



Standing Deer

Qianlong c 1760
Height: 26cm; 10.25 inches

A Chinese export model of a standing deer, painted in brown and black enamel, with tail, eyes, snout and hooves in black, the fur finely painted with reserved spots.

The small number of Chinese export figures of deer recorded fall mainly into two main groups, Kangxi examples or later models from the Jiaqing period. However, the modelling of the bodies of this example is sophisticated and the porcelain material gives a date in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, circa 1760. Few other deer models are known from this period but a fine pair of seat deer are recorded in the James E Sowell collection (Cohen & Motley 2008 - see illustration).

The head has two holes that would have held antlers made of wood or metal, or possibly carved from ivory or antlerbone, and in this example are a more recent replacement.

Deer hold a special place in the symbolism and mythology of the Chinese. The model for this animal is most likely the Chinese Spotted Deer or Sika Deer (*Cervus nippon*, Tem-

minck 1838), which has several subspecies in China, the largest of which is *C. nippon hortularum* (Swinhoe, 1864); others include the Manchurian Sika, (*C. n. mantchuricus*, Swinhoe, 1864) and the North China Sika (*C.n. mandarinus*, Milne-Edwards 1871), which is almost extinct. They all have summer coats spotted to varying degrees, though the winter coat is dark and unspotted. Another feature visible in this example is the darkened strip down the spine. Originally widespread, deer have suffered the fate of many animals that are good to eat or provide other useful features: their antlers are extensively used in Chinese medicine. Today deer are farmed for their antlers, and in the wild they are protected, so their populations have recovered a little, with a notable recent reappearance in Heilongjiang Province.

Excavations conducted recently at the Guangfulin ruins near Shanghai have found many deer skulls ceremonially included in burials of the five-thousand-year-old Liangzhu culture, as well as ceramics decorated with images of spotted deer. This is testimony to the antiquity of these animals in Chinese art, symbolism, and mythology and shows the link with immortality that this animal represents. Archaeologists have also found two-thousand-year-old wall paintings of spotted deer in Ningxia in northwestern China.

The Chinese word for deer, *lu*, is a homophone for 'fat salary', so deer also represent substantial material success.

They appear throughout Chinese history and art, often associated with Xi Wang Mu or pictured in a deer hunt symbolic of the pursuit of wealth.

Another possible model for this deer could be the unusual species *Elaphurus davidianus* (Milne-Edwards, 1866), Père David's Deer, which is spotted in juvenile stages but not as an adult and has a face more horse-like than other deer. It is known from fossils found throughout much of China but was extensively hunted, and the last surviving population was enclosed in the Qing imperial hunting park at Nan Haizi, near Beijing, with a 43 mile wall around it. This deer was called *sibuxiang* by the Chinese; the name means 'like none of the four', as the animal has the neck of a camel (or the face of a horse, by some accounts), the hooves of a cow, the tail of a donkey, and the antlers of a deer, but looks like none of the above. It is biologically important as the only species in its genus.

In 1865 Père Armand David (1825–1900), the French priest and naturalist who also discovered the Giant Panda, persuaded the guards at the imperial park to let him in to see this strange herd of deer. He later managed to send a few specimens to France, but all died on arrival. Fortunately, he also sent a few to the Duke of Bedford at Woburn Abbey, where a small herd was successfully established. In 1895, a major flood drowned most of the deer in Nan Haizi and



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washed away much of the wall. In 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion, foreign troops stationed in the park set about consuming the remaining animals entirely. It was only because the Duke's herd remained and provided breeding stock that these deer survived to be reintroduced to parks in China in the 1980s, where the repatriated animals increased from thirty-nine to over five hundred. They are soon to be released into the wild again.

Related Examples:

Pinto de Matos 2003, Cat 60, pair of stoneware recumbent deer with incised decoration, Jiaqing period; Gordon 1984, plate XIII, a blue-and-white standing deer, dated to Kangxi 1720; Howard & Ayers 1978, p611, No 640, an open vessel modelled as a recumbent spotted deer painted in underglaze blue and copper red, probably a brush washer, dated early nineteenth century; p587, No 609, a reclining deer, white-glazed with black feet, with holes in the head for antlers (missing), dated c1735–1750, 21cm long; Howard 1994, p278, No 336, a standing spotted deer c. 1810; Du Boulay 1963, p58, fig 77, a standing stag now in the Copeland Collection; Sargent 1991, p216, No 104, standing stag, yellowish ochre coloured with small white spots, 48cm high, late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, separate porcelain antlers; p246, No 124, a recumbent stag, brown fur with white spots and black feet, early nineteenth century, replaced antlers; Christie's New York, May 1981, lot 726, a single recumbent stag, brown stoneware, early nineteenth century; Sotheby's London, 6 May 1986, lot 154A, a standing deer, 10 inches high, Qianlong period; Christie's London, 6 Nov 1995, lot 133, a pair of Kangxi famille verte ewers as seated deer with lingzhi in their mouths (other ewers of this type are recorded in the Royal Collection at Hampton Court Palace; 13 July 1959, lot 19, another pair of ewers, ex Collection of the Marquis of Exeter and possibly the two mentioned in the 1688 inventory of Burghley House as 'two browne painted staggess', 24 June 1968, lots 57 & 58, two pairs; 1 Nov 1982, lot 371, a pair also illustrated in Du Boulay 1963, p291; 28 April 1999, lot 200, a large standing deer, dated as Kangxi; Sotheby's Monaco, 23 June 1986, lot 1040, a standing stag, nineteenth century; 4 March 1990, lot 352, a recumbent stag with a lingzhi in its mouth, nineteenth century; Cohen & Motley 2008, p176, No 12.1, a pair of large seated deer, Qianlong period c 1750; a yellow glazed seated deer from the Eleanor Gordon collection, Sotheby's New York, January 2009.



A unique pair of large seated deer from the James E Sowell Collection, illustrated in Cohen & Motley 2008, p176, No 12.1