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DISH WITH PLANT (P'EN CHING) CH'EN LUNG PERIOD (1736-1795)

Mottled Olive Green Nephrite Leaves, Roses of Red Coral, Pink Buds of Ground Glass, also an Orchid with Gold Leaves

Little Gardens of Jade

BY GEORGE FREDERICK KUNZ, PH.D., SC.D., A.M.

Illustrations by Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

FOR the Chinese, jade is the precious stone *par excellence*, to an even greater degree than is the diamond with Occidentals. The fact that its rich variety of shades enables the lapidary to work it up into an endless variety of ornamental objects has certainly been the chief determining characteristic which has won the favor of the Chinese. Far from needing any help from metal mountings to set off its beauty, its rich coloring renders it complete in itself without any such adventitious aid, and any attempt to recapitulate the ornamental and decorative uses to which the Chinese put jade, would be equivalent to listing all the forms of ornament that Chinese art has elaborated in the course of millenniums.

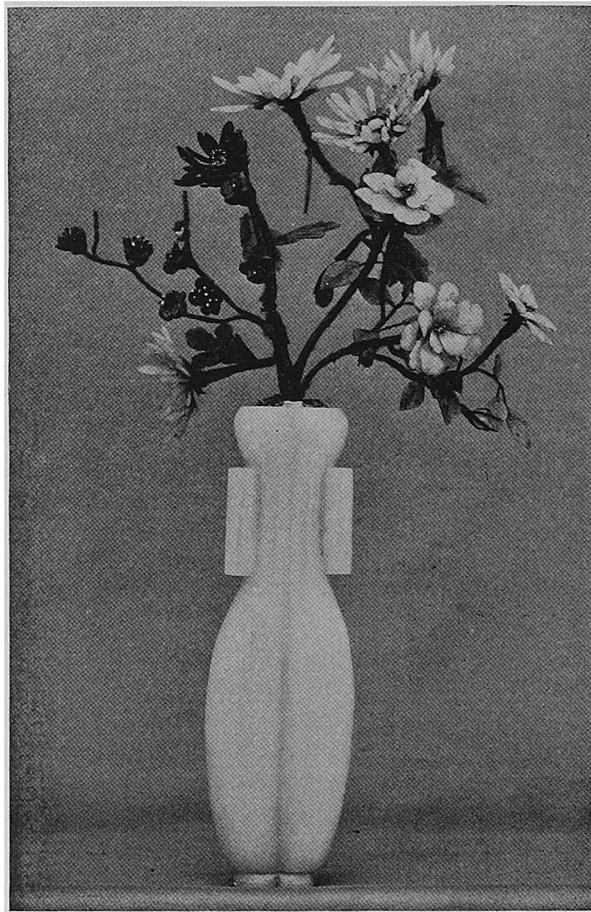
To the purely artistic qualities of the stone must be added its symbolic character and its supposed luck-bringing and curative powers—not only did jade work wonderful cures when worn on the body and when reduced to a powder and taken internally, but it was even asserted that the body of a man who had consumed

nearly five pounds of that powdered jade during his lifetime did not change after his death, for when it was exhumed after having been buried for five years, the natural color of life had been retained unchanged.

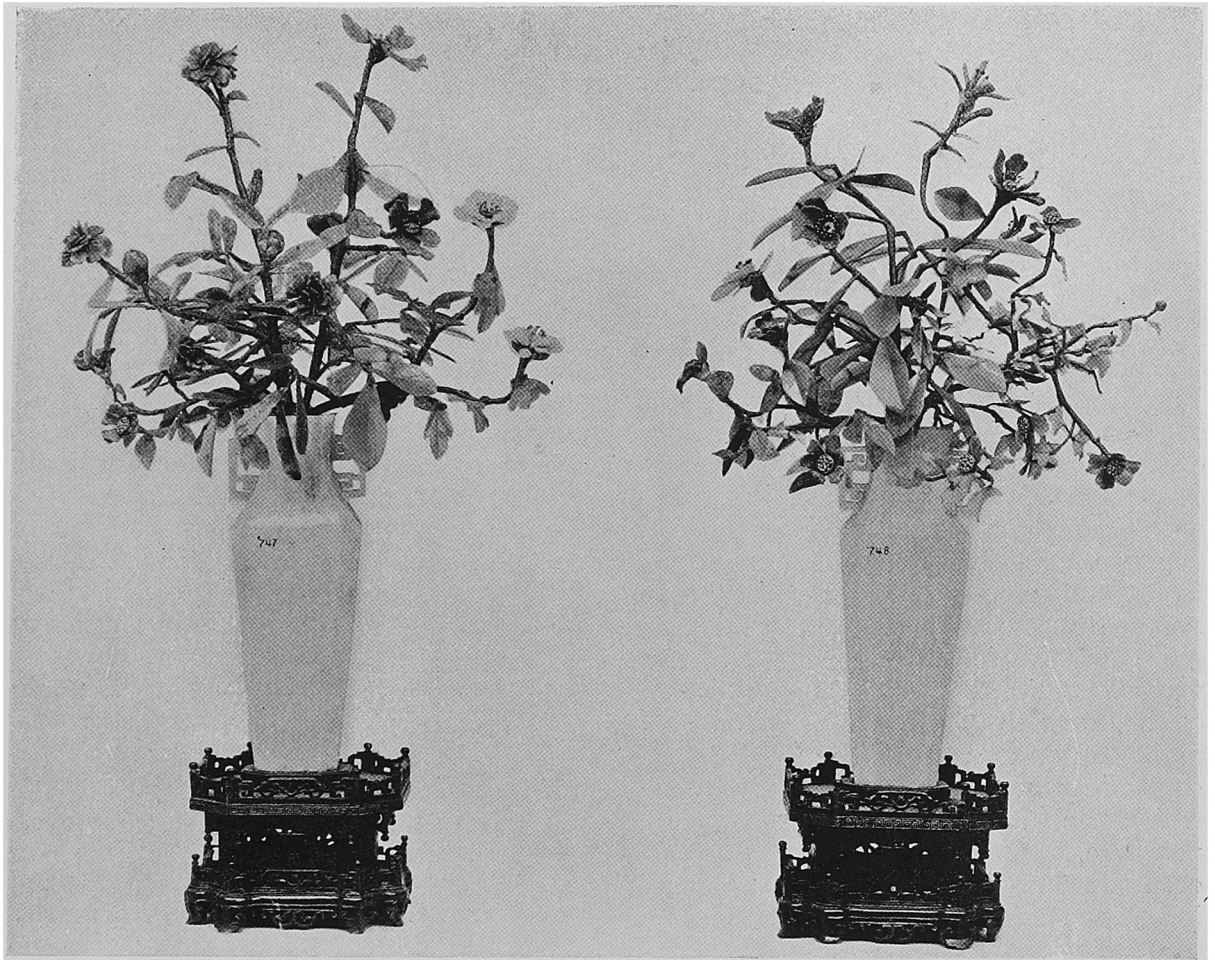
The ancients believed that precious stones were petrified flowers. Abbé Haüy, the great French crystallographer, called them crystallized flowers. The Chinese, with their great love for flowers, their wonderful knowledge of minerals, and their keen perception of color, have reproduced the flowers known to them in

permanent form, by using jade, tourmaline, beryl, lapis-lazuli and other colored stones. It is their power of concentration, of self-concentration, that enables them to construct so successfully these floral pieces which are correct to the smallest detail.

Frequently, they make these floral representations in low relief on panels and screens, everything faithfully reproduced in the precious materials, but instead of being in natural perspective, they are in low perspective. It is motives of this kind that may have led to the



NEPHRITE VASE WITH FLOWERS (HUA P'ING) OF THE CHIA-CH'ING PERIOD (1796-1820). 14½ x 80 in.



PAIR OF JADEITE VASES (HUA P'ING) WITH LEAVES OF MOSS-GREEN JADE AND TURQUOISE AND FLOWERS OF JADE, CORALLINE AND AMETHYSTINE QUARTZ. CHIA-CH'ING PERIOD (1796-1820)

Chinese decorations of the Louis XV period, or the French inspiration may perhaps have affected the Chinese.

One characteristic of Chinese lapidary work is the conscientious, careful and faithful adherence of the artist to the idealization of nature, combined with the most remarkable mechanical skill, which, however, does not in the slightest mar the artistic conception of the work, for the mechanical lapidarian manipulations are partly or entirely the result of hand application, and the touch or "feel" of the artist is apparent in every phase of the production. This is true whether the object be great or small. There is nothing haphazard about the execution, and the flower, its color, the correct position of a petal or leaf at the time that the flower is in growth, add a faithfulness

to the work not usually manifested. So in these flower pots, they are objects of grace, they do not seem like a mass of unrelated parts, but the bowl, the stamens, the petals, the leaves, all blend into one harmonious whole that affords a restful charm wherever placed.

These beautiful objects are rarely ever duplicated, except when they are made in pairs or for pendants. The flower pot itself is frequently made of jade, either in pure, carved forms, sometimes intricate, or occasionally adorned with cloisonné enamel, or else it may be of some quaint porcelain of lacquer or of metal.

The interesting feature of the plant and flower is their naturalness, inasmuch as the leaves and flowers, whether of jade, of red or yellow tourmaline, of pale sapphire or ruby, or coral, or agate, are made



A PAIR OF GILT BRONZE POTS DECORATED WITH CHAMPLEVÉ ENAMEL (P'ÊN CHING) WITH FLOWERS OF WHITE JADE SURROUNDED BY CHRYSANTHEMUMS OF RED CORAL, REDDISH-YELLOW CARNELIAN AND PINK QUARTZ AND WITH LEAVES OF JADE. CHIA-CH'ING PERIOD (1796-1820)

to simulate Nature, but as the process is never mechanical and always the result of an artist's touch, the difference of effect due to such handiwork will never make a leaf, a flower, a petal or any part exactly similar, even if many examples are produced, any more than the petals of a natural daisy or of a violet are ever absolutely alike. The flowers are placed in what seems an earth, generally of sealing wax, but covered with bits of coral, jade, tourmaline, opal or other stones, in imitation of pebbles.

Jade is one of the favorite materials, whether for the petal of a flower like the clematis, or for the large leaves of a plant resembling the lily-of-the-valley, as there it offers the greatest variety of color, from the purest white through

grays, to yellowish tints, for the flowers themselves, and then the peculiar green, gray-green, dark green and mottled jade for the leaves.

The best of these objects are of the Ch'ien Lung period (1735-1796). Some of the finest of them are those in the Heber R. Bishop Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Illustrations of a number of these accompany this article. They are artificial flowers only in the sense that they are imitations of natural flowers, but they are in fact complete realizations of the artist's idea. For it is not merely the wonderful skill with which the carver has executed his task that arouses our admiration, but, the artistic grouping and the harmonious combination of colors and materials, all



GILT BRONZE AND CHAMPLEVÉ ENAMEL POT (P'ÊN CHING), WITH PLANT OF DARK GREEN MOTTLED JADE LEAVES AND PINK CORAL BERRIES

combining to show that the artist must have visualized the beautiful object in his mind, before he gave it body and form in his work. We have here, in a higher and more perfect degree, that combination of idealization and realization we admire in the finest flower-painting on panels, with the added quality that is provided by the actual form and substance.

Perhaps the most artistic and beautiful of these jewel-plants in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, are two pairs of pots (Nos. 751-754 of the Bishop Collection). The respective dimensions of the first pair are 26 x 15 inches and 24 x 13 inches, each weighing something over eight pounds. They are of glass and gilt bronze and are provided with handles beaded with emerald-green jadeite. In one pot is a large tree of the *Magnolia yulan*, with flowers and buds of white jade, the tree being in full blossom before

the opening of the leaves. Below the magnolia is a chrysanthemum having flowers of pink quartz, and a tree of the variety called *lichhi* by the Chinese, with petals of carnelian surrounding a center formed of yellow agate. In the foreground appears a diminutive peach tree the fruit of which is made of enamelled glass, while the blossoms are of pink quartz; alongside of the peach tree is an enamelled glass orange and a Buddha's hand citron of ivory. The foliage is of olive-green jade (nephrite), bluish-green turquoise and light blue enamel on metal. The companion pot, of the same design as the one just described, holds a large peach tree, the foliage of which is carved from mottled olive-green jade; the blossoms and the ripe fruit are made of pink quartz, while the unripe fruit is carved out of a veined malachite. Beneath this



DISH WITH PLANT (P'ÊN CHING) LEAVES OF SERPENTINE AND BERRIES OF RED CORAL WITH CHRYSANTHEMUMS OF WHITE JADE, AND OF RED CORAL AND GOLD AND PEARL AND OF AMBER

tree is a shrub of the *Olea fragrans*, with flowers of yellow and brown amber and leaves of blue enamel; there are also sprays of *Begonia discolor*, the four petals formed of pink quartz and the leaves of mottled jade. In the background spring up flowers of a light-yellow agalmatolite, and at one side is a cluster of bamboo, the leaves being of turquoise.

The other pair of pots with plants (No's 753, 754), are not quite so tall, the respective heights being $16\frac{1}{2}$ inches and $16\frac{3}{4}$ inches, the diameters are respectively nine inches and ten inches. One weighs five pounds six ounces, the other five pounds. They are of gilt bronze and have a rounded form, with a six-lobed outline and foliated rims; three feet serve as supports, and the sides have a decoration in *champlevé* enamel. From one of them springs a *Magnolia yulan* tree in full blossom, the soil being figured by fine grains of coral. The flowers are of white jade and are surrounded by chrysanthemums of red coral, reddish and yellow carnelian and pink quartz. On one side the leaves are of olive-green and sage-green jade (nephrite), while on the other side is a shrub of the *Nandina domestica*, adorned with turquoise leaves, and berries and of red coral, and a branching stem of the *Polyporus lucidus*, showing fungus heads carved from pink quartz. In the companion pot are similar plants of *Polyporus lucidus* and of *Nandina domestica*, with chrysanthemums made of white jade and dark-blue flowers of the same kind made out of lapis-lazuli. These shrubs are set about two trees, a plum tree and a peach tree; on the former are blossoms and buds of amber, and on the latter blossoms and buds of pink quartz, the leaves being made of olive-green or sage-green jade, and of ivory.

Extremely fine examples of this class are shown in a pair of round dishes, of mottled, olive-green jade (nephrite), filled with a material having a thin layer of red coral to simulate earth. They contain, respectively a red-rose bush and a chrysanthemum plant (No's 743 and 744 of the Heber R. Bishop Collection).

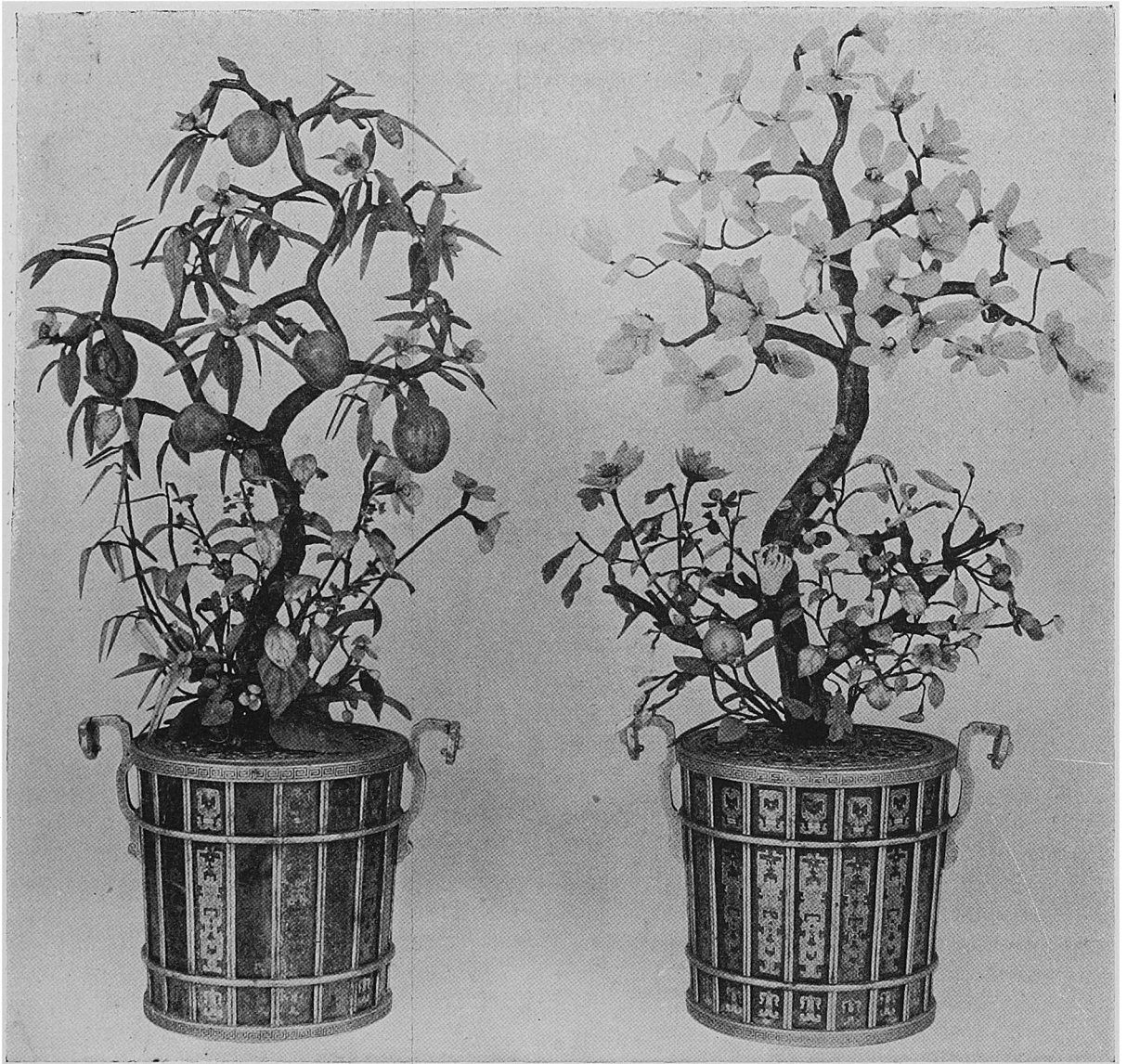
The rose petals are of red coral, and each one has a pearl in the center of a coronet of golden stamens. The buds are of a pink-hued ground glass, while the leaves are carved from thin slices of mottled jade. Below the rose-bush is an orchid with golden leaves, and bearing six-petaled flowers, five of the petals made of white jade, the sixth of red coral. Here also a pearl is set in the midst of the flower. The leaves of three small plants near the orchid suggest those of violets. On the opposite side of the rose-bush is set a small mass of lapis-lazuli to balance the design.

The companion flower-dish exhibits a flowering chrysanthemum shrub. The flowers are of different colors, as is the case with the curious natural examples of Chinese flower grafting; the leaves are of mottled-green jade. Of the flowers, four are of white jade having a red colored bead in the center; three are of red-coral and gold; another has a pearl in the center; and as a contrasting color the artist has produced one on which florets of amber encircle a coral bead. On the dish beneath the shrub is a small rock and three little violet plants, as well as another plantlet with lanceolate leaves of mottled yellow and green serpentine, and bearing red berries figured by coral.

This wonderful pair of flower-dishes dates from the Ch'ien-Lung period (1736-1795). The jade is of the nephrite variety.

Then we have a nephrite vase with flowers, of the Chia-Ch'ing period (1796-1820). It is $14\frac{1}{4}$ inches high and 8 inches in diameter, the color being white of a lightish-green tint. From it rise branches with chrysanthemum flowers of white jade, pink quartz, yellow agalmatolite, and lapis-lazuli. Besides these there is a bunch of plum blossoms carved from yellowish-brown amber, and a little rose branch made of pink quartz. In all cases the leaves are of mottled olive-green jade. (No. 749 of the Heber R. Bishop Collection.)

From the same period there is in the collection a jade pot containing plants.



PAIR OF GLASS AND GILT BRONZE POTS (P'ÉN CHING) WITH FLOWERS AND FRUITS OF PINK QUARTZ, VEINED MALACHITE, ETC. CHIA-CH'ING PERIOD (1796-1820)

The dimensions are 15.75 x 10.5 inches. The nephrite used for this vessel shows a mottling of light and dark green with black specks, it weighs 7 pounds (3175.2 grams). The form is rounded and has a six-lobed outline of gilt bronze with a *champlevé* border inlaid with blue enamel. Each of the six cornersides is mounted with an oblong plaque of white bowenite (a mineral substance strongly resembling jade). These plaques are carved in an intricate openwork pattern in which the Chinese character (*shou*) signifying longevity is combined with floral scrolls of

peony flowers, while figures of bats, emblems of happiness, are to be seen in the upper corners. In this pot grows a plant having large lanceolate leaves of dark-green mottled jade; in the midst of the leaves is a branch on which are three clusters of berries carved from pink coral. They resemble the fruit of the sacred bamboo of the Chinese (*Nandina domestica*), which is a symbol of high rank. Beneath the plant is a small rookery from which springs the woody fungus named *ling-chih* by the Chinese; the tips are of characteristic shape and are all carved of

brownish-gray jade, with the exception of one which is of turquoise. A few jade sprouts representing bamboo and a few violets with leaves of stained ivory, fill out and complete this attractive ornament (No. 750 of the Heber R. Bishop Collection).

An exceedingly beautiful pair of vases of white jadeite, containing sprigs of flowers, belong also to the Ch'ia-Ching period (No's 747 and 748 of the Heber R. Bishop Collection). The dimensions differ slightly, one of the vases being 15 inches high with 10-inch diameter, while the other has a height of 13.38 inches and a diameter of 9 inches. The prevailing white hues show mottlings of emerald green and a very light lavender tint. These vases are of quadrangular form; the body expands upward toward the shoulder, which forms a sharp ridge, the outline then receding toward the neck. Large handles with openwork carving spring from either side; in front and at the back is engraved the *shou* character denoting longevity. Each vase holds a bouquet of blossoming shrubs such as peach, pomegranate, plum and hawthorne, the leaves being of moss-green jade and turquoise, while the flowers are of white jade, or of coralline and amethystine quartz.

A remarkable collection of Chinese and Japanese treasures sold in New York in 1916, contained a large number of these beautiful precious stone flowers, there

being no less than 24 examples of this type of Chinese art. Perhaps the finest was a group of peonies, the eight large wide-open blossoms being made of light grayish yellow or gray-black jade, or that of the famous fei-tsui shade (kingfishers' plumes), sometimes called "imperial jade." At one side are chrysanthemums of carnelian and opalescent agate, near a quartz rock of aquamarine hue. The plant leaves are of green jade. The jardinière itself is of Chien-Lung gold lacquer. Rivalling this flower group is a jade and amber peach tree. Here the "peaches of longevity" are carved from a clear light brown and clouded amber; the delicate leaves are of brilliant green jade. Below appear shrubs in white jade, malachite, and carnelian, and the little figure of a stag, cut out of brilliantly polished white jade. The gilt jardinière is octagonal in form. The total height of the ornament is 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The peony and chrysanthemum group is 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. Another peach tree, growing out of a cloisonné jardinière, has nine pieces of the fruits carved out of amethysts of varying hue, while two are of dense green jade, this indicating the degrees of ripeness; the tree has leaves of green translucent jade. Beneath are set shrubs done in turquoise, green jade and clouded amber. The total height of the jardinière and the tree is 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Several of these examples are now in the collection of Col. William Boyce Thompson.

