

**Canton Enamel Saucer with Bats****BATEA 313**

What do bats conjure up in your mind?

I have lived my life in the UK and they make me think of haunted houses, Hallowe'en and vampires. However, in China, over the centuries, bats have been used as a common decorative motif on items like those we have in the museum, as well as clothes, furniture and buildings. This is because bats in East Asia are considered symbols of good fortune or good luck. Why may you ask? Well, the answer lies in the Chinese language, where the words for bat and fortune (Fu) sound the same although they have different written characters. This is like the English word for sea, as in the ocean and to see with our eyes. Homophone is the technical word if you didn't know! Many objects in the museum have examples of symbols for good wishes for the important things in life.

You might need to look hard at the yellow enamel saucer to see the circle of five bats hidden in the flower and foliage decoration. These five bats represent the Five Happinesses or Wufu, which are a virtuous life, good health, a long life, wealth and a peaceful death. This is a traditional and powerful motif in Chinese society. The bats on the plate are a pinky red, which is significant. Red is a homophone for vast in the Chinese language. So, the red colour increases the bats' already lucky meaning.

When you look at the flowers and animals decorating the beautiful objects in the museum, remember they are not just lovely to look at, but also had some deeper meaning understood by the people who made them and owned them.