transparent glaze and fired at a high temperature. It was then decorated with overglaze enamel colours and refired at a lower temperature. The palette of underglaze blue and polychrome overglaze enamels is called *Wucai*, meaning five colours.

This bowl was made in Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province, south China. By the fifteenth century, Jingdezhen, which began producing porcelain in the tenth century, became the centre of the production of porcelain and received imperial patronage. Imperial reign marks were painted in underglaze blue on the base of the porcelain.

CHINESE

Bowl 瓷碗

Ming dynasty 明朝, Jiajing 嘉靖 period (1522–66) Jingdezhen 景德鎮, Jiangxi province, South China
porcelain 瓷器 (*Wucai* 五彩 ware)
8.3 x 15.7 cm diameter
Felton Bequest, 1939 (3924-D3)

¹ For more information about the bureaucracy of the scholar-official class, see Kuncan and Dong Qichang.



(fig. a)



(fig. b)



(fig. c)