Chinese Snuff Bottles II
Including an important selection from the Marian Mayer Collection
ROBERT HALL

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Front cover illustration:
Five glass snuff bottles carved with various forms of formalised flower-head, dating between 1730-1860
For Lindsey, Gemma & Georgia
Introduction

The majority of the snuff bottles illustrated and discussed in this book are from the collection of Marian Mayer.

My introduction to Marian was through Hugh Moss, for whom I worked for six years in his London gallery. Marian’s husband, Gerry, travelled to London for his business and Marian used these trips to further her interest in snuff bottles, occasionally managing to attend an auction, but always making time to visit the gallery to see what Hugh had put aside for her.

As far as I know Marian amassed at least seven hundred bottles, a huge collection which housed some extraordinary examples, several of which grace these pages. The collection was a very personal one, particularly since she was not inclined to act on anyone’s advice except Hugh’s, and then only when the mood took her.

During many visits to Marian’s home in Cape Cod, I used to enjoy looking through her record cards and index files which were full of details of provenance, articles, snippets of information, and her personal commentary - which actually was the most interesting of all to me. I used to lose myself in a sea of snuff bottles which was fascinating but would have been very much more instructive to me now; if only I had had the vision to understand the significance of her dedication to collecting such a large group of bottles, many of which were ugly ducklings to the rest of the world at that time.

Times have changed and collectors are far more inquisitive and competitive. A new family of collectors has grown from the increased research and understanding who are fascinated with the unusual: the ugly duckling is no longer.

In September 1980, a large selection of bottles from Marian’s collection was displayed at Steuben Glass, New York. It was a breathtaking display of colour and ingenuity, a fitting monument to her diligence. Against all the advice and pleas from good friends and mentors she never published a substantial record of the event. I can hear her now, “well, if anyone wants to see my bottles they can take the trouble to go to Corning.”

The Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York, was indeed where she left a large part of her collection when she died, with the balance dispersed by auction in the United States during December 1988. The end of an era one would think.

With this book I hope to provide collectors and scholars with some record of Marian’s remarkable achievement, although it can’t be as complete as I would have liked.

Actually, the true purpose of this book is to mark the beginning of a new era, when we revive fond memories of a remarkable lady who contributed enormously to this field. Although her outspoken manner did not agree with all who knew her, to me it was one of her finest assets; she was never afraid to air her often controversial views.

In an age where the unscrupulous prey on the unsuspecting, provenance is playing an increasingly important role. It wasn’t long ago that I was of the opinion that knowing the provenance of a work of art was an added luxury, but now it is becoming increasingly important: Marian’s bottles were all acquired with her original collection numbers in ink on a small round white sticker, usually placed on the base of the bottle.

Robert Hall
Acknowledgements

HUGH MOSS

It is a fitting tribute that Hugh offered his help with this book, adding the footnotes for each of the bottles in a stimulating and informative manner. Those around him know what a profound influence Hugh has been to collectors, dealers, salerooms and museums, his influence has been undeniable.

Hugh’s level of understanding and insight into Chinese art has been derived from a lifetime of devoted research. He has always tried to see a work of art through the eyes of both the creator and the observer whilst holding all that against a background of social and political struggles, as well as the idiosyncrasies of patrons and artists themselves; all of which are impossible to disassociate from the final work of art itself.

ROBERT HALL

One could be forgiven for thinking that my photography was better than my writing, actually I have a ghost photographer whose name is Robert Hall. I couldn’t resist the temptation to ask him to photograph the bottles for the book, which he did with a rare devotion. Robert and his assistant, Simon Vousden were a creative and cheerful team who were a pleasure to work with.

SUSAN GAVINS

Susan has been as enthusiastic as ever, her diplomatic handling of my blunders is of constant comfort to me, and her memory serves as a vital life line, as do her valuable research capabilities.

ELIZABETH KNIGHT

Liz always manages to cope even though copy dates are endlessly ignored. It is always a pleasure to work with her and her care and attention to detail are always appreciated.
Foreword

When I first met Marian Mayer we took an instant dislike to each other. I thought she was loud and stubborn; she thought I was opinionated, brash and intolerant. We were both right. There is an ancient tradition in China, with its wisdom of perspective, that one must look beyond the surface to find reality. They were also right. This is exemplified in Chinese depictions of the Buddhist equivalent of our Saints: the Luohan, who were often deliberately depicted with ugly and off-putting features to concentrate attention on their inner meaning, and therefore that of Buddhism and Daoism with which it was inevitably associated in China — for both represent the same essential perspective. Fortunately for me, and largely through the good graces of Eunice Cameron who has so often acted as a charming buffer between myself and the snuff bottle world, Marian and I came to a deeper understanding, and a long-lasting and very rewarding relationship. Eventually we became firm friends, with the solid foundation of trust essential to any depth of friendship.

Her enthusiasm and dedication to collecting are legendary, and her stubbornness never left her. She knew exactly what she wanted and why. Over the years I was able to convince her that her collecting interests would be best served by concentrating on the finest in her chosen field and she was, for many years, the recipient of much of the best in glass bottles that I found. At the same time, however, I was never able to convince her not to buy some dreadful works of art simply because she didn't have something like it. If it was blue with polka-dots and she didn't have one like that, she wanted it and no advice that I ever managed to offer could dissuade her. At first I thought this was just downright stubbornness and a wrong approach. I came to realize, however, that we all collect for different reasons and for me to impose my values on anyone else against their will was equally wrong. In collecting, as in art, there is no right or wrong, only different approaches to communication. All are valid, but to discover the validity in the approach of others one must broaden one's point of view. This in itself is one of the most positive lessons of all communication.

Marian subsequently ended up with a collection which mixed masterpieces with banalities from the aesthetic point of view. From her chosen point of view, however, of forming a representative collection of glass bottles, while buying in other areas which interested her, her collection was extraordinary. At her death she had as representative a collection of glass bottles as existed anywhere mixed in with a healthy smattering of other types of mixed quality but great interest.

As is well known, much of her collection was bequeathed to the Museum of Glass at Corning, but a good deal of it, including many superb examples, eventually turned up at auction not far from where she used to live, on Cape Cod. Bob Hall, who seems to cover every auction known to the art trade and many that are not, managed to attend and bought the bulk of the bottles from her estate, which are offered here. In inviting me to add comments to his catalogue I was glad to respond, not only for my pleasure in working with Bob, but for the joy I know it would have given Marian, and certainly gives me, in being able to associate myself in print with a collection I helped, often despite my advice, to form. Marian and her forceful personality are much missed in the snuff bottle world, but here at least is an opportunity for collectors to acquire a direct memento of both her and her collection — which is an important part of the aesthetic of collecting from the Chinese point of view, where the association of past collectors carries with it equal meaning to the work of art itself.

Hugh Moss
At the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat,
Hong Kong, June, 1989.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qing Dynasty Chronology</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shunzhi</td>
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1. Porcelain; painted in underglazed cobalt blue on a white ground with a continuous scene of an imperial, five-clawed dragon clutching a flaming pearl as it encircles the cylindrical bottle, set against a background of formalised, flowering peony scroll; the neck with a single band of *ruyi* lappets; the base with a second imperial dragon within a double circle.

1800 - 1880
Height: 6.5 cm
Stopper: pink stained, crackled glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #718

As the snuff taking habit spread throughout China during the eighteenth century from its early hub around the Court at Beijing, regional manufacturing centres began to take advantage of the growing demand for snuff bottles. The extensive existing ceramic manufacturing facilities at Jingdezhen appear to have manufactured bottles on a significant scale only from the late eighteenth century onwards. The impetus for this output, which was to become enormous during the nineteenth century, seems to have been imperial orders placed late in the Qianlong period for sets of bottles made for the court in reasonably large numbers. Out of the extensive output of snuff bottles which quickly seemed to follow in the wake of these imperial orders came a group of cylindrical porcelain snuff bottles which remained popular throughout the nineteenth century. Usually decorated in underglaze blue, red or both, the vast majority of these bottles appear to have been made for common consumption. Many, however, are decorated with imperial, five-clawed dragons, which might at that time still imply some direct imperial connection with their manufacture, and occasionally one might bear an imperial reign mark.

An unusual feature of this example is the additional dragon on the base.
2. Porcelain; moulded and enamelled with a central medallion of a gold yin yang symbol surrounded by the Eight Trigrams, with details in iron-red, black, ruby and amber-yellow enamels painted on a white glaze and set against a 'robins-egg' enamelled ground.

1840 - 1900
Height: 7.5 cm
Stopper: pink glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #124

The unusual combination and use of enamels on this unusual, late mould add rarity to a subject with uniquely Chinese meaning. From the Daoist perspective, the Absolute Unity of all phenomena gives way in the relative realm to duality, represented by the yin yang symbol. The Eight Trigrams then offer a means of representing through an esoteric system of interpretation and development the multiplicity of meanings to which the duality in turn gives way.
3. Porcelain; moulded in the form of a butterfly, its wings spread and decorated in famille rose enamels with a series of formalized, asymmetrical bands of wavy lines, dots, flower-heads and petals set against a predominantly turquoise ground; the sides painted in iron-red enamel with formalised clouds.

1860 - 1920
Height: 5.3 cm
Stopper: green jadeite with a brass collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #439
Illustrated: Bob C. Stevens, The Collectors Book of Snuff Bottles, #350

Similar example: Hong Kong Museum of Art, Chinese Snuff Bottles, 1977, #72

Moulded bottles of this type would have been made by a private ceramic business in response to a demand for novelty snuff bottles. They would then have been made in quantity until the moulds were damaged, lost or thrown away. If the type was popular, a second set of moulds would be made to replace lost or damaged ones, if not, it would simply be discontinued. This accounts for the number of different moulds for the more popular subjects, such as Liu Hai, the Buddhist lions, the squirrel and grapes, etc. The relative rarity of this example may be in part due to the fact that it was made late in the snuff bottle period, when perhaps public taste for novelty in snuff bottles was becoming too jaded by over-supply to respond in force to its unusual characteristics.
4. Porcelain; moulded in the form of a finger citron and covered with mottled lemon-yellow and emerald-green enamels.

1860 - 1920
Height: 6.8 cm
Stopper: mottled emerald green jadeite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #497
            Ko Family Collection, Part I, #83

The finger-citron, or ‘Buddha’s-hand’ fruit as it is also known, was a popular auspicious fruit. It has a delightful fragrance, quite apart from its Buddhist connotations, and appears frequently in genre scenes of scholars at leisurely pursuits. As a snuff bottle form it appears popularly in the nineteenth century once ceramic production begins in the south, and is then echoed in southern ivory production. This example although late, is interesting for its naturalistic colouring.
5. Porcelain; of slightly tapering cylindrical form; enamelled in tones of black with a fruit-laden peach tree, narcissus and lingzhi fungus growing among rockwork, on a pale turquoise ground; the base with the iron-red, enamelled, six character mark Dajing Guangxi nianzhi ('made during the reign of the Guangxu emperor of the Qing dynasty').

1875 - 1908
Height: 7.3 cm
Stopper: 'coral' glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #377

The use of tones of black here is a reference to the mainstream of the Chinese tradition of painting, where esoteric communication frequently concentrated on the use of the endless shades of black possible when mixed with water to produce all the 'colours' of the universe. The peach, narcissus and lingzhi are all auspicious flora. The Empress Dowager, who held the real reins of power during the Guangxu period, had a series of similarly painted porcelain wares with coloured grounds made for her own use. These are identified by her personal studio name, which is absent here, but inevitably started a fashion for such wares during her period of influence.
6. Porcelain; moulded in quatrefoil section with gilded mask and ring handles on two sides, to one is attached an integrally moulded chain; the neck and foot decorated with a formalised floral design in red and green enamels.

1860 - 1910
Height: 6.8 cm
Stopper: turquoise, with a glass finial
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #508

This extremely rare, and exquisite bottle represents the height of restraint and technique possible, although often absent, in late nineteenth century ceramic manufacture. A small series of similarly finely worked bottles exist from the period of influence of the Empress Dowager. To what extent these were mass produced in moulds or individually crafted is not certain — any moulded bottle is in any case finished by hand, but the individual differences found in other examples where a comparison may be made, suggest a high degree of hand-crafting and perhaps minimal, if any, use of standard moulds.
7. Porcelain; a group of four miniature bottles moulded in the forms of a lemon, pea- or bean-pod, egg plant and lime.

1800 - 1860
Average height: 3.5 cm
Stoppers: coral or glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #532, #384, #297, #420
Similar example: *Ko Family Collection, Part III*, #46

This group represents the miniature production of a group of later ceramics, perhaps made provincially other than at Jingdezhen, characterised by simple moulded forms and the use of opaque, crackled monochrome enamels. They were obviously made at the time as cheap containers, perhaps for medicines as well as for snuff — although any small, suitable bottle made during the snuff bottle period might have been used either for medicine or snuff depending upon the choice of the owner. Similarly the same bottles might have been marketed by their commercial manufacturers as both without the need for any alteration in design.
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Average height: 3.5 cm
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9. Porcelain; of cylindrical form with a wide neck; painted in enamels of predominantly sepia tones, with a blue-eyed tiger confronting a ferocious five-clawed dragon partially obscured by dark, forbidding clouds; the simply recessed base covered with a white glaze.

1830-1880  
Height: 7.3 cm  
Stopper: pale green serpentine  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #61

This is an unusually decorated version of a large group of essentially cylindrical snuff bottles made throughout the nineteenth century. Usually in underglaze blue, red or both, a distinct sub-group is characterized by the use of wide necks of this type, which continue the line of the cylindrical sides of the bottle; and frequently with a biscuit base incised with concentric circles.

Cf. #1.
10. Porcelain; a pair, of rectangular form; each decorated front and back with reversible, framed European heads in iron-red and black enamels on a variegated turquoise enamel ground; the shoulders and neck decorated with a scrolling floral design in blue enamel; the base of each inscribed *guiyou* nianzhi ('made in the *guiyou* cyclical year').

1873

Heights: 6.0 cm
Stoppers: turquoise, with metal collars
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #76
Similar example: Bob C. Stevens, *The Collectors Book of Snuff Bottles*, #315

This pair comes from a well known group of similar bottles which were apparently originally intended as medicine containers — since examples are known with the name of the medicine written on them. The European heads, if inverted become quite different heads — the lady with the necklace of one view becoming a hatted, bespectacled gentleman in the other. Since the date is cyclical rather than precise the possibility exists that the correct date might be 1813, or 1933. However, in this case the enamels suggest 1873 as the most likely, although not entirely certain date.
11. Porcelain; the flattened form presenting framed, convex panels on each side, one of which is decorated in famille rose enamels with ornamental rockwork around which grow various flowers including peonies; the reverse with an imperial poem inscribed in black enamel in carefully written official script, followed by the two characters yuzhi ('imperial composition') and two iron-red enamel seals; both panels enclosed within iron-red and gold borders; the sides and shoulders painted with formalised scrolling flowers and the base neatly inscribed Jiaqing nianzhi ('made during the period of the Jiaqing emperor') in precise, seal script, both in iron-red enamel.

Jiaqing imperial kilns, Jingdezhen, 1796 - 1820
Height: 5.2 cm
Stopper: coral glass

During the latter part of the Qianlong period the court at Beijing seems to have initiated the production of porcelain snuff bottles at Jingdezhen. Among the earliest output appear to have been a series of bottles of this form, finely enamelled with mainly floral subjects on one side, and a matching imperial poem neatly inscribed on the reverse. The Qianlong emperor wrote poems and poetic inscriptions about life in general and the objects in the imperial collection in particular in large numbers and they
appear on many works of art in the imperial collection.

The practice of imperial production of snuff bottles at Jingdezhen, in the south, clearly continued through the nineteenth century. Many exist from the Jiaqing and Daoguang periods, and to a lesser extent from subsequent reigns. The series represented here continued into the Jiaqing period and such examples are more common, although no less fine than their Qianlong counterparts. It appears that the Qianlong emperor’s poems continued to be inscribed, with only a change of reign mark. Unless the Jiaqing emperor found his father’s poetry irresistible, or carried on using them out of respect, it might be reasonable to suggest that these bottles were made during the period between the 1795 abdication of the father in favour of his son, and his 1799 death. There is actually no indication of which emperor wrote the poem, merely that it is imperial. The series, however, is well known to have started with the Qianlong emperor, who was a prolific poet, and it is very likely that they simply continued to use his poems, for whatever reason.

There exist in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan a number of apparently original boxes of quite large sets of such bottles — perhaps ten or a dozen to a box. Each bottle carefully painted by hand with identical subjects and poems. They must, therefore, have been ordered in large quantities, as was the case of a great deal of imperial porcelain ordered at Jingdezhen.

I have translated the characters yuzhi (literally imperially made’) as ‘imperial composition’ in the present case. The same two characters have also been frequently translated as ’by imperial command’ when applied to the production by third parties of wares of specific interest to the emperor. The flexibility of use of many Chinese characters allows all three translations, and more importantly all three meanings.

The poem here is a melancholic reference to the peony related to an ancient legend of Lady Yu, after whom this particular type of peony is named. Lady Yu lost her love, the ruling monarch of the day who committed suicide after a defeat, and the poem refers to the fact that those who now enjoy the delights of the peony (with all its levels of meaning including that of the legend) are no longer the men of ages past.
12. Porcelain; the gourd shaped body moulded in relief with fruiting double-gourd vines, three of the pendant fruits forming a stable foot for the vessel; covered overall with an unctuous deep, emerald-green glaze.

1790 - 1850
Height: 7.0 cm
Stopper: silver, elaborately formed to sit over the neck of the bottle and surmounted with a finial enclosing a coral bead, resembling a budding rose
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #572

The gourd decorated with fruiting vines was a popular subject for vessels with the mid-Qing emperors, reviving a long established idea. The idea first appears in porcelain snuff bottles of the general group referred to in the caption to #11. A small group of such gourd bottles which may be considered to be the earliest and the finest were made in the latter part of the Qianlong period (cf. Robert Kleiner, *Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch*, 1987, p.163, #220; others are in the J & J collection; the Percival David Collection, and the Joey Silver collection). From these other later and lesser moulded and painted bottles followed the same decorative idea, thus making it a standard for the nineteenth century. This unusual monochrome green example is one of a small group of similar bottles recorded. It is set apart from others of the group by the fortuitous richness of the texture formed by the pooling enamel in the natural *cloisons* of the raised gourds and vine.
13. Porcelain; moulded with a rampant, imperial five-clawed dragon chasing a flaming pearl its detail picked out in black, green and iron-red enamels; the base with the four character mark "Daoguang nianzhi" ('made in the period of the Daoguang emperor') in iron-red enamel seal script.

1821 - 1850
Height: 5.8 cm
Stopper: porcelain with metal collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #426
Similar examples: H. Moss, Chinese Snuff Bottles, number five, pages 71 and 72, 79, 80, 81
H. Moss, Snuff Bottles of China, #296
Ko Family Collection, Part I, #69

As the nineteenth century progressed, the preferred types and moulds of the Qianlong and subsequently the Jiaqing emperors, gave way to more original examples and newer decorative ideas. One of the standard designs of the equally large imperial output at Jingdezhen of the Daoguang period was a series of globular bottles encircled by proud, imperial dragons. Sometimes simply enameled, but often moulded in relief as here, these are the later equivalents of #11 and the gourd bottles discussed in the caption to #12.
14. Porcelain; the globular bottle moulded with a continuous design of nine Buddhist lions playing with beribboned, brocade balls; the dogs painted in various colours of the *famille rose* palette and set against a background of wave pattern bordered by continuous painted *leïvien* and moulded and painted *ruiji* heads; the base with a seal, presumably of a private manufacturer, all in iron-red enamel.

1796 - 1830

| Height:       | 6.6 cm |
| Stopper:      | chased, gilt brass |
| Provenance:   | Marian Mayer Collection, #586 |

A major part of the imperial production at Jingdezhen during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (cf. #11 for instance) consisted of moulded and monochrome or enamelled bottles of this type. They apparently took as their inspiration undecorated and lacquered ivory bottles from the palace workshops (the so-called 'imperial ivory' group). However, although many early examples can be traced to this artistic origin, they soon began to flourish in their own right developing decorative styles and colours more appropriate to ceramics. Some of these, when enamelled overall in iron-red enamel (coral coloured) could also be in direct response to the cinnabar lacquer bottles made, it is believed, by the same imperial ivory carvers. It was a minor adjustment to enamel them in turquoise (sometimes with veining) or dark blue to imitate turquoise or lapis-lazuli, despite the fact that as far as we know, no originals of this type existed. It is typical of the pattern of evolvement of decorative works of art in China.
Equally it was always the case that once an imperial workshop had produced a particular type and established a fashion for it, the same skills and materials would be applied to private production at some level. This is a rare example of such an apparently private production abstracted from an initially imperial type. Perhaps because it was a private production and uninhibited by the bureaucratic tendency to standardize imperial orders, it employs a unique decorative scheme.

*Leiwen* (‘thunder pattern’) is frequently called ‘key-fret’ pattern. Derived from ancient and no doubt significant patterns, found frequently as background decoration on archaic bronze vessels, it was widely used and evolved to form a variety of decorative borders or abstract patterns.
15. Porcelain; moulded in the form of a squatting child holding onto a huge double gourd; from the famille rose palette his coat is painted in iron-red enamel, with gilded scrolling detail; his trousers in light blue with a faint floral decoration, and the gourd with a swirling, energetic, naturalistic design in sepia enamel; the base with the iron-red, seal-script, six character mark Daqing Qianlong nianzhi (‘made in the Qianlong period of the Qing dynasty’).

1830 - 1900  
Height: 5.7 cm  
Stopper: a natural twig of coral set in a metal collar  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #564  
Similar examples: Hong Kong Museum of Art, Chinese Snuff Bottles, 1977, #122  
Bob C. Stevens, The Collectors Book of Snuff Bottles, #353

This amusing, and during the nineteenth century popular mould nearly always bears a Qianlong reign mark. None is entirely convincing, and most were clearly the works of the latter part of the nineteenth century. As a rule the gourds are richly decorated with fruiting gourd vines, a clear reference to the popular fashion represented by those mentioned in the caption to #12, and are clearly made during the latter part of the nineteenth century. It is doubtful whether the type existed in an earlier version, particularly since it is so much a decorative evolution from the above-mentioned gourd bottles.

This example stands apart from the rest in its quality, and unique decorative scheme. With such use of a limited palette of enamels it is difficult to date the piece more accurately, but it seems unlikely to be earlier than the first half of the nineteenth century and is more likely to date from about the same time as the others examples, but simply rarer.
16. Porcelain; the outer casing of the double-bodied (reticulated) bottle moulded with the Eight Buddhist Symbols in relief against a formalised-cloud background; the neck with a single band of leiwen design beneath raised dots and above a band of rubi lappets which are repeated at the base, covered overall with a creamy white, slightly crackled glaze.

1796 - 1820
Height: 6.5 cm
Stopper: enamelled porcelain made after the original type
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #524
Similar example: Bob C. Stevens, *The Collector’s Book of Snuff Bottles*, #264
H. Moss, *Chinese Snuff Bottles*, number six, c.43

The superb quality, style and subject of this bottle suggest that it is part of the output of the imperial kilns from the Jiaqing period. The lack of mark, however, might indicate that it was never intended to be sent to the court. To what extent imperial moulds, materials and craftsmen were used to produce private wares is not clear, but it seems likely that whatever the imperial intention such resources were not entirely devoted to the emperor’s requirements. We know, for instance, that Tang Yin, an early eighteenth century Superintendent of the palace kilns made individually signed pieces using all the resources of the kilns he controlled for the emperor, and we may presume that others, less noted by the recorders of imperial history, did the same. Any Buddhist would have been proud to sniff his snuff from such a bottle, unless he had reached the highest levels of Buddhist comprehension, in which case whether he was proud or not would have become incidental.
examples, usually bearing apocryphal Qianlong marks, are masterworks of the snuff bottle output. As with the imperial porcelains discussed previously, once established the groups evolved to independent status as works of art, incorporating many uniquely Japanese features.

This example is of particular interest because apart from the super quality of the work that surrounds the panels, the panels themselves are approached in a deliberately crude technique of inlay relating them to certain earlier Korean lac-burghaute wares which influenced other production in Japan. This was in response to the deliberate awkwardness which was the highest level of artistic perception and expression in both the Chinese and Japanese governing perception of the day. It is also significant that this example does not have the usual, spurious reign mark, suggesting that it is well removed from the original production and made for a local audience who would have appreciated the re-acquired naivety of the decoration.
19. Baltic amber, of brilliant, mottled yellow colour with translucent depths; each side incised in neat, clerical script with a twenty character poetic inscription; the foot neatly indented.

1730 - 1850
Height: 5.5 cm
Stopper: green glass imitating jadeite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #677

The predominant source of amber for the Chinese was Burma, which is thought to have produced mainly the translucent brown range of colours, and the Baltic region via trade with Russia (which flourished during most of the snuff bottle period) which furnished the brighter, more often opaque yellow material. Although the poetic inscription here gives no indication of date, origin or ownership, the elegant taste and form and the superbly written inscription suggest a high degree of refinement suited to the influential minority of emperors, courtiers, literati, sages and monks.

The inscriptions consist of two poems:

   Afloat at night on a wooded lake,  
   The lone duckling is cold.  
   Ten thousand shadows are born of the moon;  
   One thousand sounds are born of autumn.

   'The years grow empty with age;  
   Thoughts of one's birthplace are melancholy.  
   Outside the clouds of West and North float;  
   Where will the stream flow?"
20. Coconut-shell and lacquered wood with inlaid mother-of-pearl detail; the angular form presenting two asymmetrical octagonal, convex panels; one carved in low relief with a three-story pavilion set in a river valley surrounded by rocks, mountains and trees; the other with a scholar in a river-side pavilion watching a figure in a sampan, in a similar setting with a distant summer house; the sides and shoulders inlaid with matching mother-of-pearl fu ('happiness') and shou ('longevity') characters in seal script above a ruyi fungus.

Japan, 1860-1940
Height: 6.8 cm
Stopper: matching and original, inlaid with a mother-of-pearl shou character

This is an exquisite example of a sub-group of the Japanese bottles discussed in the caption to #18. Here it has taken on a more definitely Japanese personality which is perhaps why it has risen above the apocryphal marking of many of this group. Again the style of decoration responds to the governing aesthetic of the time, both in Japan and China. While the panels are in the style of literati painting; the ruyi inlays low on each side represent the confident awkwardness apparent in so many of the arts of the influential minority (this esoteric aesthetic is discussed, together with a wide range of works of art, in Gerard Tsang and Hugh Moss, Arts from the Scholar's Studio, Hong Kong University Press, 1986).
21. Ivory, of soft, pale, creamy colour with good natural patination and age cracking; carved simply but meticulously as a peach.

1740-1860
Height: 5 cm
Stopper: a natural coral sprig
Similar subject: R. Hall, *Chinese Snuff Bottles*, #85
H. Moss, *Chinese Snuff Bottles*, number two, page 27, #2

In this bottle is found, in its most refined form, much of the inherent taste of the finest of Chinese arts. A natural material has been used to create a simple but infinitely elegant bottle in the form of a peach, a symbol of longevity with equally limitless connotations within the Chinese folklore. One aspect of this elegant comprehension, however, is demonstrated by the choice of ivory. The carver knew that for as long as his bottle was in existence, the natural oils of the hand and the wear of the ages would impart to it a meaning far beyond its original capacity. As the markings on an ancient wall, or the craggy face of a wise old sage, were appreciated for the wisdom that seemed inherent in them, so the carver of this bottle sent it off into an indefinite future of subtly growing meaning. No work of art could aspire to more!
22. Ivory, of pale yellow colour, well and naturally patinated; carved in three separate sections assembled to form a cylindrical container with rounded shoulders and everted lip.

1760 - 1880
Height: 5.9 cm
Stopper: tourmaline
Similar subject: *Ko Family Collection, Part I, #179*

Because cylindrical bottles are so common in porcelain there has been a tendency to dismiss them as universally common. In fact the form, which is suited to the ceramic tradition better than to many others, is quite rare in other materials and some of the more elegant bottles I know are of this shape. Cf. #21.
23. Boxwood; carved in the form of a finger citron with surface detail around the shoulders of two leafy branches; the fruit carved in low relief with a ladybird, a short bodied spider, a moth, a cicada, a caterpillar, a long bodied spider, a beetle and a butterfly, all realistically depicted.

Qing Dynasty, 1800 - 1920
Height: 5.5 cm
Stopper: matching and original
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #371
Published: Hong Kong Museum, Snuff Bottles of Ching Dynasty, 1978, #152

Boxwood snuff bottles of any quality are rare, of the exquisite quality of this example they can be numbered on the fingers of a single hand.

It is worth exploring the implications of period with this example. Inherited from our early ideas, as crystallized in Lilla S. Perry's inspiring and pioneering book on snuff bottles, there has been a tendency to apply imported standards of the importance of age. Chinese art at the time was governed by a Western perception of creativity in the arts which was to a very large extent considered to have run out of steam by the early Qing period. While this may be marginally applicable to ceramics, from which much of it was taken at the time, it is completely meaningless when applied to an art form which only started its creative florescence at this time. The considerable creative impetus of the ruling minority of the longest and most profound culture known to the world shifted from time to time as new arts were incorporated in the purview of the influential
minority. Actually ceramics, upon which much of our Western perception of the arts of China was formed during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, were never generally considered to be of high meaning in the governing hierarchy of arts. With the snuff bottle the governing minority was provided with a new vehicle for their inherent creativity and elegant aesthetic taste. As creativity in ceramics waned, other arts were invested with all the meaning of Chinese creativity, among which the finest snuff bottles can unquestionably be numbered. In painting, calligraphy, music, and poetry there was no essential governing aesthetic criteria that valued age above quality of expression — the only criterion was creativity in the face of experience. As the aesthetically governing minority incorporated snuff bottles into their purview, so the potential was opened up for timeless communication at the highest level — which of course transcended, as does all high art, any essential concept of age. This is not, of course, to say that all snuff bottles are high art, but only that they have the potential to be so. Emphatically, however, this perspective which was, after all, the governing perspective of the culture that made our snuff bottles, implies that creative spirit transcends age in works of art. In the snuff bottle field many high works of art did not develop until quite late in the period (the arts of the painter on the inside of snuff bottles for instance). Such bottles as this exemplify the axiom that visual art is better judged by eye than by ear!
24. Cinnabar and gilt lacquer; of elongated, flattened form, deeply carved on one side with a panel of two gilded birds flying amongst the buds of a prunus tree, and on the other with a gilded peacock standing on the bough of a pine tree, both against a gilt ground; surrounded by a formalised brocade design, the neck and foot of which are carved with a gilded band of double-unit leiwen.

Japan, 1860-1940
Height: 6.1 cm
Stopper: gilt metal

This is another example of the group made in Japan (cf. #18, 20). It represents a small sub-group in cinnabar lacquer where the detail is gilded in an entirely Japanese response to a Chinese original (cf. Robert Kleiner, Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch, p. 158, #214.) Again examples may be numbered on the fingers of one hand.
25. Crystal, of flawless transparent material; painted on the inside in bright pastel colours with two scenes from the popular novel *Dream of Red Mansions*; one side showing the heroin, Lin Daiyu, winning a poetry competition on the subject of the chrysanthemum; she is seated at a table, brush in hand, surrounded by other participants in a literati gathering; the other illustrates a scene in which two ladies are prevented from attaining the favours of the leading male protagonist, Bao Yu; each side inscribed with a description of the scene in draft script; the latter with the added inscription ‘painted by Ye Zhongsan in the winter of 1928’ followed by one seal of the artist, *yin* (‘seal’).

Beijing, the Apricot Grove Studio of the Ye family, 1928
Height: 6.7 cm
Stopper: green glass, imitating jadeite

The *yaji* (‘elegant gathering’) was a standard creative format among the influential minority. It consisted of a gathering of aesthetes who would paint, write calligraphy, play music, write or recite poetry and present impromptu dances. This was usually aided by the uninhibited use of alcohol, which in Chinese society was generally looked upon as a creative release rather than with the prohibitive zeal often fostered in the West. *Arts from the Scholar’s Studio* discusses this party format at length (cf. p. 64, no. 27 and p. 66 no. 28). Although the majority of well known *yaji* were centred around *men*, educated women enjoyed exactly the same delights with less fuss.

26. Painted enamels on copper; decorated in the famille rose palette on each side with butterflies fluttering around flowering shrubs and ornamental rocks set against a yellow ground; the neck with a stylised floral, and ruyi lappet borders; the foot with a single band of flower-heads reserved in pale blue against a black ground; the base with the blue enamelled, four character mark Qianlong nianzhi (‘made during the Qianlong period’) in regular script.

Attributed to Guangdong, 1840 - 1900
Height: 5.0 cm
Stopper: chased, gilt metal
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #224

Painted enamels on metal were introduced roughly simultaneously at the Court at Beijing and at Guangdong (Canton) in the south at some time during the first two decades of the eighteenth century. It is extraordinary that they had to import this art from the West along with skilled technicians, since for centuries they had the necessary materials and kilns available to produce them at any time, and had been producing associated enamels on porcelain and inlaid enamels for centuries. The impetus for this new interest lay with the Court. The Kangxi emperor was interested in developing the arts and crafts and had access to the West via the Jesuits at his court. Through this combination of circumstances was born in China
the art of painted enamels on metal (and glass, which was simultaneously mastered as an art). Since the Jesuits had usually to pass through Guangdong on their way to Beijing, often cooling their heels for lengthy periods of time, and many of the necessary raw material in the form of glass (from which the famille rose palette was simultaneously derived) were shipped into Guangdong, similar skills were honed there. This began a lengthy association between the enamelling centre for the court at Beijing, and that in Guangdong.

In Beijing the Palace Workshops production was entirely for the court, courtiers, imperial gifts, etc. Whereas in the south private businesses made wares for export and local use, and sent their finest to the court. Many of these Guangdong examples exist today in the imperial collections in Beijing and at the National Palace Museum in Taiwan. After the eighteenth century the imperial workshops in the north appear to have declined rapidly, perhaps ceasing production entirely after the Jiaqing period. From then onwards, northern production appears to have been in the hands of private enamelling shops. It is not as yet possible to establish exactly when these began production. Their wares appeared to have followed closely the style of the Palace Workshops, and very soon settled into a pattern of adding Qianlong reign marks to them. This apocryphal production continued into the modern period in the north, and formed the basis for the skills at enamelling re-born in the mid-1950s.

In the south, with its far broader market base which did not rely predominantly on court interest and fashion, production continued unabated well into the nineteenth century, and only began to decline when the general trade honeymoon with the West came finally to an end by the mid-nineteenth century.

The height of the art form was, despite the longevity of production in the south, the eighteenth century. That was the period of the finest wares, the most artistic and inventive pieces and the vital interest from court and other patrons that kept creativity at a high level. The Qianlong period dominated this output simply because of its longevity during the eighteenth century. Thus, a tendency arose for a considerable proportion of later output to bear Qianlong marks, and to follow Qianlong style.

This example is attributed to private workshops in Guangdong with a certain amount of confidence, and is typical of the later production in general Qianlong style. The sheer artistic mastery of the best Beijing palace production and southern painting of the eighteenth century is missing, but the brilliant technical control of the south is there at its best. As the artistic standards of the palace workshops receded into the past, production again fell into the hands of competent decorators rather than creative artists, and what had been a high art became essentially a folk art. However, like the best of the mass-produced, painted ceramics of Jingdezhen, there is a freedom and lightness to such painting which gives it great charm.
27. Cloisonné enamel inlaid with predominantly traditional colours; decorated with a continuous formalised design of Indian lotus, a single large flower-head dominating each side, set against a turquoise-blue ground; the neck and foot each with borders of ruyi lappets in cobalt blue enamel; the base filled with cobalt-blue enamel.

Attributed to Beijing, 1760 - 1850
Height: 5.5 cm
Stopper: blue glass set in a metal collar

One of the more intriguing aspects of the various traditions of enamelling in China arises out of the early eighteenth century augmentation of the traditional palette of enamels with a new palette introduced from Europe. Painted enamels on metal and glass provided the impetus for the introduction of the new palette, but it was very quickly transferred to ceramics, where the sheer quantities shifted the emphasis of its introduction towards this massive output. Even the names for the two palettes, famille verte and famille rose were coined by the French in the late nineteenth century in reference only to the ceramic tradition.

The latter palette took its name from a ruby, or rose-coloured enamel derived from gold oxide, previously unknown in China. However, an equally important distinguishing feature of the new palette was the use of white enamel, which by mixture with a variety of other colours, imported or traditional, gave rise to a wide range of possible pastel colours previously unavailable. White enamel, however, already existed in China and was widely used in the cloisonné enamels of the Ming dynasty. Indeed, in
certain early cloisonné vessels pink is achieved by a rather spotty mixture of the existing white and deep, iron-red. There seems no reason why other colours could not have been mixed with this existing white to achieve a similar range of pastel colours long before the advent of the European palette. Nor any reason for similar enamelling technology not to have been transferred to ceramics. Perhaps the traditional white was less easily mixed than the imported white, certainly in cloisonné the Qing pink is an even, integrated colour while the Ming pink is always a speckled, and obvious mixture of two separate colours which have not completely blended.

In this example all the colours used could have been produced in the Ming dynasty, making it therefore a rather unusual example of a cloisonné snuff bottle.

The court at Beijing established cloisonné workshops within the Palace during the Kangxi period, but other private workshops sprung up to supply the demand created in response to this Imperial output. This example is likely to be the product of a private workshop, perhaps from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century when, in common with the painted enamel ateliers, the cloisonné workshops production began to decline markedly.
28. Crystal, of flawless translucent material, carved with mask and ring handles on each shoulder; painted inside in bright pastel colours with two scenes from popular Chinese literature; inscribed in the upper left hand corner of one side ‘painted by Ma Shaoxuan in the almond (second) month of 1916’ followed by one seal of the artist yin (‘seal’).

Beijing, the Apricot Grove Studio of the Ye family, 1916
Height: 6.6 cm
Stopper: rock crystal carved in low relief with a chi dragon, with a white nephrite collar

Although the signature on this bottle is that of Ma Shaoxuan the palette and style make no pretence at forgery. They are entirely in the well-established style of the Ye family studio and of the date given and would have fooled no-one in Beijing familiar with the artists. There appears no sensible reason to have used Ma’s signature. No doubt circumstances beyond our knowledge dictated this unique use. The painting is an excellent example of the studio years, in a fine crystal bottle.
29. Amagdaloidal basalt; the black matrix with distinctive, mottled pink, grey, cream and milky pebble-like inclusions.

1760 - 1850
Height: 5.7 cm
Stopper: coral, with a gilt bronze collar
Provenance: Behrens Collection; David Newman, London
Similar example: Bob C. Stevens, *The Collectors Book of Snuff Bottles*, #658, 659

Amagdaloidal basalt was one of three popular forms of stone available to the Chinese throughout the snuff bottle period which tend to be lumped under the generic term 'pudding stone'. The delightful markings and unusual, predominantly pink colouring of this example set it apart from the usual material.
30. Nephrite, of white colour with light brown mottling; the finely hollowed, flattened ovoid bottle carved with a continuous basket-weave pattern; the foot flat.

1750 - 1850
Height: 5.5 cm
Stopper: pink striated glass, on a turquoise collar
Similar example: R Kleiner, *Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch*, #30

This is a good example of a snuff bottle design which remained popular from the eighteenth century until the late Qing period. The design, obviously, has the same potential for elegance and refined taste as many others. It is not the subject that makes for elegance in any art, but how the subject is handled. Here the carver has achieved a surface decoration of considerable integrity, investing a design which is capable of being dealt with entirely mechanically, because of its geometric form, with real feeling. The basket is believable, and has the texture of woven rafia, and the decision to give the repetitive bulging design a fairly large grid lends it weight. This large grid is, incidentally, often combined with more artistic commitment in this subject. This strength of surface decoration is superimposed upon a bottle of extremely elegant form, which as a final statement, the carver has hollowed well. Weight is a considerable factor in a tactile art form which is made to be handled on a regular basis, and the final touch of exquisite hollowing, where appropriate, lends a subtle elegance to the obvious features of the bottle. Such subtlety of communication appealed immensely to the influential minority in China. The literati
have been described by Sherman Lee as the ‘ultimate in-group’ and they preferred their communication to be couched in esoteric terms. This was partly for petty reasons of exclusivity and its sense of self-satisfaction and security, but at a higher level it was also essential in order to deal with the highest levels of meaning to which they aspired in all their acts of communication.

Because our snuff bottles have not been thought of as high arts, indeed quite the opposite, we have tended to concentrate on incidental surface detail for meaning. However, as their potential for very real association with the highest level of communication is better understood, the subtler languages of our snuff bottle arts will begin to communicate powerfully with us.
31. Nephrite, of even, white colour; the well hollowed, flattened globular bottle carved in low relief on each side with what is thought to be a formalised *kui* (cassia) flower; the mouth slightly concave.

1730-1850
Height: 5.1 cm
Stopper: amethyst
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #654

The *kui* flower was a symbol of the successful scholar. Here the elegance and subtlety of the previous example is overlaid with a particularly scholarly symbolism, associating the bottle irresistibly with the influential minority.
32. Nephrite, of white colour; the well hollowed bottle carved in the form of a gourd, its surface carved in low relief with a leafy vine.

1750 - 1850
Height: 5.5 cm
Stopper: spinach-green nephrite carved as a beetle
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #178

In the Chinese aesthetic where the physical art object was incidental to an overall process of communication aimed at enlightenment, enormous potential existed for audience participation in art. In China the collector, connoisseur, critic, and enthusiast alike were looked upon as a vital part of the artistic process, allowing for indefinite additions to paintings, for instance, in the form of added inscriptions and collector's seals. Equally, the owner of a work of art might express himself as part of the overall process of art by how he places objects in his study, choice of stands, etc. Similarly in snuff bottles an exquisitely appropriate stopper is capable of turning a fine quality bottle, but of a standard type, into a masterpiece. The stopper on its own is a pleasant bibelot; the bottle on its own is no more than a fine example of a well-known and popular type; but together they form a work of art of far more significant meaning.
33. Nephrite, of pure white colour; the flattened bottle well hollowed and simply formed, with a well balanced foot.

1750 - 1850
Height: 6.7 cm
Stopper: glass imitating tourmaline
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #255

Plain bottles of this standard form are well known from the mid-Qing period. They occur in a variety of colours and allow the materials used to speak for themselves; often concentrating artistic communication on the delights of a highly valued material very simply, but faultlessly, carved.
34. Turquoise, of richly marked and well-patinated colour, the black veins of the matrix providing delightful abstract markings; the undecorated bottle of flattened form with a flared neck.

1740 - 1860
Height: 5.7 cm
Stopper: amethyst, with gilt-bronze collar
Similar example: R. Hall, *Chinese Snuff Bottles*, #84
Bob C. Stevens, *The Collector’s Book of Snuff Bottles*, #601, 603
R. Kleiner, *Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch*, #175

Turquoise is another material which seems to have gained popularity during the snuff bottle period, and perhaps even in direct proportion to the need for novel and attractive bottles. Here again a delightful material is allowed to speak for itself in one of the more elegant and popular mid Qing forms (cf. #34 and #11). A mass of late turquoise snuff bottles made for collectors and decorated with impractical relief has tended to divert attention from the earlier output in this material. Turquoise is a relatively soft stone, and ideally suited to the Chinese aesthetic of subtle, and natural transformation through use. The stone absorbs natural oils from the hand and the often bright, rather harsh colour of the original acquires a patina of infinitely subtle shades of turquoise colour. Over the years these bottles have often acquired magical, natural designs on their surface made up of the random areas of different colours of patinated turquoise and the vibrant ‘brushwork’ markings of its matrix.
35. Lapis-lazuli, intense blue areas interspersed with paler stone and pyrite inclusions; the well hollowed, flattened globular form with an elegantly flared, wide neck with slightly concave mouth.

1780 - 1880
Height: 5.4 cm
Stopper: tourmaline
Similar example: Bob C. Stevens, *The Collector’s Book of Snuff Bottles*, #630, 631

This shape of bottle, with its exaggerated slimness and subsequently narrow foot was presumably developed for its carrying convenience. It seems to have become particularly popular from the late eighteenth century onwards, and was adopted particularly by the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen (cf. #11), which would, of course, have boosted its popularity still further. It has in common with the previous form the fact that it was frequently used to allow materials to speak for themselves, as in this case — a stone with delightful surface texture and markings.

Lapis-lazuli does not appear to have become a popular stone among the Chinese until the mid Qing period. Indeed, it might owe its popularity to snuff takers with their insatiable demand for the unusual. The arts associated with the snuff taker had a considerable effect on Qing arts in general. Their inherent collectibility; their function as a container for a distinctly habit-forming drug; and their potential as subtle gifts in pursuit of access to influence and power, created an immense concentration of creative energy on snuff bottles. Out of this new arts were born, and old
ones refined. In many areas, glass being a classic example, the very finest of workmanship and inventive genius was concentrated predominantly on snuff bottles, making them the vehicle for industry-wide advances in techniques and decorative styles. Early examples of lapis-lazuli snuff bottles are relatively unusual, although this fact is often obscured by a considerable output from the turn of the century onwards, and particularly after the 1950s — usually using material of brighter, and after 1950 often outrageous colour the naturalness of which is distinctly doubtful.
36. Quartz, jasper of dappled ochre-yellow and rich mahogany-brown colour set in a matrix of translucent, pale beige quartz; the elegantly formed bottle simply carved with mask and ring handles on each shoulder; the mouth concave.

1760 - 1880
Height: 5.3 cm
Stopper: coral, with silver collar

There was a wide variety of stones available to the Chinese during the snuff bottle period, either indigenously or by import, which offered their audience the delights of interpretive participation in the artistic process. The Chinese artists who governed aesthetics from the fourteenth century onwards were painting extraordinarily modern paintings. Although our traditional Western framework of understanding makes it difficult to see entirely abstract, or abstract expressive paintings made up entirely of figurative subject matter, this is precisely what the Chinese artist and his audience were dealing with. Thus the initiated Chinese audience has been trained to deal with visual abstraction at a very high level for centuries. This has resulted in a Chinese delight in natural abstractions. Roots or natural rocks that looked like sculpture; stone panels that quite naturally evoke towering mountains and drifting clouds; and stones that have richness of marking and satisfying patterns of form, line, colour and texture; were all highly valued.
In the snuff bottle field such bottles are common. By the eighteenth century the influential minority so delighted in such natural abstractions that in imbuing their beloved snuff bottles with the overriding aesthetic of their culture they frequently left materials to speak for themselves. Quite apart from the technical and formal aspects of such bottles, there is a wealth of pleasure to be had from approaching them, albeit on a tiny and very personal scale, as we would the works of our major abstract painters in the West. Once we do, we will begin to see them as they were seen by their original Chinese audience. A bottle like this, with its rich markings and wonderful colouring, would have been capable, in the hand of a Chinese aesthete of the early nineteenth century for instance, of meditational transformation to another realm of reality. No art form could aspire to a higher purpose, and this meditational, transformational potential of art has been at the forefront of Chinese aesthetics for centuries — in music, for instance, since at least the sixth century B.C. when silten music was already considered the highest form of musical expression.
37. Quartz; amethyst of transparent, pale purple colour, the material suffused with a natural pattern resembling drifting incense smoke; the bottle simply formed and with a slightly indented foot.

1780 - 1880
Height: 6.2 cm
Stopper: green glass, imitating jadeite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #150

The meditational, self-realizational function of art has always been recognized as its highest role by the Chinese, regardless of which particular art they channelled this through at any point in time. The ultimately governing perspective, the final way of knowing for the Chinese, and indeed for the East in general, was trans-intellectual and could only be attained through various meditational pursuits. These included everything from the standard meditational techniques for stilling the thinking mind and reaching beyond it, to the arts, and finally to any and every aspect of life. Once the goal of transcending the intellect was recognized, all activities in the relative realm were governed by it to some degree. A powerful aid in this process was to be found in the incense cult, where the individual could become intellectually lost in the drifting vapours of incense. For this reason it was popular among the influential minority in their studios and studies, and at their altars; for from the Chinese perspective religion and art, philosophy, calligraphy, painting or enjoying paintings, and the burning of incense were all simply different paths towards the same destination.
A bottle such as this would powerfully evoke floating incense smoke, and the initiated aesthete would drift into the Absolute by way of its curling and varied pattern. One of the great joys of the snuff bottle, as with fan paintings for instance, was that it was a constant personal appendage for the influential minority. Always available the aesthete might open a fan, or take out his bottle at any time and disappear through its channel of communication with the Absolute into a timeless realm of delight. This capacity to overcome boredom in the relative realm was honed to a razor edge of efficiency by the literati in their various arts.
ROBERT HALL

38. Quartz, crystal of transparent, almost flawless material; the decagonal bottle carved on each side with a highly formalised flower-head, perhaps intended as a chrysanthemum, the centre of which is carved as a formalised shou ('longevity') character; the mouth concave.

1770 - 1850
Height: 5.2 cm
Stopper: green jadeite, with a buffalo horn collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #519
Similar example: Hong Kong Museum of Art, Snuff Bottles of the Ching Dynasty, 1978, #184

The purity of crystal appealed enormously to the snuff takers of the Qing dynasty and unquestionably the majority of master-carvings in crystal from this period are to be found in the form of snuff bottles. The immediate intimacy of the snuff bottle, which functioned at close quarters, forced snuff bottle makers to refine their technique and their art. Whereas a large vase, or carved animal tended not to be examined at close quarters, every snuff bottle maker knew that his art was going to be subjected to frequent, close scrutiny by many people. The entire art form evolved to recognize this fact, resulting in snuff bottles representing the very finest of many arts and crafts of the Qing dynasty.
39. Quartz; crystal, the transparent material resembling ice; carved as a double bottle, the main bottle echoed in a smaller version carved on one side.

1780 - 1880
Height: 6.2 cm
Stopper: pink glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #491

The double bottle was presumably designed to hold two different flavours of snuff. As a rule the two containers are similar in form and size, but in this unusual example the second container is a miniaturized version of the first.
40. Quartz; crystal of transparent, deep brown colour; carved in the form of a double gourd with flared neck and indented base; each side decorated in low relief with the two characters daiji ('extensive good fortune') in seal script.

1750 - 1860  
Height: 6.5 cm  
Stopper: coral with yellow glass collar  
Provenance: Marian Mayer collection, #448

The double gourd form was popular among crystal carvers, allowing them to demonstrate their mastery over the added technical problems of perfectly matching interior hollowing to exterior form on a complex shape. On this example this mastery is perfectly enhanced by the form and positioning of the low relief characters, creating a faultless and subtle work of art.
41. Quartz; chalcedony of pale, honey-brown colour with darker brown markings; slightly carved to bring out a predominantly natural design on one side of a dragon chasing a flaming pearl.

1750 - 1860
Height: 6.2 cm
Stopper: green glass with coral finial

In the high arts of China, however defined at any point in time, the highest function of art was always clearly recognized: the union through creative response to experience of the separate self with a higher order of Absolute consciousness. Naturalness represented both a path towards this union and its outcome and was, therefore, highly valued in art. Out of this arose a predilection, dominant from the Song dynasty onwards in the applied arts, for natural materials which with a little help from the human hand became works of art on a cosmic scale - the only sort recognized as high art by the Chinese since at least the time of Confucius. In the snuff bottle field this aesthetic is well represented by the range of hardstone bottles with predominantly natural designs. Chalcedony, with its endless variation of natural markings proved a suitable vehicle for this aesthetic and was used, often with extraordinary results, throughout the snuff bottle period. Here a young dragon appears to frolic with a flaming pearl, but the delight of this art form is that it is not intended to be precisely descriptive. The audience is expected to add its own layers of meaning through interpretation of the subject and the languages of art through which it formalised.
42. Quartz; chalcedony of pale honey-grey colour with variegated brown markings; the well-hollowed bottle ingeniously carved to bring out a partly natural silhouette design of a tree growing from a rocky bank beneath which a fish swims in a pond; the reverse continuing the scene by taking us beneath the waters of the pond to encounter another large fish with bulbous, sad eyes.

1750 - 1860
Height: 6.5 cm
Stopper: glass, imitating green jadeite, on a coral collar with green finial
Provenance: Mr. and Mrs B. Wald Collection

Cf. 41. An impressive example of the potential for the combination of the human hand and its cosmic equivalent in this art form, here well defined relief carving blends into purely natural markings to create a partially abstract design of considerable power. The imagination, led by the precisely delineated tree and the head of the large fish on the reverse, is then allowed to run riot amidst the natural markings which may be seen as a continuation of the tree; markings on a mossy bank, or even distant landscape elements. None is necessarily the ‘right’ interpretation and all are possible. The great joy of this art form is that in leaving much of the creative input to the audience, the channel of communication between the known and the unknown that is the core of the ultimate quest for union of the Orient is more easily travelled. The natural material, the contribution of the artist, the creative response of the audience and the ultimate goal all blend into one, making the process of art as seen by the Oriental mind far more efficient and infinitely delightful.
43. Quartz; chalcedony of pale, honey-brown colour with darker inclusions; carved with a continuous design of the Hehe twins in a rocky landscape with pine and prunus trees; one of the twins opens his familiar globular box, from which a bat has flown into the drifting smoke of the charcoal brazier being fanned by the other; beneath the blossoming prunus branch, a bird pecks at a mossy bank; the whole design achieved with superb use of all the natural markings in the material.

Suzhou, 1750 - 1860
Height: 4.9 cm
Stopper: pink tourmaline set on a yellow serpentine collar

The Suzhou school of carving is exemplified here with its imaginative and complete use of all the natural markings in the stone and fine, detailed carving. But above all, what characterizes the appeal of the finest of Suzhou works is the capacity of the artist to rise above mere technical mastery of the material to create plastic designs that seem completely uninhibited.
44. Glass, single overlay of translucent light red on white-flecked, clear ground; carved with a continuous design of a carp, its body wrapped around the foot of the bottle, with an elaborate pavilion nestling in a cloud emerging from its mouth.

1750 - 1850
Height: 6.7 cm
Stopper: green glass on a coral coloured glass collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #49
Published: The Ko Family Collection, Part I, #10

From records existing from the early years of the eighteenth century it is clear that glass bottles were a staple of the burgeoning snuff bottle market in and around Beijing early in the snuff bottle period. They remained so well into the nineteenth century, never losing their popularity and representing the zenith of the Chinese glass industry. Much of the early glass was made in Beijing, either in, or inspired by the output of the Palace Workshops. Other workshops, however, emerged at various times during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, providing alternative sources, and differing styles. Connoisseurship of glass is not sufficient at present to identify the output of all these different factories and workshops ranging from the mass produced to the highest level of art existing in Chinese glass. A further complication is added by the fact that apparently master carvers would get their blanks (bottles already formed and overlaid, but not yet carved) from different manufacturers and then carve them in their own workshops. It may well be that the vast majority of early glass bottles come from the Beijing Palace Workshops, or from private workshops elsewhere in the region, but as yet attributions without some specific reason seem to serve little purpose.
45. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red on densely white-flecked clear ground; carved on each side with a central, formalised shou ('longevity') character enclosed within a circle, the upper segment of which is made up of a bat, its wings fully extended; the shoulders with mask-and-ring handles; the well defined foot also of red glass.

1750 - 1850
Height: 5.8 cm
Stopper: carnelian on a white marble collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #636

Red overlay was one of the most popular styles of glass to emerge out of the Beijing production of the eighteenth century. In this imaginative design all the quality of the best of this output is seen, albeit in a restrained design. The elongation of the rings hanging from the 'taotie mask handles' in this case may indicate a date towards the end of the eighteenth or into the nineteenth century. Exaggeratedly long handles seem to have been predominantly a feature of the nineteenth century and are common, for instance, on the later Qing output of the Yangzhou factory.
46. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red on a densely, white-flecked clear ground; carved on each side with two chi dragons, each with a different type of head, surrounding a shou ('longevity') medallion; the shoulders carved with mask-and-ring handles; the foot also in red overlay.

Probable Beijing, 1750 - 1850
Height: 7.5 cm
Stopper: coral, set on a green glass collar and with a paler green glass finial
Provenance: Mrs Harold Sooysmith
Published: Bob C. Stevens, The Collector's Book of Snuff Bottles, #190

Chi dragons were immensely popular as decoration during the early Qing period, resulting in the snuff bottle field large numbers of northern examples from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that then set a fashion for the rest of the snuff bottle period. Many of these emanated from the Palace Workshops, to which this example is tentatively attributed. However, such attributions represent the recognition of a general style and certain level of quality rather than any firm criteria for assuming that because the Palace Workshops were responsible for a great many of such works, they were necessarily responsible for all of them.

The chi dragon is a sinuous, considerably less threatening version of the fully-fledged mythical beast. Although it differs considerably in its detail over the centuries, it is generally characterized by a more lizard-like body without well defined scales; a softer head without the full antler-like horns of the imperial dragon although softer horns, or frequently a single horn occur; and subdued, if any, teeth. It can, however, assume different heads and in Qing decorative arts and particularly on snuff bottles, the usual feline-looking dragon head is often replaced by that of a phoenix - the two presumably thereby symbolizing the emperor and empress.
47. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red on a bubble suffused, milky translucent ground; carved with a continuous design of symbols of paradise, including a crane, with a scroll in its mouth, flying towards the roof of a pavilion which arises from swirling waves; amidst the waves a conch shell gives vent to a stream of swirling mist in which a pearl floats surrounded by other religious symbols.

Probably Beijing, 1750 - 1850
Height: 6.1 cm
Stopper: mottled blue glass with white finial

The subject matter here seems to represent the essential unity of Buddhist and Daoist metaphors for the ultimate nature of reality.

Particularly impressive is the carving down of the red layer used to outline the cloud of mist emerging from the conch shell. By paring it gradually into the white ground, streaks are left which lend an extraordinary dimension of depth, throwing the suspended pearl into high relief against an infinitely intriguing background.
48. Glass; single overlay of dark, ruby-red colour on a translucent, milky ground; carved with a continuous design of a formalised lotus flower, emerging from the foot and growing upwards in serried ranks of petals to the upper shoulders; the finely carved design balanced by a band of similarly formalised lotus petals reversed at the neck below a single, raised band.

1750 - 1850

Height: 6.1 cm
Stopper: purple glass imitating amethyst
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #755

This is an extremely unusual version of a well known, although far from common design. Given its high level of technical control and quality, it is lifted finally into the realm of pure delight for which we approach Chinese, and indeed any other art, by the simple, but wholly confident and beautifully proportioned plain gap between the upper petals of the main design, and its reversed echo around the neck.
49. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red on a milky-white ground; carved in relief with, on one side, a dragon emerging with great verve from waves; and on the other with an eccentric looking tiger in a rocky landscape with a bat flying above its head.

1750 - 1850
Height: 5.6 cm
Stopper: red glass set in gilt-bronze on a stained ivory collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #658

The amusing characterisations of the ‘disco-dragon’ and the bemused looking tiger lend a special appeal to this otherwise finely worked example. In the Chinese aesthetic all high art is a form of play — the self playing with the Absolute in a game which takes the individual beyond all defining concepts. Much Chinese art is couched in amusing terms which to the Occidental mind sometimes lends an air of frivolity to it which is not in keeping with the Western tradition of fine, or high arts and may mislead.
50. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red on a milky-white, bubble suffused ground; carved on one side with a galloping Manchu Bannerman and on the other with an eight character inscription referring to imperial authority and its beneficial influence, set on a well carved red footrim.

Attributed to the Beijing Palace Workshops, 1750 - 1850
Height: 5.8 cm
Stopper: red glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #324

This is one of a series of similar bottles with galloping Bannermen (the Imperial Cavalry of the Qing Emperors) usually accompanied by a similar poetic admonishment. In this case the inscription states that wherever the Authority of Heaven, represented by the Emperor, flows all evil influence is swept away, leaving the relative realm in harmony.

A similar bottle, with an essentially similar inscription is illustrated by Robert Kleiner, *Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch*, #112.

Such bottles apparently originated, and are sensibly attributable to the Beijing Palace Workshops.
51. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red on a translucent, pale caramel coloured ground; simply carved with mask-and-ring handles on the shoulders and matching neck and foot rims.

1750 - 1850
Height: 6.0 cm
Stopper: turquoise, set on a gilt metal collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #316

In this delightfully restrained example, the usual virtuosity of the glass carver gives way to an unusual delight in the material itself. It is also a rare form for a glass snuff bottle, relating to the ceramic tradition of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
52. Glass, of opaque rose-pink colour; carved with convex, octagonal panels set against a matching octagonal body; the mouth concave.

Attributed to the Beijing Palace Workshops, 1780 - 1850
Height: 5.6 cm
Stopper: green nephrite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #748

A well known series of bottles exists of this form, predominantly in glass, but also in enamelled glass and rarely enamelled metal, which are known to have been made in the Beijing Palace Workshops. Most bear the reign marks of the Qianlong Emperor and in the case of the enamelled wares are confidently attributed to the Palace Workshops. The glass examples, however, also bear reign marks well into the nineteenth century (cf. 53), suggesting that the glass manufactory in the Palace Workshops continued well beyond the life of many of the others. This may suggest that alternative sources were not as common as with other media, which endorses the general belief that large quantities of early glass bottles were, in fact, made in the Palace Workshops.

This is an extremely rare colour for this series of glass bottles.
53. Glass, of bright turquoise-blue colour; carved with faceted, convex panels on an octagonal form; the base incised with the four character mark *Dao guang nian zhi* ('made during the reign of the Daoguang emperor') in regular script.

Beijing Palace Workshops, 1821 - 1850  
Height: 5.5 cm  
Stopper: white-flecked, emerald green jadeite  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #757  
Similar example: R. Kleiner, *Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch*, #81, 82.  
*Hong Kong Museum of Art, Chinese Snuff Bottles*, 15th October 1977, #47

Cf. 52. This is a good example of an unusual and attractive colour from the nineteenth century Palace glass works, Marian Mayer had a fairly large group of similar bottles in various colours, having concentrated on the works of the Palace Workshops for some time as part of the 'core' of her glass collection — hence the predominance of unusual examples offered here.
54. Glass, of bright turquoise-blue colour; carved with faceted convex panels on an octagonal form; the base incised with the four character mark Daoguang nianzhi ('made during the reign of the Daoguang emperor') in regular script.

Beijing Palace Workshops, 1821 - 1850  
Height: 5.9 cm  
Stopper: green-flecked, white jadeite  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #758

Cf. 53.
55. Glass, of deep cobalt-blue colour and flattened ovoid form set on a neatly carved, oval foot.

1750 - 1850

Height: 4.9 cm
Stopper: blue glass set on an ivory collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #425

Plain glass bottles were made in enormous quantities both within the Beijing Palace Workshops, from which this example may come, and without. The almost opaque, deep cobalt blue colour of this example is unusual, and the purity of form and colour are allowed to speak for themselves, as with so many well made glass bottles.
56. Glass, of opaque, slightly swirly, pale turquoise-green colour; the elongated, flattened form set on a well carved, oval footrim.

1736-1820
Height: 6.7 cm
Stopper: coral
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #541

Cf. 55.
57. Glass of opaque, slightly swirly, bright turquoise-blue colour; of tapering, round-shouldered cylindrical form set on a neatly carved cylindrical footrim.

1750 - 1850
Height: 6.6 cm
Stopper: dark blue 'tiger's eye'
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #23

The fortuitous or intentional swirling patterns in the glass evoke images of drifting incense smoke. The incense cult was highly regarded in China, where the preparation of the incense burner and the subsequent swirling, heady smoke were metaphors for the drifting of the separate self into the Absolute and consciously used as an efficient meditational aid.
58. Glass, of opaque, swirly, deep, greenish caramel colour; the tear-drop form neatly finished with an indented foot.

1780 - 1880
Height: 6.5 cm
Stopper: translucent, milky glass carved with petals set on a pink glass collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #450

In blowing glass, a gather of molten glass is collected on the end of the blowing rod. If allowed to fall naturally from its own weight, just such a tear drop form as this arises. Here the blower has allowed this natural form to speak for itself, simply indenting the foot and trimming the neck to form the finished bottle. It is also an unusual colour.
59. Glass, single overlay of translucent ruby-red on an opalescent, milky ground; carved with a continuous design of a chi dragon, whose bifid tail becomes completely carried away in an excess of swirling extremeties; the foot overlaid in red and incised with the four character mark Qianlong nianzhi ('made during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor') in regular script.

Beijing Palace Workshops, 1736 - 1795  
Height: 4.6 cm  
Stopper: pink tourmaline  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #697  
Similar example: Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ching Dynasty*, 1978, #52

Cf. 60, 61, 62. This is an example of a distinct stylistic group within the output of the Beijing Palace Workshops. They are characterised by their small size; frequent imperial marks in the classic, wheel-cut, four character mark of the Palace glass works (which also appears regularly on Palace enamelled glass wares); and combination of slightly crude workmanship applied to freely drawn and lively designs. For another example, in blue overlay, see R. Kleiner, *Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch*, #86.
60. Glass, single overlay of translucent ruby-red on an opalescent, milky white ground; carved with a continuous design of a plump chi dragon with a bifid tail flying above rockwork from which a lingzhi fungus grows; the neckrim also overlaid in red; the base incised with the four character mark Qianlong nianzhi ('made during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor') in regular script.

Beijing Palace Workshops, 1736 - 1795
Height: 4.8 cm
Stopper: pink tourmaline, on a red glass collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #753

Cf. 59, 61, 62. The dragon on this example also sports the elaborate tail of the previous one, which seems to be a feature of the chi dragons in this Palace Workshops sub-group.
61. Glass, single overlay of pale, sapphire-blue on an opalescent, milky ground; carved with a continuous design of a chi dragon flying above rocks; the neckrim and foot also in blue, the latter incised with the four character mark Qianlong 'nianzhi' ('made during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor').

Beijing Palace Workshops, 1736 - 1795
Height: 5.1 cm
Stopper: green jadeite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #740

Cf. 59, 60, 62. This distinct sub-group of the Palace Workshops output appears to have been limited to single overlay work, predominantly in ruby-red or blue, although examples are known in other colours, including pink.
62. Glass, single overlay of pinkish, ruby-red on an opalescent milky ground; carved with a continuous design of a brocade ribbon which encloses the bottle and its design of a flowering peony, bamboo and rockwork with a butterfly overhead; the foot incised with a four character mark Qianlong nianzhi ('made during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor').

Beijing Palace Workshops, 1736 - 1795
Height: 4.5 cm
Stopper: pink tourmaline
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #699

Cf. 59, 60, 61. The brocade ribbon enclosing an otherwise normally decorated object was a popular eighteenth century decorative idea, particularly with Palace wares, whether made in, or for the Palace. It was probably intended to symbolize a gift, where the elaborate, beribboned wrapping became a part of the work of art being presented to someone.
63. Glass, of opaque, milky white colour; minutely incised with, on one side, a scholar seated in contemplation in a small boat in the shelter of a clump of reeds while a crane flies overhead; the reverse with a long, equally minutely incised inscription laid out in neat, vertical ranks of characters and followed by the signature Zhou Honglai and the date Guangxi gengzi (1900), with one seal of the artist, Zhou.

Zhou Honglai, Nanjing, 1900  
Height: 5.4 cm  
Stopper: carnelian with elaborate silver collar  
Similar examples: Hong Kong Art Museum, Snuff Bottles of the Ching Dynasty, 1978, #244, 245

Zhou Honglai was one of the most accomplished of a series of late Qing dynasty artists who specialized in miniature incising. Ivory was one of the most popular media for this art form and small screens for the scholar’s desk a favoured form, but Zhou appears to have worked predominantly in glass (with occasional white porcelain examples) and concentrated on snuff bottles. His work is always of exquisite quality, and his subjects scholarly and refined although far from common, examples do turn up from time to time. They are bottles to be handled and appreciated at close quarters, and once out of the cabinet and into the hand, they are very rewarding. He is also a very much underrated artist at the present time.

Two other examples, which also establish his place of working as Nanjing, are illustrated in Robert Kliener, Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch, #133, 134.
Glass, of opaque, milky-white colour; the egg-plant shaped bottle incised on one side with two scholars standing in conversation beneath a pine tree, one holding a gnarled walking staff, the other clutching a guqin; and on the other with a seven character poetic inscription followed by two seals of the inscriber, Xiao and shan ('Small mountain' — a poetic, assumed name, the latter slightly superimposed on the former).

1880 - 1930
Height: 6.7 cm
Stopper: green jadeite

With the incisers of the late nineteenth century it was not uncommon for earlier bottles to be used. With the output of Zhou Honglai certain standard shapes, such as that of #63, appear sufficiently often to suggest that he had them made at the time, while others are clearly incised on older, existing bottles. The form and quality of this example suggest a mid Qing dynasty date for the bottle itself. The incising is not technically in a class with that of Zhou Honglai, and tends more towards the folk art end of this art form. Folk art, however, has its own particular charm, and the two old scholars, out for a day of meditational pastimes deep in the woods, are delightfully depicted with an economy of strokes that equally reaches into the aesthetic of the highest levels of painting.
65. Glass, of opaque, milky-white colour; the flattened bottle painted in subdued *famille rose* enamels with a continuous scene of three magpies disposed in a garden scene with the branches of a blossoming prunus tree which grows, along with a clump of bamboos, from behind an outcrop of gnarled rock; the base enamelled in iron red with a four character mark *Qianlong nianzhi* ('made during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor') in precisely drawn seal script.

1780 - 1860  
Height: 5.6 cm  
Stopper: pink tourmaline on a buffalo horn collar

This is a delightful example of a well-known and extensive group of enamels which probably date from the nineteenth century. They frequently bear either red enamel Qianlong reign marks, or the hall mark *Gu Yue xuan* ('Ancient moon pavilion'). The group of enamelled wares which
made the Gu Yue xian mark popular has been established as dating from the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first few decades of the nineteenth, so it is unlikely that this group could predate that time, and probable that they postdate it. However, it is just possible that the earliest of this group was made during the closing years of the Qianlong period. The group is distinguished by its distinctively thin use of enamels, giving the impression of pastel colours; by its use of red marks, as mentioned above, and by the quality of painting, which is epitomized by this example. This is likely to be a provincial group of enamelled wares made elsewhere than in Beijing, but as yet there has been no indication of where this might have been.

For another unusually good example of this group see Robert Kliener, *Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch*, #20.
66. Glass, triple-layered with green, pink, brown, yellow and lacquer-red splashes encased between a ground of white and a surface layer of clear colour; the bottle of simple, flattened pear shape.

1760 - 1880
Height: 6 cm
Stopper: amethyst set on a gilt-bronze collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #227

Cf. 67, 68. A considerable number of glass bottles were made during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries forming a large group. They are characterized by being blown into simple forms, frequently with the use of two-part moulds, and consisting of layers of glass, where the random design is cased between an outer and inner layer, which is usually clear or of a transparent colour. The group is sufficiently large, and has many sub-groups which are identifiable, that it may represent a popular style which was catered to in various different parts of the Empire, but they exist in early collections and many appear to be quite early in the snuff bottle period, so at least some of them are likely to have been made in the north, in or around Beijing.

This example is an unusual combination of colours, made more unusual still by the rare white ground.

For further examples of the more classic bottles of this large group see Robert Kliener, Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch, #72, 73.
67. Glass, of opalescent, slightly milky-white colour with inclusions of emerald-green splashes of various intensities.

1750 - 1820
Height: 5.4 cm
Stopper: opaque white glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #487

Cf. 66,68. This is another example of the same group as #66, but the layering of the splashes of emerald-green colour are more subtly integrated into the inner and outer casing. Bottles of this large group rely for their appeal predominantly on shape, colour and its disposition within the encasing glass. The subtle blending of different intensities of emerald-green colour, together with the delightful form of the bottle itself, lend a dignity to this example which is appealing and sets it apart from the run-of-the mill examples of this group.
68. Glass, triple layered, a middle layer of rich, cobalt blue cased in translucent glass, the outer layer of which contains chips of gold-stone glass.

1750 - 1820  
Height: 5.2 cm  
Stopper: goldstone glass  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #294

Cf 66, 67. This is another example of the early glass group referred to previously, but with unusual flecking of goldstone glass to give the overall appearance of lapis-lazuli.
69. Glass, of opaque, dark olive and lighter green with needle like streaks sweeping across the lower body.

1750 - 1820  
Height: 6 cm  
Stopper: pink tourmaline  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection #296

This is an exciting and carefully planned glass bottle, the clever suggestion of perhaps a stormy night is by no means entirely accidental.
70. Glass, of transparent, ruby red colour; the flattened, globular form simply carved with an indented foot and slightly flared neck.

1730 - 1795
Height: 4.8 cm
Stopper: pearl, mounted on a blue glass collar

The Palace Workshops at Beijing are known to have been making snuff bottles in various basic colours, including red, by the first few years of the eighteenth century. From then onwards, well into the nineteenth century, they probably turned out vast numbers of plain bottles, frequently unidentified by reign mark or decorative style by which they could be definitely attributed to the Palace. Ruby red was a favourite colour of this early Qing output, and this is a typically elegant example with its simple, understated, yet faultless form. While it probably originates from the Palace Workshops, we are not in a position to rule out other sources, for we simply do not know to what extent other glass works produced similar bottles.
71. Glass, of transparent, sapphire-blue colour with a distinct turquoise cast; the compressed, globular bottle with elegantly flared neck and neatly carved foot.

1730 - 1795

Height: 4.9 cm
Stopper: pink tourmaline

Cf. 70. The finest of this group of glass bottles, which certainly originated in the Palace Workshops even if they were not all made there, are often simple, yet faultless like this and the last example. Such faultless understatement is far more impressive as art than a technically complex expression which falls short because the artist has chosen to do something beyond his aesthetic or technical control.
72. Glass, of transparent, deep cobalt blue colour; the simple, elegant, elongated bottle with faceted sides and an indented foot.

1760 - 1860
Height: 5.9 cm
Stopper: rose quartz with turquoise finial
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #634
Similar example: H. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, #260

Cf. 71.
73. Glass, colourless; of simple, ovoid form with with a flat foot and concave mouth.

1750-1880
Height: 5.5 cm
Stopper: glass imitating jadeite

As collectors we tend to see our plain crystal bottles, and their colourless glass equivalents, rather differently than would our snuff-taking, Chinese counterparts of the Qing dynasty. Filled with snuff, these bottles assume a quite different look. Although disturbing at first, if we are used to the clean appearance, the snuff filled clear bottle does accentuate the outer casing which makes up the bottle and tends to give the appearance of the snuff almost floating, magically, in mid-air. It is worth remembering that in many cases it was the snuff that was highly valued and the bottle which contained it of secondary importance, and an expensive, imported, perhaps subtly coloured snuff could be shown off to great advantage in a bottle such as this.
74. Glass, of lemon yellow colour; carved in the form of a finger citron.

1780 - 1880
Height: 7.0 cm
Stopper: turquoise on a black glass collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #631

The colour of this glass bottle comes very close to the original colour of the fruit, which is presumably why the glass maker decided on a paler than usual yellow.

Cf. 4, 75.
75. Glass, of black colour; carved in the form of a finger citron.

1780 - 1880  
Height: 7.5 cm  
Stopper: brown quartz on a green glass collar  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #500

Marian Mayer was a collector who loved to collect in series. Once she identified a group of bottles of similar form, or school or whatever, she was after it like a gun-dog. The finger citron was one of those forms she liked, and looked for. This example in black glass is extremely unusual and rather puzzling, but in a culture where the highest aesthetic in painting was represented by inkplays where black alone in combination with different quantities of water was seen as representing all possible colours, perhaps a black finger citron is as sensible as a yellow one.

Cf. 4, 74.
76. Glass, of transparent, pale turquoise-blue colour; carved on each side with a chi dragon, swirling around upon itself to form a medallion which matches the flattened form of the globular bottle; the foottrim well carved; the base wheel-cut with the four character mark Qianlong nianzhi (‘made during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor’) in regular script.

Beijing Palace Workshops, 1736 - 1795
Height: 5.5 cm
Stopper: pink coral on an ivory collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #595

This example is confidently attributed to the Beijing Palace Workshops because of the four character mark, which was favoured in the Workshops, and because of the wheel cutting of the mark, which was again typical of the eighteenth century output of the Palace glass works. The colour, with its metallic tint, is unusual, however.
76. Glass, of transparent, pale turquoise-blue colour; carved on each side with a chi dragon, swirling around upon itself to form a medallion which matches the flattened form of the globular bottle; the footrim well carved; the base wheel-cut with the four character mark Qianlong nianzhi (‘made during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor’) in regular script.

Beijing Palace Workshops, 1736 - 1795  
Height: 5.5 cm  
Stopper: pink coral on an ivory collar  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #595

This example is confidently attributed to the Beijing Palace Workshops because of the four character mark, which was favoured in the Workshops, and because of the wheel cutting of the mark, which was again typical of the eighteenth century output of the Palace glass works. The colour, with its metallic tint, is unusual, however.
78. Glass, of transparent, pale amethyst colour; the flattened, elongated ovoid form carved overall with a highly formalised basket-weave pattern; the foot an oval platform; the neck slightly flared.

1780 - 1880
Height: 5.8 cm
Stopper: emerald green flecked jadeite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #749

The well-known basket-weave pattern was one that attracted Marian Mayer as a collectable series. She had a number of examples, mostly of the standard form. This one, however, is unique and so formalised as to be hardly recognizable as derived from this popular pattern. Here the normal, formalised, obvious basket pattern is extended and de-emphasised so that the overall impression is imparted without resorting to technical detail. It is an abstract tour-de-force within the genre.
79. Glass, of transparent, ruby red colour; carved in low relief on each side with an oval panel of a chi dragon with an elaborate, scrolling tail; the shoulders carved with a mask-and-ring handles; the footrim neatly carved and the neck with a pronounced concave mouth giving way to an exceptionally wide opening.

Attributed to Beijing, 1750 - 1830
Height: 5.7 cm
Stopper: pink coral
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #696

The combination here of ruby-red glass and chi dragons with excessively elaborate tails (cf. 60) suggests a sensible attribution to the Beijing Palace Workshops.
80. Glass, of transparent, sapphire blue colour; the flattened, globular bottle set on a flat foot.

1750 - 1850
Height: 6.5 cm
Stopper: coral
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #603

The perfect matching of exterior form to interior hollowing in this example, together with a sumptuous colour, is further enhanced by the fact that it stands perfectly balanced on a foot which is no more than 3 mm in width at any point.
81. Glass, colourless; the flattened, globular bottle carved on each side with forty-eight small, formalised shou ('longevity') characters surrounding another, similarly formalised and placed in the centre of the design.

1780 - 1850
Height: 6.2 cm
Stopper: pink glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #509

Shou, meaning longevity, is a popular, auspicious character on a birthday gift and appears as a decorative motif on much later Chinese art. One hundred shou characters suggests a wish for eternal longevity. Here, however, there are definitely only forty-nine on each side, including the central, larger character, suggesting that a subtle reference is intended that all forty-nine together make up the fiftieth as an overall, large shou character on each side. The only alternative would have been for a stopper to have incorporated two further characters, but this is unlikely, as two is an awkward number to get on a stopper while retaining the sense of symmetry of the bottle.
82. Glass, of opaque white colour; the flattened oval body carved on one side with a lotus, showing the root, stems, pod, leaves and flower; the other side carved in relief with the inscription yuzhi (‘by Imperial command’) beneath which is the hall mark Xingyouheng tang (‘the Hall of Constancy’), both in regular script, the latter set in raised characters in a raised, square seal.

1810 - 1854
Height: 6.3 cm
Stopper: coral on a turquoise collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #544

The Xingyouheng tang belonged to the fifth Prince Ding, Zaichuan, who died in 1854. He was a collector on a grand scale who frequently had things made specifically for him which bore his hall mark. This is the only example known which combines this hall mark with the characters yuzhi which implies the direct patronage of the Emperor. The combination here is puzzling, for Prince Ding was not in a position to have used it autonomously without offence, leaving open the possibility that it was made at the command of the Emperor for Zaichuan. However, it is a most unusual usage and one that raises more questions than it answers.

For further details of Zaichuan, see Hummel, Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Dynasty, p. 728; also for further examples of snuff bottles bearing his hall mark, see Chinese Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty by Gerard Tsang and Hugh Moss, #74, 176; and Robert Kliener, Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch, #141.
83. Glass, of bubble-suffused ruby-red colour; the elongated, flattened form carved on each side with an identical design of two confronting chi dragons; the shoulders with mask-and-ring handles; well carved oval footrim.

Attributed to the Beijing Palace Workshops, 1736 - 1795
Height: 6.8 cm
Stopper: pink tourmaline on a yellow glass collar with a green finial
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #567

This group of bottles, made of bubble suffused ruby-red coloured glass is a distinctive, and small sub-group of the much more common plain, ruby-red bottles. Its style of carving seems to relate to the Palace production of the Qianlong period, and there seems no reason not to make this attribution. Equally, all such attributions without specific marks or more pressing stylistic associations are open to question.
84. Glass, of opaque, deep, sage-green colour; the pear-shaped bottle set on a neatly carved ovoid foot, and decorated in relief on each side with a carp leaping from turbulent waves; each shoulder decorated with a trifoil spray in place of the ubiquitous mask-and-ring handles.

1780 - 1860
Height: 5.3 cm
Stopper: coral on a green hardstone collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #661

There is a folk-like charm to the decoration of this example which suggests that it was made in workshops removed from the direct and traditional influence of the Palace Workshops. The substitution of the usual mask-and-ring handles with trifoil sprays also suggests a later development. It is perhaps a provincial, or private workshops product of the early nineteenth century. The colour, however, is most unusual.
85. Glass, of opaque, swirling maroon colour; the flattened, globular form carved on each side with a concave dish; neatly carved oval foot.

1720 - 1840
Height: 6.0 cm
Stopper: goldstone glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #322

There is a large group of bottles, usually of appalling quality and lumpy form, which are of this colour and which were made throughout the nineteenth century. It has been suggested that the colour results from using up all the left-over glass at the end of the day and mixing it together. However, this over-simplistic response to a usually uninspiring group of bottles is belied by an example like this. It is well formed, and with its integral snuff dishes, probably quite early - perhaps from the early eighteenth century. It is more likely that the colour, with its swirling patterns and similarity to the group which imitates realgar (with all its Daoist symbolism) was independently appreciated and originated as a positive artistic statement rather than from the last gather of glass in the working day.
86. Glass, of transparent, ruby-red colour; the flattened, globular bottle carved on each side with a formalised flower-head; well carved oval footrim and elegantly flared neck.

1750 - 1850
Height: 5.2 cm
Stopper: blue glass mounted on a buffalo horn collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #602
Similar example: Bob C. Stevens, The Collectors Book of Snuff Bottles, #164, 165.

(Illustrated on the front cover)

This distinctive formalised flower-head appears on a wide range of works of art from the early eighteenth century onwards. It has been suggested that it represents a mallow flower, or a kui flower (which is the flower associated with the successful scholar, and would, therefore account for its popularity throughout the Qing dynasty). It is usually so highly formalised, however, that it is difficult to accurately identify it. Here it is more precisely depicted than in most cases, and represents a well-known group of bottles with this design which were keenly sought after by Marian Mayer.

Cf. 87, 88, 89, 90, 93.
87. Glass, of transparent, bubble-suffused emerald-green colour; carved on each side with a stylised flower-head; well carved oval footrim and flared neck.

1750 - 1850
Height: 5.3 cm
Stopper: green glass imitating jadeite on an ivory collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #738

(Illustrated on the front cover)

Cf. 86, 89, 90, 93.
88. Glass, of partially translucent, brilliant turquoise-blue colour; the flattened bottle carved in a hexagonal form, with the entire bottle taking on the form of the formalised flower-head of the main decoration.

1760 - 1860
Height: 5.6 cm
Stopper: matching blue glass on a black glass collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #539

(Illustrated on the front cover)

This is one of the most unusual examples of the above mentioned flower-head design that Marian Mayer found. Not only is the colour rare for this design, and strikingly attractive, but the incorporation of the form of the bottle into the main decorative element is exceptional.

Cf. 86, 87, 89, 90, 93.
89. Glass, of transparent, bubble-suffused, pale emerald-green colour with extensive inclusions of small, green flecks; carved on each side with an identical formalised flower-head; with neatly carved oval footrim and flared neck.

1730 - 1850
Height: 4.6 cm
Stopper: white, flecked glass on a stained ivory collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #673

(Illustrated on the front cover)

Cf. 86, 87, 88, 90, 93. This is an extremely interesting example, as it links this small sub-group with the group of early glass bottles referred to in the caption to #66. The flecking in the clear glass is a feature of this sandwiched group, and without the decoration this bottle would be sensibly attributed to it. Clearly stylistic developments occurred in many different workshops, and perhaps there was considerable aesthetic and technical exchange between them.
90. Glass, of opaque, slightly swirly, deep caramel colour; the flattened, globular bottle carved identically on each side with a highly formalised flower-head, the design dictating the form of the bottle.

1780 - 1860
Height: 5.6 cm
Stopper: turquoise on a gilt bronze collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #625

This is an interestingly abstracted version of the bright turquoise-blue example illustrated as #88; where the design similarly dictates the form of the bottle.
91. Glass, of translucent, swirly mottled pink and white colour; the flattened, globular bottle, carved in low relief on one side with a butterfly fluttering above the branches of a blossoming prunus tree which grows from an elaborate rock; the other side similarly carved with a bat flying above a lingzi fungus, which also issues from an ornamental rock; well carved oval footrim.

1740 - 1830
Height: 5.8 cm
Stopper: green jadeite

This is a decorated version of the group of early, mottled pink snuff bottles referred to in the caption to #77.
92. Glass, of translucent, mottled and swirly white and pink colour; well carved oval footrim.

1750 - 1850  
Height: 5.4 cm  
Stopper: pink glass on white collar  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #638

There is an interesting formal association between this bottle and #48, where the colour of the main body is separated by a white band from a small, echoing band at the neck. Probably entirely accidental in this case, it achieves the same compositional strength.

Cf. 77, 91.
93. Glass, single overlay of pale pink on a translucent, milky-white ground; the flattened, globular bottle carved in relief on each side with an identical pink formalised flower-head; the oval footrim well carved in pink overlay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Stopper</th>
<th>Provenance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1750 - 1850</td>
<td>5.7 cm</td>
<td>tourmaline</td>
<td>Marian Mayer Collection, #617</td>
</tr>
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(Illustrated on the front cover)

Cf. 86, 87, 88, 89, 90. This is an extremely unusual, and delightfully subtle, version of the formalised flower-head group Marian Mayer sought out with such single-minded devotion as to end up with a disproportionately large and representative collection of the pattern. It is tempting to hope that someone will keep this group together and fulfil Marian’s devotion to serial collecting.
94. Glass, of translucent, mottled pink and white colour; the oval foottrim well carved.

1730 - 1820
Height: 6.0 cm
Stopper: pink glass on a mother-of-pearl collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #667

While this is clearly part of the group referred to in #77, 91, 92, it is also related to the sandwiched glass group of #66, 67, 68. Here the pink colouring is contained between two layers, clearly visible from the neck, the outer of which is clear glass. Again either development within a single workshop, and the Palace cannot be ruled out, or cross fertilisation between workshops is suggested.
95. Glass, of transparent, pale ruby-red colour, carved as an elegant, inverted pear shape, with fluting converging towards the base.

1750 - 1820
Height:  5.2 cm
Stopper:  green jadeite, carved as a pomegranite
Provenance:  Marian Mayer Collection, #601
Similar example:  Hong Kong Museum of Art, Snuff Bottles of the Ching Dynasty, 1978, #55

This unusual design perfectly enhances the lucid, sumptuous pale ruby colour. It is the epitome of the delights of the best of this large group of plain glass bottles where form and the qualities of the material speak for themselves.
96. Glass, single overlay of opaque, amber-yellow on a transparent lucent amber ground; carved in relief on each side with an identical chi dragon with bifid tail; the oval footrim also carved from the overlay colour.

1750 - 1850
Height: 6.6 cm
Stopper: amber-coloured glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #433

This unusual colour combination must originate with an awareness of the two basic colours of amber used in China: the transparent reddish-brown material imported from Burma, and the opaque, swirling yellow amber brought across the Russian trade routes from the Baltic regions.

The chi dragon here is typical of the cuddly, swirling beast of the post-Song period, with its lizard-like body, bifid tail, splitting again on one of its extremeties, and feline head, in this case hornless.
97. Glass, single overlay of transparent amber-yellow colour on a heavily white-flecked, clear glass ground; carved in relief on one side with a finger citron and on the other with a peach, a pomegranate and another finger citron; the oval footrim also carved from the overlay colour.

1780 - 1850
Height: 6.0 cm
Stopper: amber coloured glass on an opaque swirly white glass collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #132

In this unusual colour combination are found fruits which were of symbolic and auspicious meaning to the literati. The peach symbolises longevity, as the familiar fruit of Shou Lao, the God of Longevity, associated with the peaches of longevity which are said to grow in the Daoist Paradise under the guardianship of Xi Wangmu, the Western Goddess. The pomegranate symbolises fertility and plentiful offspring, preferably male in the traditional, male-orientated Chinese society. For the finger-citron, see # 4.
98. Glass; single overlay of transparent amber-yellow, on an opaque, lemon-yellow ground; carved on both sides and on the shoulders in place of the normal mask-and-ring handles, with a selection of ancient bronze vessels; the oval footrim also carved from the overlay colour.

1760 - 1880
Height: 6.7 cm
Stopper: carnelian, on a gilt bronze collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #446

Excavations during the Qing dynasty of early tombs created a massive revival of interest in the traditional literati pursuit of the ancient Chinese culture. Archaic bronzes, with their frequent inscriptions, represented both a philological and esoteric touchstone with the tradition of Chinese culture. To the literati this was an essential basis for all communication. The highest level of Chinese understanding was based in the Absolute realm of unified consciousness, where there were, essentially, no rules. To counteract this in the relative realm it was necessary to govern social activity within a traditional framework of understanding and precedent. The creative works of the past were a metaphor for this relative basis of authority in the every-day world.
99. Glass, single overlay of transparent, amber-yellow on a slightly milky, transparent ground; carved in relief with a continuous scene depicting a sage and his attendant walking in landscape towards an enclosure of houses, in front of which are a water buffalo and goat.

1800 - 1900
Height: 6.1 cm
Stopper: coral on a blue glass collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #137

This bottle, albeit in a very rare colour combination, represents a large group of predominantly mid-Qing bottles which depict genre scenes. These took two main forms: the idealised, arcadian life, where scholars, monks or sages (the influential minority of Chinese culture) wandered unfettered in a perfect landscape, enjoying, even if only as observers, the simple country life of the peasant and the fisherman; and mythological subjects drawn from the literature of China.
100. Glass, of transparent, amber-brown colour; carved in the form of a miniature cricket cage; the rim, formed from a separate, applied section of translucent milky-white coloured glass.

1780 -1880
Height: 5.4 cm
Stopper: green stained walrus ivory carved in the round as three peaches on a branch
Provenance: Marian Mayer collection, #589

This unique bottle is a charming reference to the cricket cult of China, which appears to have become an obsession among all classes of Chinese during the Qing period and particularly during the nineteenth century. It represents a winter cage for the fighting cricket, which was the Chinese equivalent of the Western obsession with the horse, with all its potential for gambling, honour, and transcendence of social barriers. It is interesting to note that the neck has been made of a separate section and applied, since the ubiquitous winter cricket cage of the Qing dynasty (they seem not to have existed before the Kangxi period) was made of gourd with a separately applied ivory neck. This extraordinary and very rare bottle provided Marian Mayer with great excitement when she found it, for it represented that moment that so many serial collectors crave: the unique work of art that fits, also, comfortably into a series - in this case her collection of glass snuff bottles. It is an extraordinary little bottle, and must have been made for a devoted cricket fancier who also took snuff. This in itself would have been no rarity in the Qing period, but the extent of the obsession that would have prompted the production of this personalised snuff bottle was, for none other has so far come to light.
101. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red on a transparent, aquamarine-coloured ground; carved on each side with two chi dragons disposed around a central pearl; the oval footrim well carved from the overlay colour.

1750 - 1850
Height:  6.5 cm
Stopper: green glass, imitating jadeite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #611

Here the ubiquitous chi dragons so popular with the Qing court are combined with an extremely rare ground colour. Certain glass colours seem to have been imported, ready made and were often carved like hardstones rather than melted and blown or moulded. Among these is goldstone glass, and a series of transparent, metallic looking green or greenish-blue colours. Aquamarine glass is also usually found in bottles of the type, but here this relatively rare colour has been used as a ground, and is very clearly blown.
102. Glass, single overlay of bluish, emerald-green on a bubble-suffused clear ground; carved on each side with an identical scene of a snake and a tortoise, with what appears to be a pearl suspended in mid-air above the latter; carved oval footrim in the overlay colour.

1750 - 1850  
Height: 6.5 cm  
Stopper: pink tourmaline with green finial  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #364  
Similar example: Marian Mayer, Glass Snuff Bottles of China from The Mayer Collection at Steuben Glass, #30

This is another unusual colour for a glass overlay. The tortoise and the snake, depicted together, represent the north, and are associated therefore with the Emperor of the North (Bei Di). The pearl in this example, however, is not usual for this depiction and may be a reference to another property of the often tricky snake, which is its capacity for bestowing a gift of jewels, frequently symbolised by the pearl.
103. Glass, single overlay of opaque, cinnabar-red on a milky-white ground; carved in relief with a continuous rocky landscape scene with two pine trees, on one side of which a bear and an eagle confront each other, the eagle perched on an elaborate, rocky outcrop; while on the other a stag struts below a crane, lingzhi fungus in its mouth, as it stands on one leg; formalised waves just above the footrim suggest a stream.

1780 - 1860  
Height: 6.8 cm  
Stopper: coral on an ivory collar  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #734  
Published: Marian Mayer, Glass Snuff Bottles of China from The Mayer Collection at Steuben Glass, #45

Although the animal confronting the bird on one side of this example looks distinctly like a dog, it is more likely to be intended as a bear because of the homophonous pun on the characters for ‘eagle’ and for ‘bear’ which sound the same as for ‘brave’ and ‘strong’. The stag and crane with lingzhi fungus are longevity symbols. Frequently subject matter was used, particularly on gifts, to convey auspicious wishes or other more subtle messages and most Chinese art is replete with many levels of meaning.
104. Glass, single overlay of emerald-green on an opaque caramel-coloured ground; carved in relief with a continuous design of flowering prunus trees growing from a rocky ground; set on a neatly carved oval footrim.

1780-1880
Height: 7.0 cm
Stopper: green glass on a black glass collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #354

This distinctive and unusual colour combination seems to have been a later development, perhaps beginning only at the end of the eighteenth century and continuing through the nineteenth. The majority of the few examples known appear to be nineteenth century rather than earlier, as does this one.
105. Glass, single overlay of pink on an opaque, Prussian blue ground; carved in relief on each side with a vessel containing a potted plant, one of which is a chrysanthemum; the usual mask-and-ring handles replaced by sprays of lotus and prunus; the oval footrim carved from the overlay colour.

1760 - 1860
Height: 5.3 cm
Stopper: pink stone
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #432

This extremely unusual colour combination is one of many that Marian Mayer sought out in order to have as full a range of glass colours and combinations as possible represented in her collection. There appears to have been an exploration of the potential for strange combinations of colour in glass, and more obscure combinations and materials in other areas, during the mid-Qing period. Perhaps by this time the taste of well established snuff bottle users and collectors was becoming a little jaded from a century of constantly expanding production, and manufacturers began to branch out into more exotic wares in order to keep their clientele intrigued.
106. Glass, single overlay of opaque lemon-yellow on an opaque turquoise-blue ground; carved in relief with a continuous design of double gourds on a vine; the oval footrim carved from the overlay colour.

1780 -1880
Stopper: turquoise-coloured glass on a metal collar
Height: 5.3 cm
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #267

Marian Mayer had so many rare colour combinations in her collection that, ironically, as a genre they appear almost common. Here again is a combination which is extremely rare. In recent years glass manufacturers in China have been honing their skills and turning to snuff bottle production with great skill, creating a very confusing body of wares of high quality based on early style, but often with rare colour combinations. Part of the beauty of the Mayer name as a provenance is that she stopped collecting before this body of wares began to confuse the market in recent years, thus her extensive range of overlays stands as a useful guide to rare colour combinations which are genuinely old as opposed to those which are being made now.
107. Glass, single overlay of black on a turquoise-blue ground; carved in relief with a continuous scene of two dragons, one flying amid clouds, the other gambolling in waves; the oval foot carved from the overlay colour.

1770 - 1880
Height: 6.2 cm
Stopper: black glass on a turquoise-blue coloured collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #663

Cf. 105, 106. Black overlays of any age are, in themselves, unusual. Here the brilliant, turquoise blue ground makes it still more unusual, and visually very striking.
108. Glass, single overlay of opaque, sage-green on a rich, caramel-brown ground; carved in relief with a flowering spray on each side, one a prunus branch; the base simply indented.

1780 - 1880  
Height: 5.0 cm  
Stopper: green glass on a black glass collar  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #352

Cf. 105, 106. There was a tendency during the nineteenth century for ever more exotic materials, frequently expressed in glass in multiple overlays and unusual combinations of colour, to take the place of fine craftsmanship and taste. Surface qualities, in other words, often replaced depth of expression. Here in what is likely to be a fairly early example of an exotic colour combination, is found the combination of fine quality and unusual material.
109. Glass, single overlay of translucent, pale, lime-green on a bubble-surfused, milky-white ground; carved in relief on one side with a praying mantis, clutching a pea-pod and resting on a rock; and on the other with a cricket on a cabbage; the oval foot carved from the overlay colour.

1780 - 1850
Height: 7.1 cm
Stopper: mottled blue hardstone
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #356
Published: Marian Mayer, *Glass Snuff Bottles from China from The Mayer Collection at Steuben Glass*, New York, October 1980, #29

There is a series of bottles, from the mid-Qing period, where the overlay colour is so subtly differentiated from the ground that at first sight there appears to be no difference between them. They are often extremely well carved, and represent an unusual sub-group of glass overlays.
110. Glass, single overlay of dark brown on a clear ground; carved in relief on each side with an identical design of five bats surrounding a formalised shou ('longevity') character; the oval foot carved from the overlay colour.

1780 - 1880
Height: 5.9 cm
Stopper: coral on a black collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #260

Cf. 105, 106.
111. Glass, single overlay of opaque white on a transparent, rich, aquamarine-blue ground; carved in relief on one side with a chilin, standing on a rocky outcrop, with a stream of mist arising from its mouth and supporting a volume of books; and on the other with a carp rising from waves, and supporting a pearl in a similar cloudy exhalation; the shoulders with lotus leaf and bud sprays replacing the usual mask-and-ring handles; the oval footrim neatly carved from the overlay colour.

1780 - 1850
Height: 5.5 cm
Stopper: opalescent glass on a white collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #438

Cf. 105, 106.
112. Glass, single overlay of opaque, milky-white on a gold-flecked green ground; carved in relief with an identical scene on each side depicting a carp leaping from waves in pursuit of a pearl; the rim of the flared neck and the oval foottrim both carved from the overlay colour.

1770 - 1880
Height: 5.7 cm
Stopper: white glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #414
Published: Bob C. Stevens, *The Collector’s Book of Snuff Bottles*, #208

Cf. 105. This is an extraordinary colour combination. It would be rare enough as a white on green overlay, but the green, with its gold-flecking, derived from the group of bottles referred to in #66, sets it apart as unique. It is also an extremely striking combination.
113. Glass, single overlay of deep, sapphire-blue on an opaque white ground; both sides carved as panels surrounded by a series of octagonal facets which are offset against the octagonal form of the bottle; the overall design arranged so that in every facet of the bottle the white ground colour may be seen through the overlay.

1780 - 1850
Height: 6.0 cm
Stopper: blue glass on a white collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #754

From time to time snuff bottles in glass are encountered which use the overlay technique in an unusual fashion. These range from those which are unfinished, leaving the overlay colour in uneven blobs on the surface or evenly distributed as a complete overlay, to rare works like this where the overlay technique has been applied to a formalised design. The faceted form is derived from the Beijing Palace Workshops group represented by #53, 54, and may represent a late development of it within the Palace.
114. Glass, single overlay of brilliant, sapphire-blue on a crizzled, clear ground; carved in relief with a continuous design of two dragons, one disposed on each side and one playfully biting its own tail; the oval foottrim carved from the overlay colour.

Attributed to the Beijing Palace Workshops, 1710 - 1795
Height: 8.9 cm
Stopper: opaque blue glass on a black collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #711

This bottle represents a rare group of bottles which are sensibly attributed to the Beijing Palace Workshops and probably from quite early in the eighteenth century. They are characterized by brilliant sapphire-blue overlay on clear glass, or other combinations of the two colours, and by the crizzling of the clear glass. The Palace Glassworks were known to have had initial problems in their glass mix which persisted from their inception well into the Yongzheng and Qianlong periods. This frequently resulted in crizzling at the surface. This phenomenon affects practically all Kangxi glass, with the notable exception of white, much Yongzheng glass, and clear glass even from as late as the Qianlong period. Here the typical glass is combined with a popular palace subject carved with the superb freedom and expressiveness of the finest glass carving from the early to mid-eighteenth century. For a similar colour combination, but not as an overlay, bearing a Palace Qianlong reign mark, see Robert Kliener, Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch, #62.
115. Glass, single overlay of deep, sapphire-blue on an opaque white ground; carved in relief on one side with a prunus tree growing from a rocky ground, and on the other with a pine tree and a single bamboo plant, also issuing from a rocky ground; the oval footrim carved from the overlay colour.

1760 - 1850  
Height:  6.8 cm  
Stopper:  turquoise carved with a dragon  
Provenance:  Marian Mayer Collection, #578  
Published:  Bob C. Stevens, The Collectors Book of Snuff Bottles, #184  

The carver of this bottle has adopted an interesting formalisation of the decorative elements, particularly noticeable in the neatly arranged, horizontal rows of pine needle clumps. It is perhaps a reflection of the literati aesthetic for abstraction and re-acquired naivety.
Glass, single overlay of rich, sapphire-blue on a densely white-flecked, clear ground; carved in relief on one side with a bat flying above a fruiting peach branch; and on the other with a three-legged toad looking at a fruiting pomegranate branch; the oval footrim carved from the overlay colour.

1750 - 1850  
Height: 5.5 cm  
Stopper: blue glass  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #327

A popular ground colour on Qing glass snuff bottles was made up of clear glass suffused with tiny white flecks, which when densely disposed as in this case give the impression of an opaque white mass. It is normally referred to, for obvious reasons, as ‘snowflake’ glass, and is an alternative to the bubble suffused clear glass which serves the same function of giving some substance as a ground to otherwise clear glass. The subject matter of this bottle is all auspicious: the bat represents happiness, through a homophonous pun; the peach longevity; the three-legged toad, familiar of Liu Hai, commercial success, and the pomegranate a wealth of offspring.
117. Glass, single overlay of sapphire-blue on an opaque white ground; the elegant, flattened globular form simply decorated with carved mask- and-ring handles and an oval footrim.

1780 - 1880
Height: 6.2 cm
Stopper: blue glass
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #475

Understatement in art was one of the characteristics of the high arts of the influential minority in China, and there is a small series of glass overlay bottles which express this at its best by using overlays only for handles, rims and footrings, allowing the form and simple colour combinations to speak for themselves. This is a delightful example of the group.
118. Glass, single overlay of turquoise-blue on a swirly, russet-coloured ground; carved in low relief on one side with a farmer beneath a prunus tree and a crescent moon; and on the other with various flowers and rockwork; the shoulders carved with mask-and-ring handles; the neck rim and oval foot carved from the overlay colour.

Yangzhou, 1850 - 1900
Height: 6.2 cm
Stopper: brown jasper
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #357

Yangzhou developed as an alternative centre for the production of glass at some time during the mid-nineteenth century. Yangzhou glass bottles are distinguished by a series of stylistically independent characteristics which include low relief carving, the frequent use of seals containing either signatures, appreciative comments or other sayings, and an unusual range of colours. This is a typical example with its rare colour combination, flattened form, elongated rings to the mask handles, and low relief carving. Genre scenes of this type were also common. The whole group was apparently inspired by, or in some other way connected to the well known, nineteenth century Yangzhou painter, Wang Su (Wang Xiaomei) whose name appears on several examples.
119. Glass, single overlay of opaque white on a transparent ruby-red ground; carved in low relief on one side with a cat chasing butterflies while what appears to be a puppy looks on, in a garden setting with a potted chrysanthemum plant; and on the other with a cockerel, chasing a butterfly beneath a prunus branch and a flying bat; each shoulder carved with a plant replacing the usual mask-and-ring handles and the foottrim carved from the overlay colour.

Yangzhou, 1850 - 1900
Height: 5.7 cm
Stopper: green and white jadeite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #575

Cf. 118.
120. Glass, single overlay of opaque pink on a translucent, swirly, bubble suffused green ground; the overlay colour carved as three butterflies fluttering above a fruiting vine, the largest gourd on which is used to form the bottle itself, all of which is carved from the ground colour.

1780 - 1880
Height:  5.2 cm  
Stopper: green jadeite  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #597

A distinctive, separate group of glass bottles seems to have developed at some time during the mid-Qing period which was characterized by unusual use of overlay colours and considerable use of the ground colour to form relief on an equal footing to the overlay. These may represent the output of a particular workshop, or perhaps area, but their source is not yet identifiable. Although frequently somewhat crude as they developed through the nineteenth century, they are saved by their unusual colour combination and imaginative form and decoration.
121. Glass, double overlay of ruby-red on opaque mustard-yellow, on an opaque white ground; carved in relief with a continuous scene of flowering shrubs growing from a rocky ground, the red overlay used only for the flower-heads; the oval foottrim carved from the yellow, middle layer of glass.

1800 - 1850  
Height: 6.0 cm  
Stopper: pink tourmaline on a yellow collar  
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #417

Perhaps loosely related to the group discussed in #120, this example also represents a small sub-group of unknown origin, where unusual colours combine with a crisp, distinctive style of carving. Certain examples suggest an early nineteenth century date. By the mid-Qing period it is likely that glass manufacturing was going on in different parts of China to supply the demand for snuff bottles, and few are identifiable other than stylistically, which does not, as yet, allow us to guess at their origin.

Cf. 124, 125.
122. Glass, single overlay of pale turquoise-blue on an opaque white ground; carved in low relief on one side with butterflies fluttering around a chrysanthemum and an orchid growing from a rocky ground which is carved from the white, ground colour; with a small, oval seal reading Youshan ('friend of the mountains'); and on the other with two birds, one in flight beyond, and one perched on a blossoming prunus tree which grows from eccentrically formed rockwork; the oval foottrim carved from the overlay colour; the base carved in relief with the four character mark Yunting chenwean ('precious plaything of Yunting') in raised seal script.

Yangzhou, 1850 - 1880
Height: 5.2 cm
Stopper: rose quartz, carved with a flower-head
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #692

The base inscription here could conceivably be translated as 'precious plaything of the rhyming pavilion' but this would be an unusual usage of the word chenwean ('precious plaything') which is more commonly associated with the name of an individual.
Yangzhou glass production was commercially founded and produced a wide range of works to suit all pockets and tastes. There exist, therefore, distinctively Yangzhou products at all levels of excellence. At their finest they are extraordinary works in the highest of taste, and this is a good example of the more artistic end of the Yangzhou production. The finest are nearly always accompanied by seals or other inscriptions and sometimes incorporate carved relief in the ground colour as well as the overlay colour or colours. Here a very rare feature is the raised mark on the base identifying it as having been specifically made for the appreciation of an individual collector or snuff taker. Such commissioned works seemed to have formed a significant part of the finest of Yangzhou glass, but are rarely identified so clearly.
123. Glass, double overlay of transparent turquoise-blue on opalescent white, on a translucent, deep, sapphire-blue ground; carved in relief with a continuous scene showing two figures in a boat set against a background of swirling mist, and a standing lady holding an umbrella in front of bamboo plants; the neck with pendant, plantain-leaf lappets; the base decorated with a flower-head using the three colours of glass.

1820 - 1880
Height: 5.7 cm
Stopper: malachite on an ivory collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #108

There is a distinctive group of glass bottles which clearly developed at some time during the first half of the nineteenth century and continued towards 1900. They are characterised by the use of multiple overlays, complex genre scenes, neck borders of this type, and frequent use of the inside of the footrim for further decorative elements. They are also usually fairly crudely carved, although frequently with considerably folksey charm, presumably on the basis that with such fancy colours the quality of carving was less important. This group has been extensively faked in the past few years, but the modern fakers tend to have missed the point of the crudeness and folk art quality of the originals, tending to apply rather too fancy carving to a group that never aspired to it in the first place.
124. Glass, single overlay of sapphire-blue, ruby red, and variegated mustard colour on an opaque white ground; carved in relief on one side with a frog on a lotus plant; and on the other with two flowering sprays, one a peony; the oval footrim carved from the white glass ground.

1800 - 1850
Height: 6.0 cm
Stopper: carnelian
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #272

Cf. 121, 125. This is another example of the group mentioned in #121, and displays clearly another characteristic of the group which is to overlay with mixed colours. Here the mustard-yellow colour is streaked and variegated giving it considerable appeal and character.
125. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red, sapphire-blue, palest emerald-green, and streaked mustard-yellow on an opaque white ground; carved with a continuous scene of various flowering plants, including peony and chrysanthemum, and bamboo growing from a ground set with rocky outcrops; the oval footrim well carved from a mixture of the streaky mustard-yellow and the white ground.

1800 - 1850
Height: 8.1 cm
Stopper: green nephrite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection #271

Cf. 121, 124.
126. Glass, single overlay of lemon-yellow, sapphire-blue, blueish-emerald-green and ruby-red on a bubble suffused clear ground; carved in relief on one side with a peach and two pomegranates; and on the other with a bat flying around a fruiting double gourd vine; the foottrim carved from the green overlay.

1750 - 1830
Height: 6.3 cm
Stopper: pale green nephrite on a mother-of-pearl collar
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #594

This is one of a series of early, multi-coloured overlay glass bottles, which may have been the forerunners to the group discussed in #121, 124 and 125. They are characterised by the use of all the standard colours of the Beijing production of the Qianlong period and before, but frequently in combinations which take the form of neatly separated overlay areas on each side, divided into two, as here, or sometimes into quadrants, or some other geometric division. Other, perhaps earlier examples even than this, are illustrated in Robert Kliener, Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Collection of Mary and George Bloch, #93, 96; and in a still more fascinating example in #107, where the basic overlay remains for some unknown reason, uncarved, showing how the overlay colours were laid on.
127. Glass, single overlay of ruby-red, emerald-green and lemon-yellow, on a transparent, bubble-suffused, pale amber-yellow ground; carved in relief on one side with a fruiting pomegranate branch; and on the other with a bat and lingzhi fungus; the base simply formed from the ground colour.

1750 - 1830
Height: 5.8 cm
Stopper: green jadeite
Provenance: Marian Mayer Collection, #561

This is an unusual colour combination, mainly because of the coloured ground, of the group referred to in #126.
128. Nephrite, of dark grey and greyish-white colours; the ample bottle of flattened form and excellent hollowing; carved in low relief with a continuous landscape scene showing a sampan moored in a turbulent stream beneath an eccentrically depicted pavilion on stilts set on a rocky ledge beneath a gnarled old tree, the subject continuing on the other side with rocky cliffs, a pine tree, lingzhi fungus, and a spring in the rocks which seems to provide the source of the flowing waters.

1750 - 1850
Height: 7.5 cm
Stopper: hollowed quartz, painted inside to give the illusion of green and white jadeite, set on a gilt bronze collar

This is an extraordinary bottle. It is related in style, very clearly, to a group of bottles often referred to as 'Han' jade bottles because of its predominant use of yellowish-green and brown nephrite which resembled the much valued pebble jade carvings of the Han dynasty. Occasionally bottles by this distinctive school of carvers appear in other colours of nephrite but they are rare. This is the only example recorded in a type of jade usually a chosen material of the Suzhou school. Not only is it a bold and confident bottle of considerable visual power, but it also reflects the highest literati aesthetic in its depiction of the house, where a deliberately awkward and child-like rendition is chosen, its perspective all awry, which judging from the superb depiction of rocks, waves and trees, was a matter of choice rather than the limitations of the artist. Clearly a bottle designed for the patronage of the scholar class.
129. Duanstone (‘inkstone’), of striated, dark brown colour; the simply formed, ovoid bottle, allowing the vertically aligned striations in the material to accentuate and energize the form; inscribed on both sides with poetic couplets eulogizing the qualities of the material in regular script.

1760 - 1880
Height: 5.2 cm
Stopper: red glass on a metal collar

The influential minority in China had a high regard for any material which made good inkstones upon which they could grind their solid sticks of ink as a necessary preparation for writing or painting. Such materials had to be sufficiently hard to grind the ink, but yet soft enough and grainy enough not to cause it to simply slip across the surface. It was also ideal if a minute amount of the material would wear off each time, giving a little, perhaps largely psychological, magic ingredient to the ink itself. Of all the materials used by the Chinese over the centuries, the stones from the Duan quarries were amongst the most valued, since well before the Song dynasty. Most of this precious material was concentrated on inkstone production, not unnaturally, but it carried with it a literati association which occasionally prompted the manufacture of other objects in this highly regarded material. The striations in this example lend a delightful surface energy to the tactile material.
130. Jadeite, of black colour, which under very close inspection and bright light is revealed to have a slight, very dark, emerald-green tone; the ovoid bottle carved with two raised, shaped panels on each convex side; one incised with a design of two birds on the branches of bare trees; the other inscribed with a poetic inscription in regular script which describes the scene on the front and evokes a popular poetic sentiment of lonely creatures brought together in the bleak autumn; the poem followed by the two characters Yuzhi ('Imperial composition').

1730 - 1850
Height: 5.3 cm
Stopper: coral with a pearl finial

This is a most unusual form of black jadeite, probably rich with iron. The inscription is of an imperial poem, perhaps written by the Qianlong Emperor who was a well known and prolific poet, but this is not specifically implied by the simple use of the characters Yuzhi. Here these have been translated as ‘Imperial composition’ rather than ‘by Imperial command’ which more suits a poetic output. The character zhi in fact means manufactured or created in many different senses, and is open to different translations depending upon the context.