



**Japanese Imari fluted bowl, 18th-19th century  
POA**

Japanese Imari fluted bowl, 18th-19th century, with everted rim, the exterior decorated predominantly in iron red and gilt with a pair of phoenix in a rocky garden with paulownia, peony, bamboo and other foliage, the interior decorated with a floral garland to the rim and further floral sprays to the ribbed sides, the central roundel with two perching birds amongst clouds and foliage.

Condition: Restored break to rim, hairline crack

Notes:

An 18th century bowl and cover decorated with a similar pattern can be found in the Rijksmuseum Collection (AK-NM-6492-A.).

The paulownia tomentosa (? , 'kiri') is a hardwood tree native to parts of China, brought to Japan in ancient times. Exceptionally fast growing, it was appreciated for its large decorative flowers and beautiful leaves. Traditionally it was planted by aristocratic families in Japan upon the birth of a daughter; when the grown-up daughter got married the mature tree would be felled and used to make a 'tansu' chest as part of her dowry. The leaves and flowers of the paulownia feature in the private seal used by the Japanese Imperial family from around the 16th century, before the chrysanthemum seal became the predominant Imperial symbol. Other powerful families adopted the paulownia as their 'mon' (clan crest), including the Toyotomi family, led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598) who is known as one of the three great 'unifiers' of Japan and was the de facto ruler in the late 16th century. The seal, which features a stylised leaf with flowers in a 5-7-5 pattern, is now used by the Japanese government as an official symbol of office, and also features on the 500 yen coin. Interestingly, given its appearance here within ceramic design, the lightweight seeds of the paulownia were commonly used as protective packaging material by Chinese porcelain exporters before the development of plastic-based alternatives.

Meanwhile, the symbol of the 'Chinese phoenix' was also transmitted to Japan from China, most likely during the Asuka Period (538–710 C.E.), where it became known as the hō-o (Japanese phoenix). It shares some of its symbolism with its Chinese counterpart. In ancient China, the 'fenghuang' had consisted of two separate entities to represent yin and yang; the male bird (feng) and female (huang). However, during the Ming the two gradually merged to become the symbol of female royalty. In Japan the phoenix represents renewal of life and the balancing of opposites, and has long been associated with the Imperial Family (indeed, it features on the Imperial throne and can also be found on the 10,000 yen note). Usually depicted as a magnificent beast with brilliant plumage and sometimes with the neck of a snake and a tortoise-like back, it has been a popular decorative motif in Japanese art since at least the Nara period, and also features heavily in ceramic, lacquer and textile design. Several extant examples of early architecture feature the hō-o, perhaps most notably the ceiling of the Western Gate of the Main Hall at the Hōryū-ji temple complex in Nara, the oldest parts of which date back to the 7th century. Initially, designs incorporating the phoenix seem to have retained a strong connection to the symbol's Chinese origins, with the bird often shown perching in a paulownia or amongst the arabesque pattern known as karakusa (literally, 'Chinese grasses'). However, over time artists began to combine these 'Chinese' motifs with seasonal 'Japanese' ones such as wild grasses, peony and bamboo, reflecting the assimilation of the phoenix into a specifically Japanese iconography.

<b>Material and Technique</b>	Porcelain with enamel and gilt decoration
<b>Origin</b>	Japanese
<b>Diameter</b>	14cm. (5 1/2in.)

Antique ref: Y128